

WANDER

Brandeis Abroad



ISSUE X



Wander: Brandeis Abroad





“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. And see if I could not learn what it had to teach me and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” - Henry David Thoreau

Letter From The Editor

Dear Wanderers,

As you sift through the pages of Wander: Brandeis Abroad, I hope you are transported to another place and inspired to go abroad yourself. You will soon find out that Wander provides a platform for students to reflect upon their experiences abroad and share them with the Brandeis community by featuring students' prose, poetry, photos, and artwork.

After living and studying abroad, I have learned several things about myself and about traveling in general. For me, the purpose of traveling is not to visit as many monuments and landmarks as possible; rather it is about gaining an understanding of the local customs and culture I am in. It is not about the places I go, but about the people I meet. It is not about standing out, but about blending in. And, it is about letting go and leaving behind. Somehow, friendships come with greater ease and new habits are adopted.

Last semester, I studied international law and justice in The Hague. Visiting the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and various tribunals in the "The International City of Peace and Justice," I observed international governance being put to the test, and the way in which the international justice system attempts to bring individuals accused of serious human rights abuses to account. I caught a glimpse of the imperfections of the international legal system and how difficult the pursuit for justice can be. Feeling closer to the complex, delicate, and ever-shifting web of international relations, I also gained an understanding of the complementary and contradictory relationship between law and politics.

I believe international relations begins with the individual and that in order to improve international relations, we must encourage dialogue and cross-cultural understanding on a person-to-person basis. It is crucial to understand others, foster interpersonal relationships, and at times, make concessions. The pages within this issue seek to encourage you to travel overseas and establish the connections that international relations begin with.

Wander well,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Honoré".

Honoré Cole, '17

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Fresh Roots and New Branches

By Elizabeth (Betsy) Hochman

*Class of 2017
Queensland, Australia*

We hop out of the dusty van, muck boots squealing, work gloves flailing at our sides, and dirty spades tossing in our hands. I look around at the plunging green hills and up to the iconic Australian skies, layers upon layers of blue. After a week of wet season rain, the sun feels particularly sweet, baking my face and filling my chest with static energy. Putting on a sunhat, I venture down the hill with my classmates, and join clusters of locals chatting and planting trees. Here in Yungaburra, Saturdays are community tree planting days— a local initiative to restore cleared rainforest. Today, several thousand seedlings lay waiting to spread their roots in the earth.

When I told family and friends that I would be living in the Australian rainforest, I was met with perplexed stares. “There’s rainforest in Australia?” While desert covers the majority of the country, Far North Queensland is kissed by the Great Barrier Reef and blessed with the oldest continuous rainforest on the planet. The area is wild, rugged, and beautiful. The small towns peppering the region are rich with pioneering spirit, and the forests are something out of Dr. Seuss’s imagination—odd creatures flitting between stinging trees, strangler figs, and wait-a-whiles. As I sit scooping out gobs of red soil and slipping in slim acacias, I can almost feel the spirit of the earth humming beneath me.

Earlier in the semester I experienced the learning curve associated with living in the rainforest. In fact, my first week was downright terrifying. Upon arrival, everyone was promptly taught how to wrap snake bites. Soon after, we were briefed on dangerous plants, terrestrial leeches, paralysis ticks, leptospirosis, crocodiles, cyclones and much more. To my anxious eye, every coiled root or stick was a writhing snake and every tree or spider was of the poisonous variety. Navigating the thin, craggy trails back and forth from my cabin to the center required a great deal of courage, particularly at night with nothing but a headlamp to illuminate the path. I had always considered myself an outdoorsy, rugged person, but that didn’t make a difference. I felt like an invader; I had stepped into hallowed forest and was at the mercy of its guards.



Betsy Hochma *Blue Mountains, Australia*

However, the anxiety gradually faded. As my classmates and I familiarized ourselves with the rainforest it became equal parts host, home, and wonder. Little feet in the brush lolled us to sleep in our cabins every night; laughing kookaburras and riflebirds woke us up at sunrise. We became children, catching ugly cane toads between classes, climbing strangler figs by their stout, woven tendrils, and dunking ourselves in the sleek pools beneath waterfalls in our big, wild backyard. We named all the animal “regulars”: Boris the Bandicoot, Monty the Carpet Python (yes, Monty Python), Charles the Brush Turkey, Larry the Leech, and so on. We danced in the monsoon rain and silently watched the dragons prowling near the dank fortress of our compost pile. One night, I stayed up to finish a paper and discovered bioluminescent fungus—ghostly, blue-white smudges and sculptures of it—decorating the trees and illuminating the darkness. That night, I realized that I was witnessing, on a daily basis, magic that very few would or could access...or even imagine. I know I certainly could not have prior to coming here.

