

AMSTERDAM

NISA RAZA

FEBRUARY 2017- JUNE 2017

STUDYING ABROAD

**TRAVEL
QUOTE BY
NICK
MILLER**



"Travel is little beds and cramped bathrooms. It's old television sets and slow Internet connections. Travel is extraordinary conversations with ordinary people. It's waiters, gas station attendants, and housekeepers becoming the most interesting people in the world. It's churches that are compelling enough to enter. It's McDonald's being a luxury. It's the realization that you may have been born in the wrong country. Travel is a smile that leads to a conversation in broken English. It's the epiphany that good guys smile the same way all over the world. Travel is the same white T-shirt again tomorrow. Travel is accented love after good wine and too many unfiltered cigarettes. Travel is flowing in the back of a bus with giggly strangers. It's a street full of bearded backpackers looking down at maps. Travel is wishing for one more bite of whatever that just was. It's the rediscovery of walking somewhere. It's sharing a bottle of liquor on an overnight train with a new friend. Travel is "Maybe I don't have to do it that way when I get back home." "



LIVING ON CAMPUS

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I lived in a two-person apartment in the student residences of the Vrije Universiteit. The campus was called "Uilenstede" and it was located in Amstelveen, which is a small suburb of Amsterdam. I lived with a Portuguese girl from Lisboa also studying marketing and we shared a common kitchen and bathroom. We each had our own private room with a little balcony. We took time to decorate our apartment and make it feel like home. We got along very well and shared dinners together and discussions about how we feel living abroad. Outside, there was a large grass area where we would have picnics and barbecues, surrounded by international student buildings. It would take me one minute to walk to my friends' apartments and join them for dinner, enjoy a movie night or a delicious wine and cheese evening. We would spend all our time together, learning from each other and learning about each other's cultures, countries, customs, norms, interests and beliefs. We could discuss for hours about Canadian nature, Australian beaches, Turkish politics, Spain's language conflicts, U.S.A's political beliefs, Portugal's food and the Netherlands population. Beside my apartment, there was a little bar called "Il Caffe", where we decided to have Canadian nights every Monday. I would meet up with a few people who also studied in Montreal that I met in Amsterdam.

To go into the city, we would take a 25-minute tram or metro ride which was walking distance from where we lived. However, we also all bought bikes which was the easiest method of transportation, as the whole city is flat and bicycle-friendly. I loved it because I did not have to depend on a public transport schedule to go anywhere, I could just take my bicycle and go wherever I wanted when I wanted. Concerning safety, I felt where we lived was safe but I also always made sure to keep my doors locked as I lived on the ground floor. A few people got their bicycles stolen, but that is very normal in Amsterdam. I also made sure not to walk home alone in the night and always be with people when we went out just in case. We all looked out for each other – that was the beauty of Amsterdam.



UNIVERSITY LIFE

NISA RAZA

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STUDYING ABROAD



I studied at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which was a 10-minute bicycle ride or a 5-minute tram ride from my apartment. I took two electives and two business classes. I enjoyed my courses because they give a different educational perspective than the traditional North American one we have in Montreal. In the Netherlands, a semester is divided in two periods of two classes. In the first period, in my Organizational Culture and Change course, I learned about racism and feelings of belonging in South African universities and institutions. It opened my eyes on how racism and racial segregation is still very present, even if it subtler than before. In my Culture and New Media course, I learned how media is omnipresent in everything we do and see and how it was a stronger impact on who we are than I thought. It started to make me think of how much I use media and how it shapes who I am in some ways. At the end of each of these two classes, there was only one final exam worth 100% of our final grade. This was unusual to me, because usually I have multiple elements determining my grade. However, studied a lot and still managed to get good grades. After, in the second period, I took two marketing courses. In Cross-Cultural Marketing, we had a big project which involved creating a marketing plan to bring the popular Dutch Babboe Bikes (cargo bikes where parents can carry their young children) to the United States. This was interesting because the product was very typically Dutch and we had to brainstorm with team members who each had different perspectives as we were all from different parts of the world. In my Digital Marketing and Metrics class, which was the most difficult at all, we learned how to effectively use data analytics and online metrics to evaluate a company or a brand's equity. We got to get real-world insight as we compared Nike to Adidas branding and presented our recommendations to our class. All in all, the education system of the Netherlands is quite different than Canada but also very eye-opening and offering new insights and perspectives on world business and culture.

