

WANDER

Brandeis Abroad

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Wander: Brandeis Abroad





Letter From The Editor

Dear Wanderers,

To wander means to traverse the globe, to cross cultural, linguistic, and physical boundaries. It means being in a constant state of physical and psychological transition and being in a place of in-between-ness.

While I was in Beijing four years ago, the subway was my main mode of transportation. It allowed me to explore the city and was also a place where I could sit down and let my mind wander freely. Its trains felt like a place of timelessness and provided a much-needed space to process all that was going on around me. Despite the frenzy of getting on and off the train and the amount of pushing and shoving it entailed, the train was one of the only places I felt completely at ease. It was a place of limbo, where I did not feel the pressure to conform to American or Chinese culture or to make sense of my multicultural identity.

Wander: Brandeis Abroad was founded in 2011 with the intention of providing students at Brandeis University with the opportunity to share their overseas experiences through poetry, prose, photographs, and artwork. As Brandeis' only study abroad journal, Wander's founders recognized the growing demand for a safe place where students who went abroad and came back could tell their stories.

Some of these stories are deeply personal and document the struggles and wonder of being overseas. In these pages, learn what it is like to live with a host family in Korea (p.13). Take public transportation in a country whose language (Vietnamese) you do not understand (p. 20). Admire the sunrise atop Mount Kilimanjaro (p. 31) and take a whiff of the Dane's delicious pie (p.33).

Wander well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Honoré". The script is cursive and fluid, with a stylized 'H' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'e'.

Honoré Cole, '17

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Alex Ashley Havana, Cuba



Host Family

By Liat Meeyun Shapiro

*Class of 2020
Seoul, South Korea*

Note: In June 2015, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Seoul, South Korea, under the National Security Initiative for Youth (NSLIY) sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. The focus on immersion in the host country and culture included living with a host family for the entirety of the program. Each of the 49 students on the program was matched and lived with a Korean host family. I hope you enjoy this introduction to my lovely Korean host family.

“Meeyunah, pali, pali!” the five foot tall Korean woman hurried past me toward the department store, pausing only to look back and impatiently translate, “fast, fast!” Once inside the store, she rolled a shopping cart toward me and walked briskly toward an aisle. “Flakes? Eat flakes?” Unsure of how to respond, I simply continued following her. When we reached the aisle, she threw a box of cornflakes into the cart and exclaimed, “Meeyun’s American breakfast!” Then, while exiting the aisle, she grabbed a piece of octopus and shoved it into my mouth. “Delicious. Healthy.” She scanned my face for a response and when I managed a smile around octopus’ tentacles, she nodded, satisfied, and began checking out. If anything indicated my time as an exchange student and member of a Korean household would be interesting, it would be the first time I met my host mother.

This U.S. State Department sponsored National Security Initiative for Youth scholarship focused on providing students with an experience as close to total immersion as possible. One of the primary reasons I applied to NSLIY was the opportunity to live with a host family. During the weeks leading up to the departure date, I eagerly awaited the email containing host family information. The document finally landed in my mailbox as I was on my way home from church one morning. My phone’s data had expired for the month, so I forwarded the email to my mother.

“Well, Liat,” she began.

“Yes? What?” I bounced in my seat.

“I don’t think they are at all what you imagined.” I couldn’t believe those were the first words out of my mother’s mouth. She laughed before explaining, “I think you have host grandparents.”

“Wait, show me!” I reached for her laptop and scanned the document. Lee Bumjoon 60 and Lee Jeongah 60. My three host sisters were above the age of 25. My first thought was “I don’t have any host siblings my age ...” My second thought was, “since they’re an older couple, maybe they won’t speak as much English and my Korean will improve drastically.” My third thought was, “wow, I really don’t have host siblings ...” For weeks, I had imagined asking my host siblings for Korean help, teaching them English, shopping with them, and other activities now obviously inaccessible to me as the paper indicated my host sisters no longer lived at home. My first encounter with reality tugged down an expectation I had created for myself, even though I knew I shouldn’t have.

