

WANDER

Brandeis Abroad

Spring 2016
Issue IX





Wander: Brandeis Abroad



Letter from the Editors



Dear Wanderer,

So how was it? they will ask you as you return from your time spent as a foreigner. This question will baffle you for a time, but eventually you will learn to communicate your broadest feelings towards the days and weeks and months spent away in just a few select words. Those few words won't fully grasp the way in which studying abroad has fractured and reconstructed you, but perhaps you don't fully grasp it yourself. How could you encapsulate everything, the ease of new routines, that made there your home?

In this issue of *Wander*, students have begun to do just that. Within these pages, they have shared representative routines and routine-breaking realizations. Come along to drink in the staggering Spanish sunsets (page 13), to live in Denmark as feelings of unbelonging ease away (page 9), and to begin making newly-normal milk-tea runs in China (page 19). Come along and nod to the passing strangers in Ireland (page 21), and gaze out at the breathtaking Icelandic landscape (page 16). Realize, alongside us, that all these experiences, spectacularly singular as well as quotidian-polished, are all exactly how it was.

Wander: Brandeis Abroad is a magazine that gathers together the snapshots and reflections of our students around the world. By gathering together these impressions and revelations, we hope to present a mosaic picture of what exploring beyond the borders of a home nation—and our comfort zones—can offer. Take a pause in your daily life, and peek into that of a student abroad.

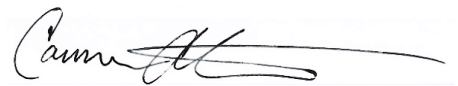
Wander well.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Darren R Gallant".

Darren Gallant,
Office of Study Abroad

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gregory Bonacci".

Gregory Bonacci,
Editor-in-Chief

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Carmen Altes".

Carmen Altes,
Editor-in-Chief



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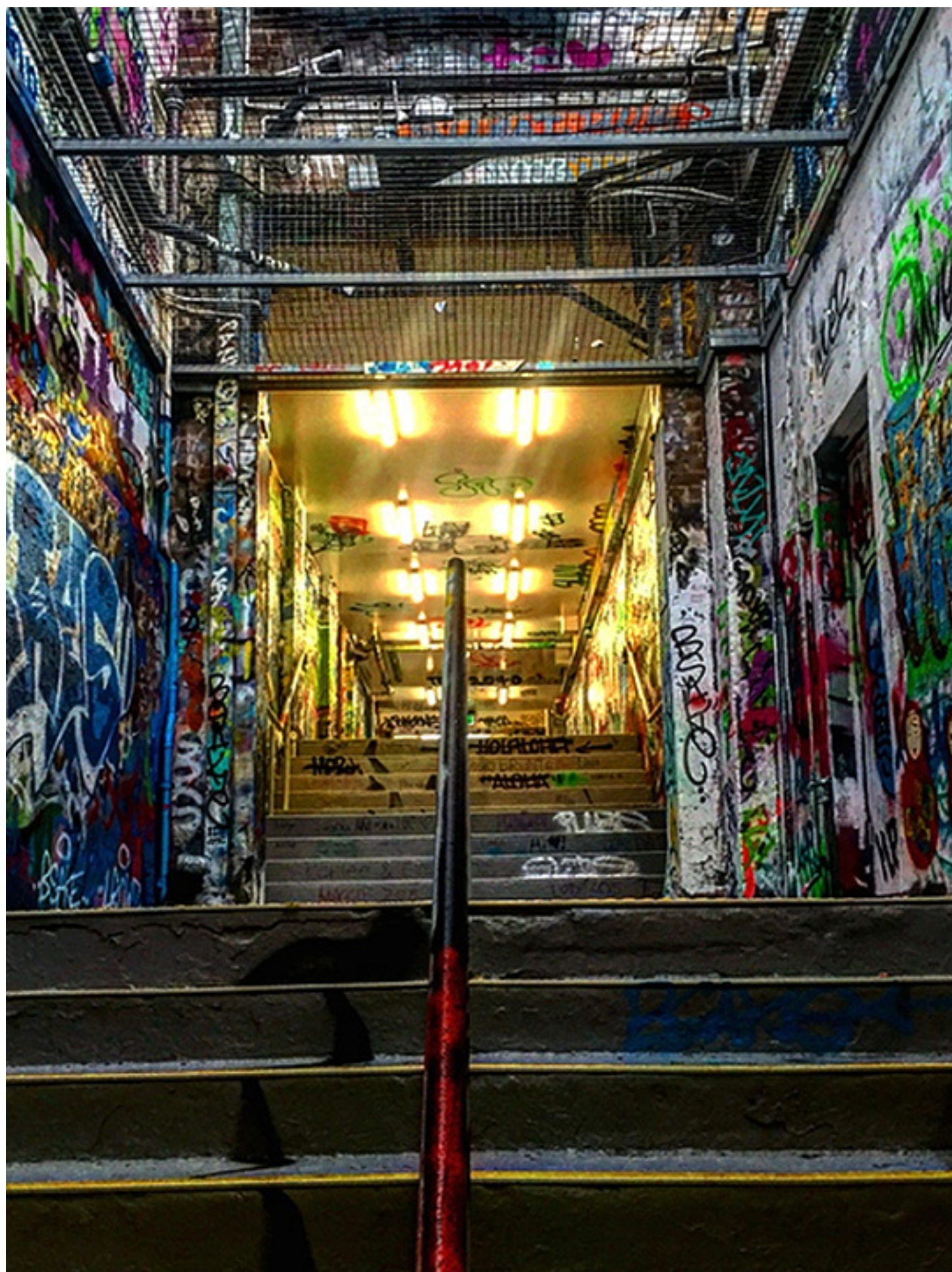
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Gregory Bonacci
Carmen Altes
Editors-in-Chief

