

*Friends' Central*

# FOCUS GEOGRAPHIC *TRAVEL ISSUE*



"The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page."  
-Saint Augustine

Travel has the potential to open our eyes to unfamiliar wonders and a developing world. Whether it is a breathtaking view or a life changing meal, oftentimes what happens on our journeys outside of the comfort of our homes becomes some of our strongest, most treasured memories. Even if you cannot singlehandedly travel the entire world, perhaps you can gain a taste of doing so by reading about others' expeditions. With this issue, we aspire to give our community a chance to share its wealth of global perspectives and experiences.

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and photos to bring this issue to life, and a special thank you to Josh Weinstein for the incredible cover art. We hope that this inspires you to never stop exploring.

Happy travels,  
Julia, Jess, and the Focus team



Background image taken  
by Max Sall in France.



# Eating My Way Through Europe

By STEFAN SULTAN '15

Humorist Erma Bombeck once stated, “I am not a glutton - I am an explorer of food.” Following this philosophy, in the following vignettes I will take you from the chateaus of the Swiss Alps to the beaches of the Adriatic, as we explore six different European cities and towns through seven different meals.

## A Moveable Feast

It was my first day in Paris. The seemingly endless flight was over and I was walking down the streets, stomach first. Our first stop was a small corner bakery in the 18th arrondissement, and I, wasting no time in trying everything that France had to offer, got a baguette for my breakfast. Now before you judge me you have to remember, carbs are pretty incredible, and after my long flight, that baguette was Nirvana. As good as that baguette was, it was just the beginning of the culinary wonderland that is Paris. After sightseeing for a few hours, I was getting pretty hungry, and after dropping off all of our bags at the hotel, I was back strolling down the streets of Paris in search of food. Finally, my friend and I stumbled upon a small little bistro tucked away on a side street. Scanning the menu, my heart skipped a beat, for on the very first page was a crepe with Reblochon (in my opinion, the king of the cheeses), bacon, and potatoes. The crepe itself was absolute perfection. The bacon was crispy, the potatoes were waxy, and the cheese was warm and gooey. While traditional French food was delicious, a day in Paris wouldn’t be complete without trying one of the myriad of ethnic restaurants that are one of the leftovers from France’s colonial possession. So for dinner that night I made my way to a Tunisian restaurant, where I indulged in a spicy lamb soup and some juicy meats fresh off the grill. After spending the day eating my way through Paris, I finally made it back to my hotel, where I collapsed in my bed, completely content.

## The Sandwich

The worst part about eating an incredible meal while abroad is knowing that once you finish the last bite, you will never eat the same food again; yet there is always the hope that one day you will be able to go back to that restaurant. Unfortunately, this was not the case with this sandwich. Now this was not just any sandwich. This was the perfect marriage of a fresh baguette, delectable Italian prosciutto, heavenly slices of cheese, and a spicy sauce mixed with ambrosia. Each bite was pure bliss, a paradise, my cloud nine. It was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had. But I did not realize this at first, and so as I slipped the wrapped sandwich into my backpack and started biking to Lausanne, I didn’t even look back. It was only later on, while sitting in a vineyard, looking out at Lake Geneva and the snowy peaks beyond, that I took my first bite and realized the mistake I had made by not writing down the name of that small sandwich shop, a few miles outside of Montreux.

## Il Pasto Maggiore

As the vaporetto slowly made its way to the archipelago that lay in the distance the growling in my stomach only grew louder, something that was not helped by the fact that the only thing that I could think of was homemade pasta and tiramisu. It was my first time in Italy, the culinary capital of the world, and I was, as you can imagine, pretty excited. Unfortunately, from a culinary perspective, my first day in Venice was not what I had expected. While the lasagna I had for dinner

that night was good, it wasn’t the gastronomical masterpiece I had been hoping for. Given this lackluster meal, on the second night I was determined to find a restaurant that would put Batali to shame, and after nearly a half hour of wandering I finally found one, tucked into the back alleys of Venice. As I sat down at the table I had high hopes, and I was not disappointed. I was given a four course meal, consisting of a roasted butternut squash soup, tender venetian calf liver, served on a bed of polenta, a cheese plate filled with fresh italian cheeses, jams, and honeys, and a decadent chocolate red chile cake. Despite not having had any pasta, the meal was perfect and, with my stomach about to burst, I was in a state of pure bliss.