Fast forward a month or so to another impatient wait, this time in the lobby of the youth hostel that hosted the program’s in-country orientation. The rest of the students had been picked up by

their host parents and only I and one other boy remained. A program director asked to speak privately with each of us and before complying, we looked at one another and shrugged—not exactly what we had expected.

“I’m really sorry this happened, Liat,” the lady began. Am I switching host families? “But unfortunately, your host mother...” Do I have anything I didn’t bring as host family gifts that could be host family gifts? “...picked up the wrong student and that student’s host father will drive you to meet your host mother.” Wait, really? Acceptable plot for an unrealistic drama not a State Department scholarship program, but a lot better than I expected. Expected ... expectations, right ...

An hour after meeting my mother in an underground parking lot, I found myself in front of my new apartment, practicing unlocking the door over and over until she was satisfied I wouldn’t forget. 2, 3, 1, 8, 0; 2, 3, 1, 8, 0. “Forget? No! Rememorize!” she exclaimed.

I took my shoes off in the entryway and watched as my host mother yanked my fifty pound suitcase into the apartment. Dusting off her hands she said, “your house!” She pulled me toward a door and opened it up. “Your room!” It was a beautiful little room complete with a bed, clothes rack, and desk. It was next to the balcony and overlooked the park next door. She motioned toward my suitcase, which I took as the signal to unpack. Once done, she gave me a tour of the entire apartment, pointing out “my” bathroom and—to my immense surprise—“my” refrigerator, stocked with Korean side dishes and snacks, all and only for my consumption.

That first day, I was left alone in an entirely new environment. Only a couple days later did I discover it was because my host parents owned a health food store. The first three weeks were difficult. If I didn’t study at a café with friends or explore on my own, I would be left to myself in a silent apartment while my parents attended to their store. Not that I particularly minded being an only child (in America, I was the eldest of five), but it wasn’t anything close to what I expected either.




Lorraine Li Kagoshima, Japan

A week or so into the program, I grew extremely tired of being the only student not hanging out with my host family. Although I couldn't go to a water park with my host parents, I could find ways to spend more time with them. Since asking my host parents to take me to church or let me help out at the store always resulted in them exclaiming, "study! Good grades—important, important!" I decided to switch tactics.

One day, during the break between morning and afternoon classes at a local university, I opened up Kakao Talk, a Korean messaging platform, and asked my host father, "will you come home tonight and eat dinner?" He responded with a series of emoticons and ended with, "I'll buy fruit to eat together!" That evening, my umma cooked home-made ramen and told me to eat immediately while it was still hot. Appa hadn't come home yet, so I asked if I could wait. "Why? Cold food!" Using my improved Korean, I told umma I wanted to eat with appa and she responded all right, we'd eat ramen and watch TV together once appa returned. A few minutes later, appa came through the door with a watermelon. Thus began my journey of creating entirely new expectations of life with a Korean host family, with my host parents.

For the rest of the program I balanced family life with school life. I didn't go home early every evening, but every night, I ate dinner with my parents and talked about the day. When umma and appa hosted a French tourist for two nights, I translated for everybody, switching from French to English to Korean and vice versa. My last week in Korea, I went to a concert in the neighboring park with my host parents, met my youngest host sister, and finally visited my parents' store. Before I left, appa put me into a group chat with himself, umma, and my sisters. In Korean, he explained, "you're the youngest daughter—maknae—of our family. You will always be our daughter and we will always be your Korean family."

The day I left Korea, my umma drove me to the hostel. She turned on some loud Korean preaching and refused to talk the entire drive. When we arrived, she said in Korean, "Meeyun, buy umma an iced coffee from the vending machine." I had already exchanged my money and told her I couldn't. Her response? "When I see you in America, you will buy me an Americano." She told me appa was by himself at the store and she needed to get going. My eyes filled with tears, and I shook my head. She glared and suddenly exclaimed in her harsh-sounding Korean dialect, "No crying! Family doesn't cry when we say goodbye because we will see one another soon. Come take a picture with umma." I dried my tears and posed for a picture before she pulled me into a hug and walked back to the car. I watched, tears welling up again, as she pulled away. She suddenly braked and rolled down her window to wave before she left. One of my program friends was standing next to me. "I thought you said you weren't close with your host fam," he said. I glanced up. "Yeah, I guess I was wrong."

