

Post Semester at Sea

If you would have asked my five years ago where I'd be today, I would have never of said on a ship, sailing around the world. That sounds like a dream, and it truly was. Semester at sea was a life changing experience and really was "The voyage of a lifetime." After spending the last 5 months living onboard the MV World Odyssey, exploring 12 countries around the globe, I can honestly say that studying abroad was one of the best decisions I've ever made. That said, Semester at Sea is not like any other study abroad program. From life on the ship, to life in port, I encountered new experiences that I learned from every single day.

Let's start with life on the ship. The community on the ship was indescribable. It was full of people I called family, in a place that I called my home. That ship is full of laughs, memories, and unforgettable times. I formed relationships with people that I would have never expected. On the ship we had a poster with the African word "Ubuntu", meaning "I am because we are" or in other words "the belief in a universal bond that connects all humanity." I truly believe that was present on the ship. I made friends of a lifetime, interacted and learned from some of the world's best professors, and even became close with the crew members. When you're in the middle of the ocean with no phone service and zero internet connection, it's crazy what can happen between people. No connection to the outside world was definitely hard the first week or so, but looking back, it's actually one of the things that I am most grateful for. I made such close and genuine connections with people in a span of 5 months, that I haven't made with friends on campus in 2 years.

Now, what about life in port? Personally, exploring a variety of places is what promoted so much growth. In our global studies class, we discussed the “fishbowl” analogy. Your own culture is the water and you’re the fish. One can’t see their own culture until they’re taken out of water and placed back into it. This whole Semester at Sea experience was me being taken out of water. Embarking in each country was like being in a new fishbowl with different water. Each country was so different from one another, for instance, the culture in Croatia was completely different than that of Morocco, which was different from Ghana, which was so different from Brazil. Of course, it was good to find similarities between them; however, accepting the differences between them was the real learning experience. In class we also discussed approaching others with “Platinum Rule”, rather than “Golden Rule.” This means treating others the way *they* want to be treated, rather than the way *you* want to be treated. Using this allowed me to understand and accept each culture individually. Being immersed in each of them allowed me to interact with individuals and understand their values and beliefs. Doing this, I was able to discover the ways in which each culture differed and learned something new from each of them.

So, yes, studying abroad contributed to my academic education; however, it left a greater impact on my view of the world. I see the world completely different than I had before the voyage. Everything that was once common is new once again, and everything that’s new is exciting. By exposing myself to new situations filled with new people and experiences, It’s allowed me to open my eyes to the world around me. This is a lesson that I could not have learned in a traditional classroom. Overall, I am so grateful for the opportunity to have lived and learned while traveling the world, this

unique learning experience broadened my perspective through connecting people, places, and cultures.