## In the Land of Truffles

Imagine a place where truffles line the windy, cobblestone streets of small hilltop towns. The part about the truffles may be a slight exaggeration, but Istria really did seem that way. As I walked down the streets of Rovinj and Motovun, Croatia, I would see stalls filled with truffles, truffle oil, truffle honey, and of course, truffle cheese, that lined the ancient, cobblestone roads. It appeared that the menu of every restaurant in the peninsula was filled with truffles, truffles, and more truffles. From homemade ravioli with a truffle sauce to tender chicken topped with chopped truffles, it was a truffle lovers dream. At one particularly great dish I ate while I was there, I had a simple pasta that consisted of freshly rolled fettuccine, truffle oil, and parmesan, all topped with a some shaved black truffles; it was a truffle lined heaven.

## Figs on a Beach

I sat under the cool shade of the archaic olive tree as the warm Croatian sun beat down on the small pebble beach. The cool waves of the Adriatic lapped the shore as I looked out at the shades of blue that spread out from the little cove. As I was sitting there, in that Croatian Eden, I ordered what would turn out to be one of the best lunches I ate all summer. The meal, while minimalist, was delicious. On top of the wooden platter lay big, juicy slices of tomatoes, rolls of fresh Italian prosciutto, wedges of celestial cheese, succulent dried figs, and pitch black Croatian olives. Though simple, the meal was nothing but divine.

## Eating in a Winter Wonderland

As the gondola was slowly making its way down the snowy peaks of the Swiss Alps, I looked out on the small alpine village below me. It had been snowing since the night before and the whole world was covered in a thick blanket of shimmering white. From my perch in the gondola, the whole world looked like a snow globe, complete with the wooden chateaus and mammoth mountains. When the doors to the gondola opened a fresh blast of glacial air rushed in and chilled me to the bone. The moment that the frigid wind entered the gondola I rushed to put my gear back on and skied down the Main Street of Zermatt. As I got closer to the hotel I thought less and less about the snowy gust that had virtually frozen me, and more about the warm, cheesy fondue that awaited me. After all, I had been skiing so long that I could have sworn the snow had frozen my blood. Yet all of that ice seemed to melt away as I dunked pieces of fresh out of the oven bread into that heavenly pot of warm, melted cheese. •

# A New Shade of Islam

By JULIA BARR '15

We decided to go to Morocco because the plane tickets were cheap. I was warned that even though the weather would be hot in late March, I had to keep my shoulders and legs covered at all times. As we boarded, the family of 10 American Jews stood out from the other passengers. It was strikingly obvious that we were going into foreign territory. As a relatively naïve sixth-grader, I had a narrow preconception of what an Islamic country would look like; the words that I had previously associated with the Arab world were along the lines of burkas and terrorist attacks. It is an entirely false generalization, but as a middle school student, my knowledge was limited to one book I had read about the Taliban in Afghanistan, and what I had heard from the people around me.

That perception changed immediately. On our first walk through the marketplaces of Fez, I was overwhelmed by the scents, the noise and especially the colors. On every block, there was a vendor selling scarves made from cactus silk, stacked in tall piles in a rainbow of bright colors. This is what almost all of the women wore to cover their hair instead of the dark robes that we often see in America. It was, simply put, beautiful.

# Huanying to Beijing

By EMMA VERGES '17

NSLI-Y (National Security Language Initiative for Youth) awards a couple hundred high school students the opportunity to intensely study a language while being fully immersed in its culture. It’s goal is to further improve foreign communication and relations. NSLI-Y sends American students to places including Jordan, Russia, China, Korea, India and Turkey. Upon arrival, students are sent to designated areas in the country (dependent on one’s skill: beginner, intermediate, advanced) where they will be live and attend schools specified to teach the land’s native language. I was thrilled to be awarded a six week stay in Chengdu, China, where I stayed with host families and attended a school with about 15 other American students.

