

A perfect time of life in Salzburg, Austria

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When I reminisce on the spring I spent studying in Salzburg, Austria, I think of five intensely experiential months fraught with dramatic ups and downs. From a semi-traumatic Austrian hospital stay, to a personal triumph of creativity, ingenuity and work ethic ? these experiences will forever be preserved in my brain as a perfect time of life in which everything that occurred, intentional and unintentional, was somehow according to plan and helped me become the person I'm still becoming.

Salzburg College is the complete study abroad package in an intimate setting. The school organized our living and eating situations (dorm or homestay), held classes taught by professors from local universities and cultural institutions in the Kunstquartier (Art Quarter), and organized many excursions ? fun, educational, both!

The program included 19 American, Guatemalan and Norwegian students. Classes were tiny and we formed practically familial bonds with our two administrators, our teachers and each other. The personal support intrinsic to Salzburg College ? academic and emotional ? is a large part of why the program is one-of-a-kind.

It may be impossible to prepare for culture shock, but if one engages fully in new relationships, experiences, cultures and languages while maintaining an attitude of flexibility, the rewards are infinite. Fortunately, I have studied German since I was in the 4th grade.

I wrote, acted in, directed, filmed and composed the music for a 21-minute film (see the clip, above), created six monstrous paintings in six weeks, traveled widely (including Istanbul, Athens, Budapest), made some of the best friends I'll ever meet, and got hit by a car and came away practically unscathed.

I decided to upgrade the German minor I'd already completed at Tulane to a major, meaning I will graduate in spring 2015 with a triple major.

Extended travel is tougher when you're older. My advice: don't graduate without studying abroad.

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