

The hidden beauty of studying abroad

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newwave@tulane.edu



Claire Davenport poses for a picture against a scenic location in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, where she spent the fall semester learning about herself and central European politics.

Study abroad is both what you expect, and nothing you expect. I expected to find new friends, interesting classes and beautiful scenery. I didn't expect to find myself.

Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, is known for its *genius loci* — the spirit of a place that transcends time and history. In my classes we walked the streets and learned about this spirit. Prague is where alchemists thrived and where the Knights Templar was founded. There's something exciting around every corner.

Before I began the study abroad process, I hadn't been expecting to come across any spirit; I had just been looking for an extension of my education, a chance to study comparative government in a new place.

My adviser, Joshua Burns, told me I should look at all of my options before selecting a location.

"It's about the mindset you go with, not the place that you go," he explained.

Burns' advice made me reconsider what I wanted out of my study abroad experience. He suggested Prague as a place where I could study central European politics while seeing a lesser known part of Europe. I decided to change my attitude toward study abroad and see it as a chance for adventure just as much as a chance for class credit.

This was one of the best decisions I ever made. Study abroad didn't change me; it reaffirmed who I am. It inspired me to write every day and to pursue international journalism. Everyone who studies abroad learns something about who they are. I encourage anyone considering going abroad to consult with the Office of Study Abroad. They will match you with a program that fits not just your academic needs, but also inspires you to take a risk on yourself.

Claire Davenport is a Tulane junior majoring in English and political science.

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Joshua Burns, Tulane study abroad adviser