Although all of my pre-program expectations about Korean family life never developed into reality, the real host family I discovered far exceeded those dreams. It's been almost two years since I last saw my host family. Fortunately, the distance and time haven't broken the relationships we fostered in the last three weeks of program. On any major holiday—either American or Korean—our family chat explodes with cute emoticons (appa), pictures (my sisters), and questions on whether we're all eating healthily and taking vitamins (umma). Just a few days ago, my appa randomly texted in Korean, "Meeyunah! I miss you! Come to Korea!" A few minutes later, my umma added, "Pali, pali!" 



Stephanie Sjoblom *Anhui, China*



Jennifer Wu *Anhui, China*





Marcelo Brociner *Hanoi, Vietnam*



Abigail Grinberg *Lecco, Italy*

First Commute

By Marcelo Brociner

*Class of 2018
Hanoi, Vietnam*

After spending Sunday through Tuesday exploring my immediate neighborhood, I began working on Wednesday. Before I realized that taxis in Vietnam were plentiful, inexpensive, and efficient, I took the #58 bus to work. With my body still adjusting to the eleven-hour time difference between Boston and Hanoi, I involuntarily woke up at 6:30 am and left my apartment at 7:30 am to give myself time to eat breakfast before catching the 8:16 am bus. For whatever reason, I decided to wear sneakers for my first day of work after wearing sandals for my first four days in Hanoi.

The Work Room Four art studio is located on the outskirts of Hanoi in a 25-story skyscraper called Packexim. The massive red letters that read “PACKEXIM” on the roof of the building made the building easily identifiable both for taxi drivers and myself. The vast majority of the building consists of apartments, most of which are occupied by Vietnamese folks, in addition to the occasional European or Indian family. The Work Room Four art studio was originally based in Zone 9, an abandoned medical school that was eventually renovated and transformed into a flourishing arts district. Sadly, for reasons that no one can quite put their finger on, Zone 9 was shut down by the government after just six months. Work Room Four was then forced to relocate, and it was during this time that they purchased the space in the Packexim building.

One day I went to Colonel Quy’s Café, as I did every morning, and approached a woman working there who seemed to be around the same age as me. I took out my phone and showed her a photograph of the menu that I took the day before in order to make ordering food easier, and she got a big laugh out of that. It had rained all through the night, and in the morning it was drizzling, so the woman seated me under the iconic yellow awning that I was always happy to see from a distance. On a sunny day, the lake was illuminated with a beautiful tint of blue that distracted me from the slightly foul smell it emitted. On cloudy days the lake’s foul smell seemed even fouler to me. Colonel Quy’s attracted a large number of Western customers, and on weekends I would eavesdrop on various conversations in part out of relief to hear people speaking English. On that day, I was the only person eating, and I did so quickly before heading off to work.

I spent my first four days in Hanoi getting familiar with my neighborhood and those nearby mine, and while I enjoyed doing so, there had been no direction to my exploration. On my first day of work, I remember feeling a newfound sense of purpose with each step I took towards Nghi Tâm, a feeling I had been missing during those first four days. It put me in a wonderful mood as I waded through the humid air towards the bus stop, which I was relieved to find after a brief moment of uncertainty. I stood at the bus stop and observed the never ending flow of traffic that I had heard so much about in preparing to travel, with motorbikes outnumbering automobiles by what seemed to be fifteen to one. While the motor bikers wore ponchos, I couldn’t decide what to wear because of the humidity. I took off and put back on my windbreaker countless times before deciding to keep it off.