FRIENDSHIPS

NISA RAZA

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STUDYING ABROAD

Amsterdam gave me clarity, and I will be forever grateful. It is a city of lust, open-mindedness, ease and serenity. It is a place of joy and appreciating the little moments. The best part of my experience was the genuinely amazing people I had the opportunity to meet. From a girl from Turkey I met on the tram on the first day to a guy from Australia at a campus party, I made life-changing friendships. These people taught me so much. They taught me that friendship is extremely important, and that friends have to be there for each other through the thick and thin. We carried each other, through heartbreak, homesickness, fear and stress. We appreciated moments of laughter, reverie and pure happiness together. We discovered the city we lived in together, from studying at cafes, visiting vintage clothes shops and walking the busy streets together. We travelled to different countries and saw places we never even imagined of side by side. We fell in love and felt invincible together. I miss them with my whole heart. I realized my friendships back home in Montreal are not comparable and that broke my heart a little. However, it also made me realize what to look for in my friendships in the future and taught me who is worth my time and who is not.



TRAVEL

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STUDYING ABROAD

THE NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam, Rotterdam,
The Hague, etc.



I had the chance to visit multiple Dutch cities, as my mother's friend is from the Netherlands and was kind enough to bring me to explore different areas. I went to small Dutch villages and ate traditional Dutch food, such as croquettes, stroopwafels and bitterballen. She also brought me on road trips to see the beautiful beaches. I also visited Rotterdam, the Netherlands' modern city with its cube-shaped houses. In addition, my family came to visit in April which was very nice to see them again. I was excited to show them the city so they could see how life in Amsterdam was. We also had the chance to see the beautiful tulips that bloomed just in time for their arrival.

UNITED KINGDOM

London



I have relatives who live in London, who I was really happy to go see for a weekend in March. We went to go see a Shakespeare play, walked in the beautiful city streets, and took a boat ride in the evening to see the illuminated bridges. We also had delicious indian food and visited cool markets. I really enjoyed visiting Buckingham Palace and the nice parks.

FRANCE

Monaco, Nice, Cannes



,The South of France is filled with beautiful beaches, great landscapes and delicious food. Monaco was simply breathtaking with its luxurious homes, fancy yachts and majestic palaces.

TRAVEL

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STUDYING ABROAD

ICELAND

Reykjavik



After our first period exams, a group of friends (from the United States, Finland and China) and I spontaneously decided to go to Iceland on our break. It is an amazing country. Having such a small population, most of the country is just landscapes and natures - untouched by the human hand. It is unlike anything else. We saw glaciers, volcanoes, hot springs and Icelandic horses. One of my best trips!

BELGIUM

Bruges, Brussels



Belgium is simply a four hour bus ride away from Amsterdam. I visited the country twice and really enjoyed delicious Belgian beer and chocolate. These cities also have very intricate unique architecture!

GERMANY

Cologne



We went to Cologne for Carnival, which is a big holiday celebration that happens in Germany and the Netherlands. We went as a day trip organized by the exchange committee and it is where I got to make some great friends. It was very festive and we watched a parade where everyone is costumed and throwing candy into the crowds, with traditional German music playing in the background.

TRAVEL

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SWITZERLAND

Zurich, Lucern



I went to Switzerland to visit my Swiss friend who was on exchange in Montreal in the fall semester. We had a great time, sharing our stories and memories. We also took a very scenic train ride across the whole country, which allowed us to stop and see different cities.

PORTUGAL

Lisboa, Lagos



Portugal was incredible because of its great beaches, seafood and nice people. We stayed at my flatmate's apartment in the center of Lisboa. It was in the middle of the heatwave so we headed to the beach almost everyday to cool off in the big waves. It was a very relaxing and scenic place.



LIFE LESSONS

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Living abroad on my own was life-altering. It may sound corny or cliché, but it is the truth. In the past six months, I've learned from the people I met, the places I've seen and the cultures I've experienced. I've learned how to let myself fall in love with cities, moments and people. Most importantly, I have realized that when you give your all to something, you feel in it your whole body. I have felt love, pain, fear, compassion, freedom, ultimate joy, heartbreak and laughter reverberating through my soul. I've reached out to others for a hand to hold but what I realize now is that I am capable of feeling of all these things and accepting them on my own. I am capable of standing on my own two feet and being proud and empowered. I am capable of making my choices and standing up for what I truly believe in. I am capable of saying goodbye to those who have let me down or who do not have good intentions. I am capable of forgiving and accepting some issues as they are. Because I cannot change what I can't control. Because at the end of the day, all I have is myself and I won't let anyone take away my pride. I have learned that I am capable of all these things and it has been the most difficult but essential lesson in life for me, which makes me feel very grateful and motivated to be better and move forward with purpose.



THE NETHERLANDS EXPERIENCE

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