Carmen Altes
Niranjana Warriier
Copy Editorial Staff

Gregory Bonacci
Erica Chai
Honore Cole
Layout Editorial Staff

Darren Gallant
Staff Advisor



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A Tune You Can Hum

By Jamie Kaiser (1st Prize)

Class of 2016

Copenhagen, Denmark

It's a mid-February afternoon in Copenhagen, Denmark and I decide to cut through Kongens Have – the King's Garden – to meet up with a friend for dinner. Few people occupy the park at the time. Those who do are mostly locals, clutching the neutral-tone fabrics that typify the city's style close around them as they walk through the cold. Copenhagen has plenty of tourists but rarely feels saturated with visitors like some of the other European cities I would visit during the course of the semester.

From about fifteen meters away, I make eye contact with a middle-aged woman and her terrier. The terrier wears a tiny black coat and the woman wears a bigger but similar coat. I assume the sheepish attitude of someone constantly being approached in a language that isn't her own. The anxiety over how to respond has dissipated completely. I plan now to simply apologize: "*Udskyld*—I don't speak Danish."

It's not that you actually need to know Danish in Denmark. Almost everyone except the oldest generations learn English in school at a young age. Yet, there's something so satisfying about reaching someone in their own language, about figuring out that tricky piece of immersion that takes years to master.

"*Hvad er klokken?*" she asks and I'm so complacent in my expectations that I don't immediately realize that, in fact, I understand her perfectly. I look at my wrist and reply, "*seksten*". She says "*tak*". I say "*tak*," which isn't appropriate, of course. I mean, who thanks someone for thanking them? Nobody does that. But the thing is, I didn't care that the interaction was imperfect. It happened! We communicated!


My breakthrough that day was the first in a series of breakthroughs. Soon I felt confident telling every employee of the Copenhagen service industry that "*Jeg vil gerne have et stor kop kaffe*," and was happily rewarded with large cups of warm coffee to fuel my caffeine addiction. It became a game of sorts to see how many employees and pedestrians I could convince with my dyed-

blonde hair and growing mental list of phrases that, "*Ganske vist, jeg er fra København*," – "Indeed, I'm from Copenhagen."