The #58 bus arrived a few minutes late, but I was not worried about being late to work. I got on the bus and was surprised to see that the bus driver did not deal with the fare, as there was a man sitting in a seat across from him with a cash box. I paid this man the 9,000 Dong (roughly \$0.40) for my ticket



Marcelo Brociner *Hanoi, Vietnam*

in exact change, and he laughed at me as he handed me my ticket. I then sat down a couple of seats behind him and figured that he found it funny seeing a Westerner using public transportation. For as I looked around the bus, which was a little less than half full, it was occupied by perhaps fifteen other commuters, all of whom were Vietnamese. Among those fifteen were an old woman with a number of bags in the seat beside her, and in front of her was a man in formal clothes with a briefcase on his lap, clearly on his way to work. The bus driver was playing traditional Vietnamese music at a volume loud enough for all on the bus to hear, which I got a serious kick out of. First, because this was not permissible in the United States, and secondly because I wondered what American bus drivers would play if they could. I genuinely enjoyed the music as it gave my morning adventure a more local feel to it.

There was no “Stop Here” button of any kind on the bus, and I learned by observing other commuters that you had to stand by the door in order for the bus driver to stop. Once the bus did stop, it remained still for only a matter of seconds, making the process of getting off the bus more exciting and dangerous all at once. I realized after some time that I had waited too long to get off the bus and that I might end up far from where the studio was, so I decided to get off at the next stop and walk from there. To do so, I stood up at the door, the bus driver pulled over, and I jumped out before the bus quickly drove away. Of course, I had no idea where I was, but I did have a vague idea of where the studio was.

I crossed the highway, which looked like that of a ghost town in comparison to the area where I got on the bus, and proceeded to make my way through local back roads in hopes of creating the perfect shortcut to the studio. I was taken aback by the beauty of these quiet and colorful streets, decorated with a variety of flowers and occupied by small homes in a presumably humble neighborhood. Unfortunately, my shortcut plan was cut short, as many of the turns I made turned out to be dead ends. As I continued my exploration, a man drove by on a motorbike and immediately smiled upon seeing me. He stopped soon after passing me and I turned around to see him looking at me.

He asked me, “Are you an English teacher?”

I approached him and said, “No, but I would like to be.”


“Where are you going? Would you like a ride?”

“Packexim. How much would you charge me?”

“Free.”

I happily got on his motorbike and we went on our way. This man went by the name of Rock. Rock was twenty-six years old, married, and the father of a four-month old boy. He wanted to go into the communications industry but had poor English for that field, so he was eager to improve his language skills. Only minutes into our ride, heavily flooded streets met us with brown-shaded rainwater covering the pavement. We proceeded to look for detours to Packexim that avoided the flooding, but it turned out that every street within a five-block radius of the building was flooded. With the upper half of the massive Packexim building in plain sight, we decided to get off Rock’s motorbike and travel by foot via sidewalk in hopes of reaching the building. As we walked, I took down his email address and agreed to meet with him in the near future.

Now a mere block away from Packexim, I realized that there was simply no way to avoid the flooding that surrounded the building. The first day that I decided to wear shoes in Hanoi, I had no choice but to take them off and wade through the muddy rainwater in my barefeet. The water was dirty to the point that I could not see my feet or the pavement, and so with each step I took was afraid of stepping on something that could cut my feet. At the same time, I had my cell phone and laptop with me, so if I were to step on anything and react instinctively, or more likely slip and fall into the water, my two most expensive belongings would have been completely ruined before I even began working. While I was worried about my feet and my electronic devices, I also had a lot of fun wading through the water. It was a first-day-of-work commute that could not be scripted, and with this in mind, I had a big smile on my face most of the time.

Luckily, I only had to walk one block. I emerged from the dirt water without a single scratch on my body, and with my cell phone and laptop both intact. Upon reaching “shore,” a local looked at me and jokingly made a swimming motion, which made me laugh. Thanks to my eagerness and the help of my new friend Rock, I arrived at Packexim at 9 am, almost on the dot. All I knew was that I would no longer be taking the bus to work. 