I can’t say the trip was perfect, but it was certainly as close as one can get. Between the other NSIL-Y scholars who immediately took roles as my older siblings, my amazing host families who showed me parts of China completely surpassing generalizations and stereotypes, and adoring teachers and locals who went to extremes to help out were all beyond what I expected, it’s safe to say I was in good hands and nowhere near missing home... except my dog.

I can’t thank my parents enough for having not interfered with my trip because, as my pre-orientation stressed, distractions back home are what rip you out of the community you are currently experiencing. With the support from my family and friends and the self-determination to study my fourth language, I confidently stepped onto that plane on July 5th, knowing I wouldn’t be back until August 22nd.

The second I stepped off the plane from Beijing to Chengdu, I saw a sign with my name and three smiling people beneath it. I was so overwhelmed and excited that I hugged them! We were told that contact such as hugging was fairly uncommon and during the 13 hour plane ride, I had taken the time to plan the perfect “friendly wave” and “excited smile.” I forgot all I had practiced, but before getting on the plane back to America, my mama and baba were the ones initiating the hug.

I took thousands of pictures and kept

Our tour guide was a woman, and although she kept her hair covered and dressed modestly, she was smart, witty and had a fiery personality. She knew everything there was to know about every arch built in the entire country, and for twelve hours a day, for seven days straight, she piloted us through winding streets with a natural confidence and sense of direction.

Suffice it to say, I saw very few women wearing burkas in Morocco. It is important to note that while Morocco is an Islamic country, it is a moderate one, which has allowed it to embrace the twenty-first century while still maintaining a strong adherence to tradition. It is not an oppressive adherence to tradition, but rather a celebratory one. If there is any lesson to take from this trip, it is that a religion should not be defined by its extremists. I had prepared myself to feel ostracized, but I left Morocco feeling connected to a culture that, although it wasn’t my own, shares the same joy and vibrancy as the heritage that I come from. Morocco taught me that it is in the moments when we open ourselves to experiencing the unknown that we oftentimes discover beauty. •

a journal, and all of it put together still would not describe the growth I went through in China. I still keep in contact with not only my host families and friends, but people I met for two minutes at a bus stop and exchanged contact information.

When I got back from China I took one look at my parents and cried-- I was really back! Just hearing English was weird. I missed waking up at 6:00 am for my morning exercise with Baba. I missed going to school for the day to study Chinese and being picked up and driven 30 minutes home while Baba would ask me to take out my workbooks for a chance to review my day’s lessons. I missed the car rides even though I never knew exactly where I was being taken. I missed taking the bus and smiling from ear to ear after seeing people’s reactions as they heard me speak some words of Chinese. I missed having dinner with my family even though sometimes I wasn’t sure what I was eating.

The list goes on. What happened in China certainly does not stay in China. I brought back as many books and pictures and stories and memories as I could, but I guess I’ll have to go back because there are things like the beauty, the people, and the culture which I couldn’t pack. •



# Bu-Taiwan-na Go Back: Jesse Gross’ Introduction to Taiwan

By ETHAN BROADDUS '18

Over the years, some of the students here in our community have gone to some pretty amazing places. Recently, I had a chance to speak with someone who went to a very culturally different country off the coast of China. Jesse Gross (9), during a regular school week, was given the opportunity to go to Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, a small country off the coast of China and below the Koreas in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Jesse was amazed by the scenic views that this country had offered. Taipei sits next to the Elephant Mountain, where you can do an assortment of activities. He said, “I went on a hike in the hills of the rainforest and went in a gondola. It was very pretty.” Apart from it’s large rain forest, the city in general is ripe for exploration. “You can

literally go anywhere,” Jesse said, “You always can find somewhere to eat and somewhere to explore.” However the one down side, Jesse said, is that the currency there is thirty to the dollar. Although this may be bad for the Taiwanese economy, consumers from the United States and many other countries are going to be able to purchase goods cheaply.