As of today, I only have three weeks left here, three weeks to absorb as much as possible. Things—and dare I say people? —grow quickly in this region of Australia. Soaked in Queensland rain and sun, the seedlings I plant this morning will be as tall as a two-story house in five years or less. Similarly, I’ve only been here a short while, and something significant has changed. It’s true that I’ve learned more about the environment and that I’ve become a better steward of it. But there’s something more. I can’t put my finger on it, but I can feel it in the warmth of my smile, in my dancing freckles driven from hibernation, in the dirt saturating the creases of my hands and blushing the knees of my field pants. I feel bolder and hungrier for adventure, more observant, playful, and grateful. The kid who ran through the woods in my backyard is back, only stronger. I sit on the muddy, grassy hill joking with my Aussie and American friends whom I have shared and learned so much with in three months. I drive fresh roots into the earth and drink in sunlight. 🌿





Erica Chai Guilin, China



Lorraine Li *Degen Autonomous Region, China*





Stephanie Heimler Granada, Spain

Language of Traveling

By Lorraine Li

*Class of 2018
Central Asia*

Traveling is a foreign language. You aren't born knowing it, but the more you practise it, the more you enjoy it and the more it turns into your entire world. You converse with people who are like you in that foreign language, but when you come out of that world, it's almost as if you're unfamiliar with your native language, your original world. You feel lost. You feel alone. Because no one speaks that foreign language, and everything about that world which you loved is unshareable.


Most backpackers and travelers will understand what I'm talking about here. But for those who do not, let me explain to you why we travelers always seek to get back on the road again.

You see, I learn more about myself and the world from a day of traveling than from a month in school. I travel during every winter and summer break, and each time, I return having grown so much more than I did over the entire course of the previous academic semester. The kind of environment that traveling blesses its travelers with is a sort of training that school or work could never give.

It makes you braver. It tears down your self-defense lines, it challenges your already-formed perceptions of yourself and the world, it strips you of everything you own besides your most inner mind, and it forces you to let go of all hesitations and worries, in order to continue walking. You come out more clear-minded and more self-confident, and come to treasure all that is around you. You really come to understand the meaning of what it means to live once. Throughout your life back home, you will take many many classes, you will have multiple relationships, go to many similar parties and events, and earn numerous recognitions, awards or recommendations. If you miss a class today, you can always make up for it tomorrow. You don't have a fear of losing everything. But when you travel, that tree, this mountain, that village, this meal—all of these things only happen once. Next morning, the people you had laughed with, the roof you had slept under, and the place you had fallen in love with, will be all gone. Only to be replaced by even more beautiful things the next day. So we travelers learn, beyond anything else, to really treasure the present moment. Because even in the blink of a moment, we could miss something that we never will have the opportunity to behold again.

But I want to go back to the beginning, where I talked about traveling as a language. Each time I come back home from my travels, I feel like a completely new person. I have learned so much, seen so much and grown so much. My values and perceptions of the world, of myself, and of life have sharpened and changed, and I feel so empowered and enlightened. Travelers like me want to share this new state of mind with our family and friends. But often, they do not understand us. Not because they aren't receptive, but because they haven't lived through what we have. Two worlds, two different kind of lives—how do we relate to each other when our focus and priorities are so different? So all this excitement from traveling that had been building up since we got on the plane back home suddenly plummets into an abyss of nothingness. We feel empty and not understood. As if we were speaking a completely different language, an amazing language that we want to share with everyone, a language that was instrumental in shaping who we are, but no one is able to understand it. For me, I become an individual unable to communicate with anyone else, standing in a cut-off world separated from my world back home.

Eventually, all of this emptiness and loneliness turns into one thing: the desire to get back on the road. The desire to return to your world, where there are people who speak your language, and beauty that captivates your soul. To me, traveling is not only a passion or hobby, but an everlasting desire. In the course of our lifetimes, we will have many passions. But desire is different. Desire is that uncontrollable, unreasonable urge in you to get up and chase after something, even if it is not pragmatic, even if you become a moth diving into the flames, a mermaid loving a human. Some say, it's addiction. But I say that it is the most beautiful and fulfilling kind of addiction. It's the kind of addiction that keeps you alive, and makes you a stronger and more aware person.