“ *The bus driver was playing traditional Vietnamese music at a volume loud enough for all on the bus to hear, which I got a serious kick out of. First, because this was not permissible in the United States, and secondly because I wondered what American bus drivers would play if they could.* ”



Alex Ashley Havana, Cuba



Ly Thien Nguyen (Na)

By Marcello Brociner

*Class of 2018
Hanoi, Vietnam*

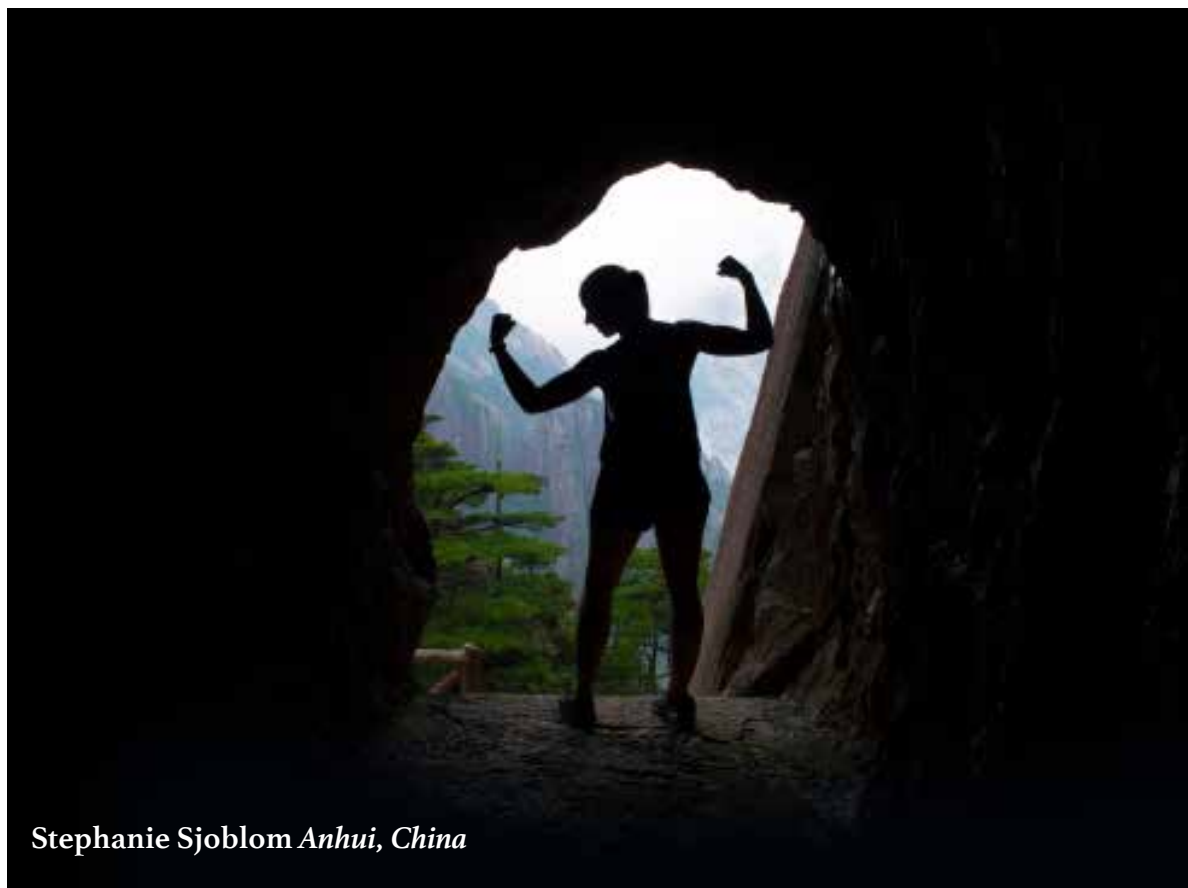
She was the only true friend that I had during my two-month stay in Vietnam. For this, I will be forever grateful. She had bangs that seemed to slightly obscure her face in the same way that her insecurities seemed to slightly obscure her physical presence. They stopped just short of her eyes, which were as black as the long hair that reached almost halfway down her back. She was much shorter than me, which was an unusual dynamic for me to experience, and one that I happily welcomed. Her pale skin, intentionally maintained by keeping out of the sun, contrasted with the red lipstick that she had on every day. Her sense of style put mine to shame because I only focused on wearing the coolest clothes possible in order to cope with the humidity of Hanoi. Na wore wonderfully coordinated outfits that further reflected her cultured identity. Her laugh was contagious to me, so I would laugh and make fun of her laugh, and she would then laugh and make fun of my laugh.