When asked about the culture in Taiwan, he said, “It was nice to see how everyone worked together.” This was the one thing that surprised Jesse about the culture. Apart from the constant smell in the air from the markets and the pushing and shoving to get to order first, there is a sense of togetherness and community that not many other countries have. •



# Winter in the Promised Land

By TALIA ROSENBERG '17

Picture this: it’s pitch black, the water is rising, you’ve just bumped your head into the ceiling, and then, a light appears! Relief washed over my three new friends and I as the guide came trudging towards us, flashlight in hand. Apparently the rest of the group had already finished the City of David Tunnel Tour and were waiting for us at the end. We speed-walked through the rest of the tunnel and, when we saw the opening, started to sing the Israeli Anthem, the Hatikvah. We burst out of the tunnel practically yelling the last words, and were immediately questioned how in the world we ended up in the back of line without flashlights. This tunnel tour was one of the many amazing things I experienced during my time in Israel.

This winter break, a group of 15 kids and I, including two other Friends’ Central students, Rebecca Miller and Daniel Yadgaroff, took a confirmation trip to Israel. We spent a few days around Tel Aviv, learning about the history and independence of Israel, a few days in the desert, doing things like climbing Mount Masada and swimming in the Dead Sea, a few random days of traveling to important Israeli landmarks, and the rest of our

time in and around the holiest place in the world: Jerusalem.

Most of the places we went held historical importance. Our first and, in my opinion, one of our best stops was at Independence Hall, where we all sat in the same room where Prime Minister David Ben Gurion announced Israel’s independence back in 1948. Another great destination was to the actual house of David Ben Gurion, where we learned all about his life and how he helped Israel. A powerful stop on our trip was to the spot where Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated. Directly after this, we walked over to the Palmach Museum, an interactive museum that told the story of the Israeli army before it was known officially as the I.D.F., or Israeli Defense Force. Our other extremely important and educational excursion was to Mount Herzl, where we visited the grave sight of Theodore Herzl and learned all about his influence in Zionism. After seeing his grave, we took a detour to the grave of Michael Levin, a beloved soldier from Philadelphia, who died during the Second Lebanon War. His grave sight was overflowing with Phillies paraphernalia.

Along with the really fun activi-

ties, like the archeological dig, the camel rides, and the amazing shopping, we also had the chance to spend time in the amazing city of Jerusalem. Our time at the Western Wall was incredible. We visited during a weekday to put our notes in the cracks and experienced the silent worship of the Jewish men and women. Then, we went on Friday night and everyone at the wall was singing and dancing and it was incredible! Also while in Jerusalem we went to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum. It was extremely moving for all of us, and reminded us how lucky we were to be standing in the Jewish state of Israel. After Jerusalem we went to our last stop before going to the airport. The rabbi bringing us on the trip had apparently grown up with as a childhood friend with the American Ambassador to Israel. We ate our final meal at his house while also getting to take part in a little political Q and A. He explained to us the current problems in Israel and the issue of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. He told us that there were borders drawn up for a Palestinian state in Israel and that the two state solution was a plan that was slowly being worked towards. He said that there are many conflicts and

much controversy over whether or not the solution is possible and that it could take a very long time before something happens.

Even with the threats they face every day, Israel continues to stand together and fight for its existence. The second we arrived back in the U.S, my friends and I were already talking about how and when we could possibly go back to our wonderful homeland. On this trip, not only did I gain 15 new friends, but I also gained a new perspective. It’s important that we don’t take for granted the sheltered and safe place we live in, because while we are all over here, there are 18 year olds in Israel training for war. All in all, the education and experiences I received from this trip were eye opening and even life changing. •



## It’s the Climb

By HANNAH SZAPARY '15

As I took my last step onto the snowy ridge of Mount Kilimanjaro, I felt the adrenaline rush through me with exhilaration. There was no step higher to take, I had reached the summit of the volcano. At nineteen thousand feet above sea level, I was officially at the highest point in Africa after having walked for five days uphill through blazing sunshine, pouring rain, and the snow that had arrived the evening of our summit attempt. The smile that was on my face under the many layers of sweaters and coats gave away how incredibly excited I was to have achieved this goal after an eight hour push to the summit that started an hour before midnight. My heart beat fast, and I felt a second wind of energy. I later learned that this euphoric feeling is well known among the climbing community- it’s appropriately called the “climber’s high.”