No longer do you feel lonely speaking this foreign language by yourself. Because you know that out there, there are so many people like you, separated only by a couple of oceans. But most importantly, you learn to embrace loneliness. You learn to value loneliness and silence, and to focus inwardly on yourself, giving yourself the time and space to cultivate your mind and heart, until your own personal world becomes strong enough to rival the outside world. And eventually, you get back on the road, perhaps this time with a one-way ticket. 





Honoré Colei Paris, France



Erica Chai Beijing, China



A Home Away From Home

By Zachary Bellis

*Class of 2017
Amman, Jordan*

“It’s a small country, and there are too many people,” the taxi driver says. “One million Syrians, one million Iraqis, and no jobs.” I struggled to understand what he was saying, not just because it was in Arabic, it was a different dialect from what I’d studied in college. Even though media coverage of Syrian refugees surged last fall as thousands began arriving in Europe, it is difficult to comprehend the scale of the crisis unless you experience it firsthand. Even though refugees from Iraq and Syria now comprise a quarter of Jordan’s population, a Westerner wouldn’t necessarily notice this walking down the streets of Amman. Unlike in any number of American cities, there are few people on the streets begging for change or food. Unless you’ve been following the news, you wouldn’t know that rents have doubled in some places and unemployment has spiked.


Once you start talking to Jordanians, you quickly realize how deeply the refugee crisis has affected the country. Everyone seems to know someone who has escaped from Syria’s civil war, or has relatives who still live there. One of my coworkers from my internship in Amman is Syrian. He just graduated a year late, a consequence of interrupted studies and a country left behind. As I ride the bus to Petra with the other American students, a lone UNHCR tent sits just off the side of the desert highway. The intersection of the modern conflict and the ancient desert is jarring and unexpected, starkly beautiful and sad all at once.

We arrive at Petra, and it is stunning, an entire city carved out of red sandstone mountains, thousands of years old. How many people did it take to build this? How long did it take? I’m awed even as the local Bedouin children pester me to buy the postcards and jewelry they are selling. Again the modern rubs up against the ancient. I’m told that the locals lived in the ancient city and its tombs until the 1980s, when the government built the new city of Wadi Musa for them. After Petra became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its preservation necessitated that the residents move. They stubbornly refused to leave until the king promised them exclusive rights to do business inside the site, besides the modern apartments the government had already offered. I soak in the day, but it’s the people who linger in my mind. Ties to one’s home city or country are not easily broken, and the collective memory of the land left behind seems to have galvanized identity here as it has for the Syrians and Iraqis I’ve met.



Amy Wu Cinque Terre, Italy

“Welcome to Jordan” and “Enjoy your stay” are the phrases that I’ve heard the most while I’ve been in the country, from taxi drivers, waiters, and many others. America loves to call itself a nation of immigrants, but Jordan is a nation built by refugees. Sixty percent of the population are descended from Palestinian refugees from the wars of 1948 and 1967, and now millions of Syrians and Iraqis take refuge there. In a country where tradition holds great weight and people still speak of their tribe, “Home is where the heart is” is more than just a truism. There is a Jordanian tradition of hospitality, but the economic hardships which accompanied the refugee crisis have somewhat strained the population’s collective patience. For their part, all of the refugees that I met are grateful for the assistance of their local communities, but are torn between a deep desire to return and the more realistic option of permanent resettlement. While walking through Petra, parallel histories converge in my mind. The residents of Wadi Musa didn’t want to leave their dwelling-places in Petra, but had to once it became a World Heritage Site and left with the foreknowledge that they would be compensated. The Syrians and Iraqis, too, are being forced to leave their homes and heritage behind, but their future is far less certain and they bear the psychological scars of wartime. During one of my program’s class events, we had the opportunity to meet Iraqi Christians from Mosul, who had escaped from the city after it was captured by the Islamic State militant group. (They are now living in Jordan with assistance from the government and a local Christian congregation). In their remarks, several of the refugees expressed that even though they consider Iraq their true home, they don’t wish to return there even after ISIS is defeated. Their future seems brighter away from their home, despite the hardships of the present. The air in the room feels heavy with sorrow, but in their voices is a spark of hope for a better tomorrow.

As an American student abroad, I lived comfortably even in a foreign country halfway across the globe, even if it never felt exactly like home. The Jordanian hospitality which I so often experienced is being put to the test, even as refugees in the country confront their own difficult choices. In most cases, it seems the spirit of hospitality has prevailed over that of hostility. In a region where ancient and modern identities are so closely intertwined with the land, the Syrian crisis has strained the traditional notion of home. The refugees hold on to memories of their home countries and dream to someday return there. Despite many hardships, hope endures in their hearts. 