A Vietnamese native, Na had received her bachelor's degree in business the previous spring. She lacked a passion for business but saw it as a practical way to get a good job. She did, however, have a passion for the arts, one that is rooted in her upbringing. Her grandmother, with whom she spent much of her childhood, was an avid collector of artwork, and her birth father was a painter in addition to being an actor. But because she claimed to lack any creative capacity - which I disagreed with - she chose to pursue the management side of the art industry. Na's mother happened to know Dorian, one of the two cofounders of the Work Room Four art studio, and was happy to bring Na aboard after she expressed an interest in the art industry.

I was lucky to work with Na this summer. As the only two interns at the studio, we were able to vent the frustrations that came with our inability to contribute to much of the

work being done. She was the second youngest person at the studio after me, which also helped us find a common thread amidst the stark differences in our backgrounds. Despite our differences, I was surprised to discover that she was even more familiar with Western pop culture than I was! She was highly knowledgeable regarding film, which was obvious by her ability to deconstruct various films and critique them in a deeply perceptive manner. She had aspirations to become a film director, which is mainly why I disagreed with her so-

“*She was the only true friend that I had during my two-month stay in Vietnam. For this, I will be forever grateful*”



Stephanie Sjoblom *Anhui, China*

called “lack in creative capacity.” She had perhaps the most eclectic taste for music that I have ever encountered, and we shared an admiration for Kendrick Lamar’s masterpiece album “To Pimp a Butterfly.” I was elated that I was able to engage on a higher level with someone who lived on the other side of Earth, and I was ashamed by my surprise in being able to do so, having doubted my ability to connect with Vietnamese folks on that level.

Na and I spent a considerable amount of time together, not only during our seven-hour workdays during the week but also outside of the studio. However, because Na was my only friend in Hanoi, I spent the majority of my free time outside of the studio on my own, and being unable to connect on a more immediate level with my surroundings was a depressingly difficult thing to adapt to. Na really helped me to grapple with these feelings and navigate Hanoi by simply listening to me. She was an incredible listener, and was happy to let me speak in order to help me cope with the culture shock that I was experiencing all around me. We often talked about battling the inner sorrow that had manifested within each of us, albeit for different reasons, and the importance of allowing ourselves to find happiness.

As we explored Hanoi together, she answered the countless questions that I had. She explained our surroundings in great detail, and made me more comfortable as a Westerner living in Vietnam. Without her help, I would have been lost in Hanoi. She was the only true friend that I had during my two month stay in Vietnam, and for this, I will be forever grateful.



Granada Part II: Proserpina

By Ashley Simmons

*Class of 2017
Granada, Spain*

i moved like
phases of the moon
through a city with
glimmering sidewalks

wondering where and when
my skin and self fit amongst
its hushed chaos.

in the amphitheater,
bathed wine red from
walls' passionate eyes,
they stomped and struck their pain
in percussions

we all ate the oranges off the trees,
knowing they'd be bitter, but hungered for
whatever sweetness might momentarily grace our tongues


pero todo lo bueno se acaba,
and we only found it
in the aftertaste,
the sharp tongue-twisting twang of terracotta.
walked through midnights
inappropriately clothed but close.

Granada Part III: Proserpina

somehow this air knows me,
wraps its arms and legs around
and locks me into a pleasant stronghold,
like Persephone through its seeds

yes, i ate the pomegranate
 & i bathed in her pulp
came out with different skin
eyes and hands laden with sights and feelings of
 worlds that had always been there
 but were never seen by me

yes, i ate the pomegranate
& the four month condemnation to that Hell was the most Glorious
& though it too caused my mother pain for me to be away so long
 if you told me to not eat the fruit out of fear of being stuck there
 i would tell you as Persephone did:

my eyes glazed over warm with water from Motril
 & mouth moistened as
 something in my fingers itched,
 an ache crawled on the inside of my skull,
clapped again with the Flamenco for more, more
 and i could not resist,
 i did not dare want to.
that place, it called for me to come.
 and so i did. 