Flash-forward about four months, when I found myself on Mount Adams, a twelve-thousand foot mountain just outside of Portland, Oregon, whose reputation pales in comparison to the highly acclaimed Kilimanjaro. A training climb in preparation for the Mount Rainier summit I would attempt the following week, hiking Mt. Adams was something we discounted as “easy.” I made naïve assumptions about its difficulty based solely on a number, its elevation, with the Kilimanjaro summit still fresh in my mind. Little did I know how lucky I had been at that time.

The minute my climbing group set foot on the mountain’s south glacier, crampons



on our feet and ice axes in our hands, a torrential downpour began. As we headed up into the cold, thin air, the rain turned to snow, with winds up to fifty miles an hour hitting our faces. By the halfway point, we were caught in the middle of a blizzard with less than three feet of visibility in front of us. With no sense of direction and a signal that the weather would only worsen overnight, we were faced with a dilemma, and needed to make a smart decision. At the end of a stormy night, we had to put aside our urge to summit and head back down the mountain to safety. The choice was a hard one, no doubt, but I learned an important lesson in that moment. Climbing is definitely about strength and endurance, but ultimately the mountain is in control of whether the climber reaches the top. Sometimes you get to rejoice in a summit success, and other times you have to turn around; however that’s not the point of the sport. The real fun is found in the process, bonding with fellow climbers, and getting to explore the most untouched parts of the world. •

## I’m “Sphinxin”

By NATE GUERRA '16

In the summer of 2008 my family took a trip to Egypt, where we visited Cairo, Alexandria, and of course the great pyramids of Giza. We spent several days in Cairo, staying in an apartment and traveling around, doing a lot of sightseeing. The thing that struck me about Cairo was just how busy it was. There was always movement and the drivers there were very aggressive. We visited museums and historical sights, including a fort and the Library of Alexandria. With every place we visited, I received a lecture from my parents about the history and importance of that sight, with a lot of detail and dates that could at sometime become overwhelming for my eleven-year self.

We visited the pyramids and the Sphinx on probably one of the hottest days of the entire vacation. We took many photos and posed for even more, with sweat pouring off our faces. I received another lecture about how they built the pyramids and how the slaves in Egypt had to carry these giant blocks up and just how impressive it was. The entire time my parents were talking all I could think about was, “It is about 200 degrees out here. Can we wait for the history lesson until we are inside somewhere?” My dad and I had a chance to go under one of the pyramids and into the tomb, which was

incredible (especially since it was cooler), but my mother did not go due to her claustrophobia.

The next day we boarded a train and took it from Cairo to Alexandria. After we unpacked our bags, we hit the city to enjoy some fresh falafel, pita bread and hummus along with other traditional Mediterranean dishes. We also had a chance to swim in the beautiful Mediterranean Sea, which was quite enjoyable until I got stung by a jellyfish and ran from water screaming. After lots of lemons, limes and different treatments and ointments, the swelling went down and all was left was a scar and a very vivid memory. We spent several days there and stayed in a very nice hotel and saw a bunch of very interesting sites like the Library of Alexandria, an enormous library with almost 100 percent glass walls. Another nice part of Alexandria were the prices- I remember the food there was very cheap but still very delicious.

I am sure Egypt is now a very different place from when I was there. In last few years it has been greatly affected by the Arab Spring movement of 2011, and in the past year just they elected a new president. If I could, I would love the opportunity to return and see all that has changed. •

# Lions and Elephants and Zebras, Oh My!

By ELIZABETH RAPHAELY '16

From visiting the Philadelphia Zoo a multitude of times as a kid to watching “The Lion King” on repeat at age 6, I guess I could say that going on an African Safari has been at the top of my bucket list for most of my life. Fortunately enough, last summer I was able to check off this experience when my family and I traveled over 7,000 miles to Tanzania, Africa.