Zachary Bellis Amman, Jordan



Stephanie Heimler Córdoba, Spain



Foreigner Gone Home

By Hin Hon (Jamie) Wong

*Class of 2017
The Hague, Netherlands*

1. The first time I realize the night differs is when the sun sets behind a sky smothered in fog. The dark isn't as dark, night not as night, and everything is different.
2. The first time I climb into a taxi is a feat greater than scaling the mountains we watch from afar. The second time I pray the driver knows the way; the third time is dark but fearless. Today, I figure out how to pay.
3. The first time I see the misted peaks I want to be there. The second time, I am there, and there's no mist in ropes and waterfalls.
4. The first time, and only time, no one stares is on the train. I'm from the subway born and raised in the tunnels. No need to talk here, no speaking, no questions, your destination is here.
5. The first time I'm here is now. 🇳🇱





Stephanie Heimler Seville, Spain

Granada

By Ashley Simmons

*Class of 2017
Granada, Spain*

Granada,

stains my fingers with the familiar
color birthed in her arils,
bleeds onto melanin
nurtured by
an almost-African sun.
from her honeycomb piths
i gently pry sweetly sour seeds of knowledge
muqarna of the Berber Dynasty
that lives on in her fruit.
they ask me where I'm from because
my tongue sounds as if it's been here before.
Yo dije que I come from a land of desecration.
my ancestors found liberation in themselves
when it was denied to skin & breast
from café au lait to espresso bean
and the creams and sugars mingled amongst them.
they don't understand this and ask how I know myself
y estoy perdida en las calles pero
the mountains are all around
narrow alleyways from Italian footsteps beg to cuentame la historia
sobre un tiempo it holds close.
secrets live in each building
in strong eleventh century walls; rooms for queens
tell tales of times ancient souls have seen.
you and I, we dance in and out
of tapas bars with sangria on puckered plump lips
in and out of arms and amor
snuck into conversations like liquor in your coffee
the loud stomp and clap of the Flamenco above my head
clicks rhythms in my ears



Lorraine Li Degen Autonomous Region, China

& she cracks open the precious fruit
the splitting of a skull
the breaking wide open of a heart
making space for a familiar mind
catches sight of the girl-to-woman in the mirror
on the back of the taracea
& there's passion in the stiffness of your body
but you only show me when the sun sets
the first time i ate a pomegranate it was
to soothe the ache in my throat.
i stand in my first home,
barefoot on cool marble of a cocina
where i baked love into your daily bread.
juice drips from my fingertips.
i cradle a handful of promises
ruby red translucence
and bring them to my lips
press into my mouth
to soothe the ache in my soul
crush them with my teeth
& swallow them whole.
i am in my second home,
i walk cold alongside the river running dry
in a grassless land
somehow full of life
we're standing where Boabdil stood
taking it in inhales, tearless mujer,
no pasa nada coursing through good veins
¿quieres dar un paseo conmigo? and the time is flying
lost somewhere in those six hours
from the home I was born in
to the one I found. 🏰



Katherine Vargas Rabat, Morocco







*The Hague,
Netherlands (p. 25)*

*Granada,
Spain (p. 27)*

Granada, Spain

Granada (p. 27)

Ashley Simmons, 2017

Major: English, Creative Writing

Minor: Film, Television and Interactive Media

Creativity, the Arts and Social Transformation

Washington DC

IES Granada

The Hague, Netherlands

Foreigner Gone Home (p. 25)

Hin Hon (Jamie) Wong, 2017

Major: Sociology

Minor: Legal Studies, Social Justice and Social Policy

Oakland Gardens, New York

Brandeis in The Hague



Amman, Jordan
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Central Asia (p. 16)

Amman, Jordan

A Home Away from Home (p. 21)

Zachary Bellis, 2017

Major: Politics, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

Minor: Economics

South Windsor, Connecticut

CIEE Diplomacy and Policy Studies

Central Asia

Language of Traveling (p. 16)

Lorraine Li, 2018

Major: Politics, Economics

Albany, California

Queensland,
Australia (p. 11)

Queensland, Australia

Fresh Roots and New Branches (p. 11)

Elizabeth (Betsy) Hochman, 2017

Major: Environmental Studies

Minor: Anthropology

Lansdale, Pennsylvania

School of Field Studies, Australia

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