Gabrielle Hersch *Meknes, Morocco*



Cristen Weiss Galway, Ireland



Kilimanjaro

By Faust Núñez

*Class of 2017
Arusha, Tanzania*


We left for Kilimanjaro on the 5th and started hiking, heavy packs and boots on, to start the journey to get there. The first day we climbed to 2720 meters, the second to 3750, the third to 4150 (acclimating to the altitude), and then the fourth up to Kibo Camp at 4780 meters, at the foot of the final ascent. Getting into Kibo we all took a few hours to nap before dinner at 5:30, and all promptly went back to bed at 7:30. After not being able to fall asleep as had become the norm on the trip for me we were brought tea and biscuits at 11:00 (PM) and by midnight we had our gear on and were ready for the final climb. In the pitch black we started shuffling off, two headlamps and one flashlight between the nine of us including our three guides. Temperatures below 0 and without sleep I walked for what felt like forever. We marched up the face of the crater, zig-zagging on loose rocks and dirt to avoid falling back on the steep incline. With no moon out I could just tell where the rim was by where the seemingly infinitesimal stars ended. Walking up that in the pitch black was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do, not because it was too physically taxing or because of the altitude sickness that had started to take hold, but because no matter how many hours we had walked, no matter how many zig-zags we had made, it never seemed like we had gotten closer. Finally after four hours we reached what I had initially thought was the outline of the rim. But hidden



Fuast Núñez Kilimanjaro, Tanzania



Fuast Núñez *Kilimanjaro, Tanzania*

behind it were massive rocks and another steep incline, only this time to get up it we had to climb rocks, not soft and flat dirt. All of the five girls with me had given their backpacks to the porters and one to me just to be able to keep going. One girl in particular was struggling and kept asking for breaks but every time we stopped the freezing cold was get past my four layers and hurt until I couldn't feel my feet or hands. After another two hours we finally saw a small plaque on top of a rock above us, we had made it to the rim, at a point called Gillman's Peak. People cried tears of joy, as if the journey was over. But it wasn't, we could look across the rim now and over the crater beneath us and see Uhuru Peak, the top of the mountain, all the way on the other side, another 2 kilometers away. My head was killing me from the lack of oxygen in the air (we were about 5600 meters up at this point), I had to take it easy on my water since I only had 1.7 liters that certainly were not going to last much longer, and I had given my energy bars to two girls who were really struggling. Our guides gave us almost no time to rest, knowing that if we sat too long the cold would freeze us to the rocks. In fact, another group of 21 students my age from Minnesota who had started climbing at the same time we did, seemed to not be doing well, and many were turning back (only four of the initial twenty-one would end up making it to the top). We moved along, trying to push through the brutal pains of altitude sickness. But then I turned around and saw the sun rising and I swear it was the most beautiful sunrise I have ever seen, it looked like it had been painted. Freshly motivated I pushed on with the rest of the troops, and after another hour we arrived at Stella Point, the second highest peak on the mountain. We had gotten to the permafrost now, with gargantuan glaciers running along the side of the rim. We could all see the finish line now. Grunting with each step on sore and blistering feet we made the final push. And, despite all of the pain and struggle, standing at the top, the tallest person on the entire continent of Africa, it was all worth it. 



Abigail Grinberg Sicily, Italy

Once You've Been You Always Come Back

By Brittany Duncan

*Class of 2018
Copenhagen, Denmark*

It turned into a nearly cloudless sunny day as my friend and I walked down Skindergade towards the park. I told my friend that this American Pie place smells amazing and looks to have very good pies. You just have to smell them. Walking up the short steep stairs, I look down as a enter to watch my step, only to see white octagon tile floors sprinkled with black tile flowers. Feels a little like my bathroom back home. Standing in front of the neon red lights reading PIE I feel as if I walked through a door and was transported to a small soda fountain and luncheonette from the 40s with red brick walls, naked light bulbs as lighting fixtures, a bar area, spinning stools with brown leather tops and a couple of tables lining the walls.