After



22 hours of traveling, 4 different layovers, and 3 hours of unsatisfying sleep, we finally reached Kilimanjaro,Tanzania, our final destination. Though exhausted, my eyes revived with the sightings of vast planes with grey mountains in the distance. Along with four other families, my family and I spent two weeks traveling through Tanzania on a family tour, and I can confidently say that I have never experienced more adventure in my life than I did during those 16 days.

The first morning, even in the midst of extreme jet lag, we climbed a sixth of the way up Mount Kilimanjaro to start this amazing journey. In the days following, we traveled through 3 national parks where we were within 20 feet of lions, elephants, zebras and many other African animals without anything separating us. Often times our tour guides would warn us

to not keep food inside our tent dwellings because “the baboons could easily unzip the tents and rummage through the suitcases for snacks.” We were also forbidden to walk outside our tents after dark at the risk of being attacked by an animal. While I followed their rules, the threat of being in possible danger never phased me. This quickly changed the third night, however, when I woke up to the grumbling moan of a lion that lurked right beside our canvas tent.

In our final days in Tanzania, we woke up one morning at 4:00 and set out on our finale activity, a hot- air balloon ride over the Serengeti. Driving through the pre-sunrise darkness, the lights of our van flashed onto the striped backs of zebras and the chill of the air filled my lungs. We reached a grassy field that was cut off in the horizon by the pink and purple sky

that initiated the break off day. We were told to climb into the basket of the balloon that was tilted on it’s side and with the final blow of the torch we were lifted into the frosty air. We floated in the silence of dawn and once we were 400 hundred feet in the air I peered down at the fields of the wild. Gazelles scampered like tiny mice while prides of lions remained calm and coiled together, waiting for their daily prey. Just as I thought my views could not be surpassed, the sun’s rays flashed into my vision and melted over the edge of the vast planes. And before I knew it, the sun beamed regular daylight. Though the sunrise’s presence lasted for less than 2 minutes, it’s glorious image still remains in my memory. In light of this, I can only hope to experience more moments like this one as I continue to check places off of my bucket list. •



# FCS Travel Edition



Alec Clothier: Galápagos Islands



Alex Kalman: Tokyo, Japan



FCS Spanish Exchange 2014/2015 (Courtesy of Jess Miller)



Nickie Lewis: Los Angeles, California



Rochelle Ostroff-Weinberg:  
Turcs and Caicos



Michele Zuckman: San Francisco, California



Charlie Blumberg: Patagonia, Chile



FCS Peru Trip 2014: Maachu Picchu, Peru  
(Courtesy of Lisa Bernstein)



Jacob Greenblatt: St. Kitts



Dane Greisiger: Curaçao



Stefan Sultan: Croatia



Jesse Gross: Taiwan (Courtesy of Ethan Broaddus)



Rebecca Miller: Ein Avdat, Israel



Rebecca Miller: New York, New York



# Submissions 2014-15



Sam Levitties: Bear Creek, Colorado



Matt Blackman: Venice, Italy



Julia Barr: Sedona, Arizona



Liza Ewen: Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica



Austin Margulies: New York, New York



Stefan Sultan: U Bein Bridge, Burma



FCS French Exchange 2013/2014: Crémieu, France  
(Courtesy of Noah Silvestry)



Sophie Ritt: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



Nadia Taranta: Bamf, Canada



Laura Barr: Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand



Max Sall: Lyon, France



Wendy Simkin: Watkins Glen State Park, New York



Stefan Sultan: Croatia



Anabelle Harden: Switzerland



# Changing Lives, One Surgery at a Time

By LEAH HARRIS '16

Surgicorps International is a non-profit organization with which my family, especially my mom, has become very involved over the past several years. My mom uses her career as an anaesthesiologist to not only help patients locally, but also globally, something about which she is extremely passionate. With this organization, she travels to third world countries such as Guatemala, Vietnam, Bhutan, and Zambia to provide free surgical and medical care to disadvantaged individuals. Just recently she returned from a “medical mission” with Surgicorps in Uganda, and in one of her emails to me and my family while she was there she wrote, “The need is so great here. We definitely are making a difference.”