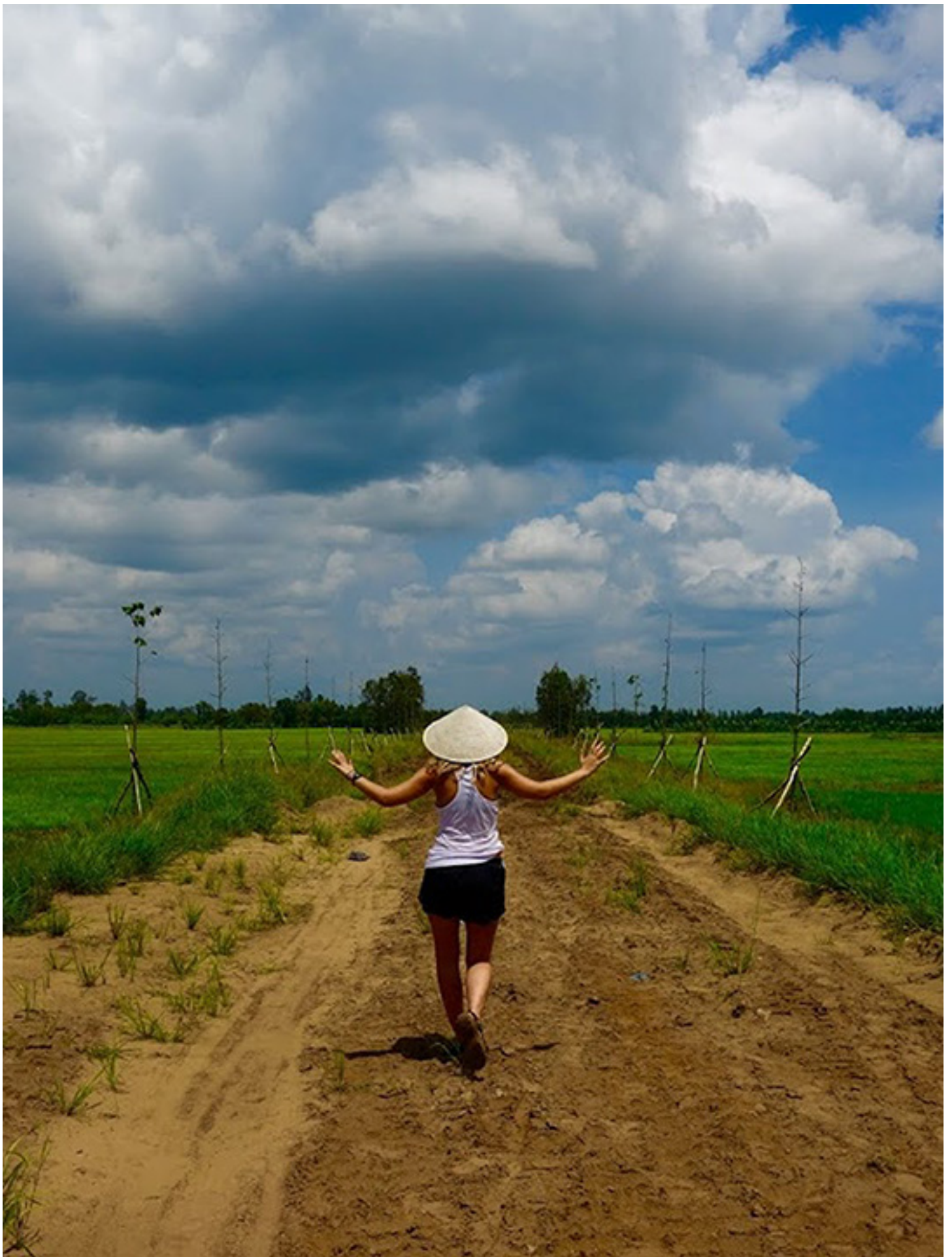
But of course my successes only felt successful because I could hold them up against all my flops, linguistic and otherwise. There were many times when I felt lost. I was lost all the time. Travelling really puts your sense of direction to the test, and mine is no good at all. Almost everyday I took a wrong turn, but always with unfounded conviction. I would often get lost on my bike, too, usually because I was too scared to make a left turn in traffic.

Yet slowly, it all started to make more sense. The guttural Danish vowels started to feel more natural. I became an honorary native to the city every time I managed to hop off the seat of my bike at red lights and seamlessly hop back on, or when I bought yogurt that came in a carton, and every time I sat in a candlelit circle of friends. I still rocked my bright-green sweater all the time because I love my bright-green sweater, but the classic neutral colors that characterize Copenhagen street style also made their way into my wardrobe.