I stumbled across this place a week before while I was headed to the Studenthuset, and was lured in by the warm smell of apple, fresh smell of blueberry and the comforting smell of chocolate. This time I was showing it to my friend. The pie case was truly a sight to see. Apple Cinnamon Pie with perfect lattice pie crust, a fluffy white Smores Chocolate Pie, hand sized Chicken Potpie, deep red Strawberry Rhubarb, moist Chocolate Brownie Pie and crisp and sweet Apricot Blackberry Crumble. We were overwhelmed and drooling. I was craving Pumpkin Pie and was disappointed that I didn't see it in the pastry display case. I let my eyes browse over the establishment, only to rest on the tea box. My eyes lit up and I decided I'd buy something after all.

A lovely older woman typed our order onto the iPad. She had her light silver grey hair in a low ponytail, falling down the nape of her neck. Her thin lips curled into a small smile, as if she was laughing at herself, while she tried to find the tea option on the iPad. Figuring it out, she turned and asked another worker to prepare a to go hot water, meanwhile turning herself to cut a slice of Chocolate Brownie Pie for my friend. The other worker, blonde with short front bangs and a shoulder length ponytail, and a small very slightly wrinkled face walks over with my hot water and finishes ringing up the order. My friend hands her the receipt, which the woman respond to with "Have a good day lovelies!" and turns back to the conversation she was having with an elder gentleman.

"That accent sounds familiar," I say to my friend. "Where are you from?" I call after the worker. She turns back and introduces herself as an American who moved to Denmark. My friend and I introduce ourselves as Kaycee from California and Brittany from New York respectively, and students at Study Abroad in Scandinavia (DIS). Her name is Grace. She was also a student at DIS back in the day. After returning to America and finishing college, she met a man whom she fell in love with.

"I moved to Denmark for all the wrong reasons. That guy turned out to be a rotten egg," she reveals. "But I'm glad I came because I met my baby daddy and we have a little girl." At first they tried to move back to America. She wanted to make sure that Denmark was the right place to settle down. "He was okay with trying to move to California for me. We were there for a year or two and decided it wasn't the same." My jaw drops. Is it possible that Denmark is truly the place to live? If I had the choice would I do the same?

"How is it that different from California? I thought life there would be pretty much the same," I asked perplexed.


"Well here I can both work in the shop, take my daughter to football practice, be home for dinner, relax with my family and not feel stressed at all. I'm not sure if it's the vibe from the Danes themselves because it's true California is laid back in some areas. Denmark just feels more genuine I would say," she explains. I couldn't help but ask, "But can you speak Danish?"

"To be honest, enough to get by," she laughed. Danish is a hard language. Her daughter will be able to speak both but Grace will always be somewhat on the outside. After talking about the language for a little bit, I asked about how the pie shop came to be. "I opened it last Fall actually. I wanted to bring a bit of American tradition to Denmark. I found that many Danes don't know what pie is. Most of their pastries are called cake or rolls." For a moment I search through my memory for a time that my host family has talked about pastries. I guess I never noticed it before. So what do they do for pastries during holidays? I thought. "Wait do you sell Pumpkin pie here?" I ask.

"Closer to November we sell Pumpkin Pie." She adds, "So I'll be looking forward to seeing you then," when she sees my face light up at the mention the pumpkin pie. "But come back for the morning cinnamon bread pie with glaze on top and a cup of coffee."

"I'm glad you chose to come back to Denmark, this place is amazing," I say to her.

"I'm glad I came back too. The Danes are a supportive group. The right place to raise my little girl and to make pies." She smiles.

We agreed we'd be back. Waved goodbye leaving the warm comforting scents of the pie shop. I knew I'd be back. And I was, the following Friday at 10am sharp I ordered a slice of cinnamon bread pie and a green tea. 



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Copenhagen, Denmark

Once You've Been You Always Come Back (p. 33)

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Host Family (p. 13)

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