One of Surgicorps International’s goals is to make a commitment to go back to countries several years in a row and to hopefully be able to see improvements in patients that they have taken care of in the past. When I asked my mom about what it feels like to return to countries year after year she said, “It makes my heart smile to see the kids that I took care of in the past come back to the hospital to greet us upon our return, whether it be for the need for an additional surgery or just to smile and show off how much they have grown in the past year.” Surgicorps strives to see and care for as many patients as they can each and every day in attempt to leave the country knowing that

they have made their mark for the better. The organization helps children and adults with acquired or congenital deformities escape social pressure and become functional members of their society, while also significantly decreasing the financial burden placed on a family that is already struggling to survive. Although the volunteers that travel on these missions may not necessarily be fluent in the dialect of the country in which they are, they believe in Surgicorps’ saying, “A smile speaks every language.” My mom’s fourteenth mission with this organi-



zation was marked by her recent trip to Uganda. She believes in living life generously and sharing with those less fortunate. As she says, “I leave each country and trip with a sense of fulfillment and having received more than I gave. Being blessed to be welcomed into the lives, cultures, traditions, and warmth of strangers is one of the best feelings in the world.”

# Sloths, Sugarcane, and Speaking Spanish

By LINDSAY TALEMAL '16

When my mom first told me she had signed me up for a teen trip to Costa Rica for the summer, I was anything but thrilled; especially because I thought she was using it as an excuse to get me out of the house. It meant leaving my friends, heading out of the country for my first international flight, and spending a whole month with people I had never even met. As I got off my flight in Miami to meet the other kids on our journey out of the country, I was nervous about who would be waiting at the gate to my plane. I was pleased to see around 12 kids, all with welcoming hellos. They became my family for the next month.

After we all arrived in Costa Rica, we soon got into a van on our way to Turrialba. The scenery was very new to me. There were huge mountains, dirt roads, and small shops everywhere. I was very surprised by the way it seemed so different from the US...that is, of course, until I heard McDonalds was common in the area. After we had driven halfway up one of the many mountains, suddenly the van stopped and we were all told to be very quiet. One of our counselors got out of the vehicle and asked, “Who wants to see a sloth?” For me, being able to see such an animal in the wild, one that is not native to our country and not found in a zoo, was amazing, and is by far one of my favorite memories of the trip. It hung upside down as it inched along a telephone wire, and we watched as it made its way into a tree. I was amazed at so much of the wildlife I had the chance to encounter. A viper,

a boa constrictor, tarranchillas, and tree frogs all on a night walk, monkeys at my breakfast table, many species of birds always over my head, and not to my liking, a lot of different BIG bugs and way too many mosquitos.

Turrialba proved to be an amazing adventure as we white water rafted, rappelled down waterfalls, and even got to enjoy making our own coffee and sugar from fresh sugar cane. After all that fun, the next few days were spent at a school a mile or so away that we backpacked to everyday. We helped the kids with their studies, especially those who could understand our not-so-amazing Spanish, prepared lunch for them, painted the walls of the buildings, and played with them, mainly soccer, after class. The following day we were told that we would be taking a hike down to a waterfall. Most of us replied with sighs knowing that it would be about a 3 mile hike down some steep terrain and then the even worse hike back up to the top. The complaining on the way down did not stop until we began to see the water topple over through the tops of the trees and feel the mist as it cooled the air. When we arrived at the base of the waterfall, everyone was speechless. We raced to the pool at the bottom of the falls and began to jump in one at a time and swim. I no longer cared about the returning hike; this, and the entire trip itself, were completely worth it. •

# It’s Not Guy, It’s “Gui”

By NATASHA GUY '16

I used to get upset because my family doesn’t really have traditions. We don’t have special holiday pajamas, designated yearly tomato sauce making days and we don’t stay home every winter break. Now I realize that I never wanted special pajamas, I hate tomato sauce and I actually prefer going away over winter break. The one tradition that formed without me even noticing is that every year we go to Paris to visit family. It never occurred to me when I was younger that this wasn’t a typical family experience, since most of my classmates aren’t dual citizens in

France and the United States. Dual nationality isn’t often something that’s apparent when looking at someone, but for me it has always manifested itself in one way: my last name.