It's okay that cultural immersion happens slowly, that it involves making mistakes. It's unrealistic to expect consistent inspiration and perfect cosmic peace just because you're a young, sparkling student in Europe for the semester. Nothing about living in a foreign country feels perfect. I arrived at the Copenhagen airport with an extra bag of items I didn't need, a new hairstyle that kept coming undone, and a pure fear of using a new language and making new friends.

Copenhagen tempted me in brochures and digital photo collages with an adventure, but now I'm sure the experience was something closer to a song. The foreign noises that overcame me during my arrival greeted me like a familiar tune after returning from a weeklong trip elsewhere on the continent. By the end of it all, Danish was the kind of standout number you wish had an extra few verses, or at least an extended bridge. I never did learn all the words, but I hummed along. 





Look Closer

By Chantal Sochavzevski

Class of 2017

Sydney, Australia

Try not to be deceived by bustling George Street.
Sydney only appears to resemble any big North American city.
The Sydney Guide should read, "Look closer visitors."
The exotic flora and fauna in the city of Sydney is sure to catch you off guard.
Hiding between Sydney's skyscrapers are numerous parks filled with grand trees and blooming
Jacarandas at this time of the year.
Sydney is a manageable city to explore by foot,
yet every turn can be a new adventure.
Each "suburb" in the city has unique offerings.
I am a foreigner in this country,
a country that is positioned on the opposite side of the world from my home,
still it is impossible for me to stand out.
Various types of people inhabit the harbor city,
bringing multiple cultures into harmonious contact.
Sydney'siders generally are friendly blokes and biddies.
It is a youthful city, many Unis reside in and around the area.
Intricate old buildings still stand, juxtaposed by new architectural styles.
Though beaches are filled with blonde, barefooted boys,
not all Australian stereotypes are factual.
Enormous spiders are certainly not commonly seen.
Kangaroos and koalas are only found in the zoos.
The weather is not always warm,
but the Harbor water does glisten,
and the view of Sydney's Opera House is breathtaking from any angle.
Although it does rain here in Sydney,
it is worth the stay.
The sunny days illuminate all that Sydney has to offer.
Breathe in, this city has many surface similarities, but widen your eyes and
look closer, new visitors,
Sydney is different.



The Persistence of Memory

By Clayre Benzadon

Class of 2017

Madrid, Spain

Memory's residue
scratches against the
film of perception

and I'm a wet-winged
shadow under the cloak
of a Sangria sunset.

The architecture booms
una voz nocturna: nocturnal
voice of slurs, of the clanks of

bars still open, saturated in drunk
chocolate con churros, in the angry
sizzle of the patatas bravas.

The persistence of memory is the
only thing that keeps me awake
if I'm conscious at all: It's 5:45 am

and I feel like the bird in Dali's painting,
dead on desert ground, melted under the
iron of the clocks; surreal vision blurred

with my left eye as small as the lonely crumbs
left on the plate full of magdalenas, the horizon
a silhouette where I'm at the edge of the

ocean's pendulum, rewinding the
clocks embedded in the body of the
hills, in the body of the mind, until I arise.



Warmth

By Gregory Bonacci

Class of 2016

Québec City, Canada

Under the panopticon of the Frontenac
And around the corner from *les escaliers casse-cou*,
I lie,