For non-French-speaking people, the pronunciation of “Guy” seems almost too easy. In fact, whenever I tell someone how to spell my name - somehow there always seems to be a strong belief that it should be spelled “Gui” - I always clarify by saying, “It’s Guy, as in man.” The truth, however, is that contrary to popular belief, my last name isn’t pronounced “guy.” When I

was younger I used to correct people, sometimes to the point of becoming genuinely upset by their completely innocent error, but now even I pronounce it “guy.” On the rare occurrence when someone does use the correct pronunciation, “guee,” only then is my status as a dual citizen revealed.

On my yearly family trips to Paris, as soon as I step into the country and go to baggage claim, “guy” is gone and it’s strictly “guee.” Whenever I introduce myself, I almost expect that I will say “guy,” but I never do. Even though

every trip brings with it different adventures and new experiences, Paris never ceases to offer me a home. For me, Paris isn’t this place of overpriced food, tourists crowded around a tiny painting, and overpriced coffee. It’s a place where walking up five flights of stairs to my family’s apartment is part of our family tradition. No matter how many times I gone back, I am always captivated by the view out my window of the lit-up Eiffel Tower dancing at night. •

# Wonders of the West: Backpacking the Coast

By FARIA REHMAN '17

There I was, wind whipping my hair as I looked down upon what was, by far, the most beautiful sight I’ve ever seen. I was standing at the tip of San Juan Island, which is half American and half Canadian territory. Rolling, lush hills were splayed out in front of me, colliding into the deep Pacific, where seals and sea lions were seen sprawled out on rocks popping out from the water. The sky was pristine and the clearest blue one would imagine- it felt like a completely surreal world, away from the constant buzz of technology we face on a day to day basis.

The scene was one of energizing stillness- donkeys and alpacas, led by townspeople, were walking lazily along on the

path next to us as the wind rustled in the trees and the rare bald eagle circled over, it’s prying eyes watching over the land. From our position on the island, we could see all of it at once: Friday Harbor in the distance, the luscious and aromatic lavender fields, the alpaca farm, and several home designer-created cabins along the coast. The perfect balance of luxury and raw, undisturbed nature.

When we had first landed in San Juan, I didn’t think it was too much of a wonder. Just a normal town. It was when we were away from the city- that’s when the wonder set in. It was a land for nature lovers, a place where people just came to be happy and at ease with the world.

Log cabins were situated atop of curving, steep roads, with towering trees (and the occasional bald eagle) shrouding the area and with the sea just a few steps away. One family owned an alpaca farm, another an art studio, and another a fresh field of lavender, which you could smell the intoxicating aroma of as you neared it.

And then I ended up back where this article started- at that astounding peak, where the forest met the sea, the irreplaceable scent of pines and sea breeze in the air. It was heavenly; a mixture of eerily quiet and astonishingly reenergizing and invigorating, and despite all the great things those two weeks brought me, right then and there was when I felt on top of the world. •

# Taiwan Impressions

By ALICE HU '17

boating activity around the lake in order to create a similar scene to that in West Lake, his hometown.

Halfway through our sightseeing, we stopped at the local shopping street. On that day, the weather was mysterious; half of the sky was cloudy and releasing rain showers, while the other was sunny. This is common in some islands but it is still cool when you actually feel these two different atmosphere at once.

Another thing that I want to mention is the Taiwanese food, especially in the night market. The night market is very famous



and includes so many kinds of local delicacies. I went to many night markets in Taipei and Taizhong. The markets are outdoors and there are always two roads in the market for people to walk on and shop in the stores. An attraction to all in Taiwan, both locals and tourists, the markets are bustling and crowded sometimes. Some people prefer walking and eating at the same time, which is wise because the food varies so many that you can easily try different things. There are puddings, candies, bean pastes, crabs, noodles, meats, salads and more. Because of the local sauce and cream, the food usually has a special flavor unique to Taiwanese cuisine. Moreover, since Taiwan is close to sea and in the tropical zone, the seafood and fruits are fresh, delicious, and indulgent.

Some destinations will entice you to return because of their unique specialties, cultures, and personal memories associated with them. Taiwan is that destination for me. •

# •Focus•

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