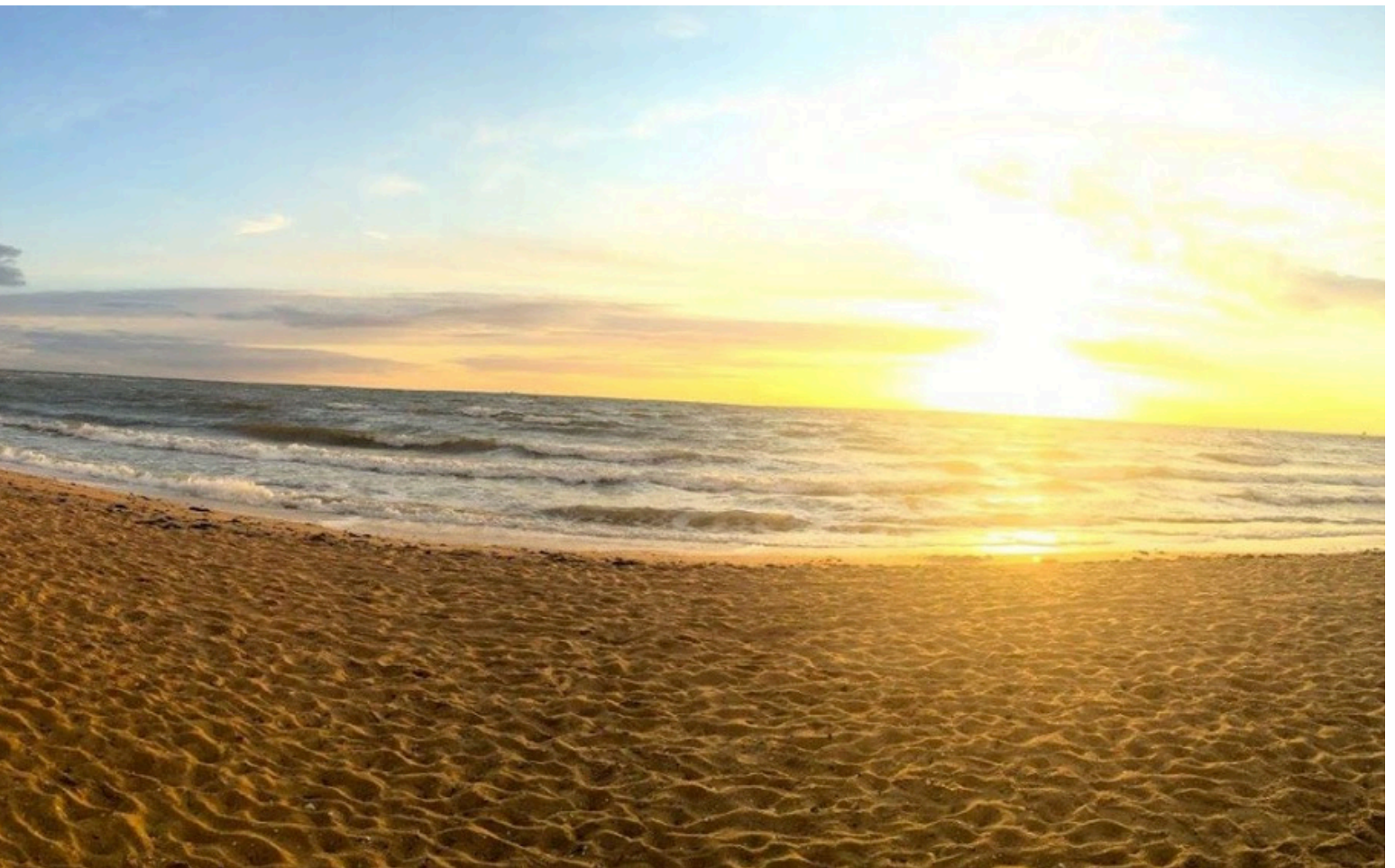
The *palais de glace* the gem in my icy crown,
Celebrating the season of death
With a juxtaposed warmth

You laugh,
And though you can't hear me,
You can be sure that I am too.

The Grande Allée has never seen more traffic
Weaving through space heaters and cups of brandy—
Gone when the programmed sun rises on springtime.

Yet—not forgotten,
The snowy clockwork remembered by
A culture too strong to contain.

Ensconced in ice,
I still find a way to be warm.



Giants

By Margot Grubert (2nd Prize)

Class of 2017

Sapa, Vietnam

I used to think the clouds were gods
The giants of the sky
They'd sit on pearly mountain thrones
And watch the world pass by

But now I've traveled thick and deep
Into the giant's mouth
And now that I have found this place
I may not venture out

The people here live quiet lives
On terraced farms of rice
In thick and woven robes and shawls
To keep them warm at night

And yet, despite the wonder here
Red limp hair marks the crowds
The food is scarce, the land is damp
And no, you can't eat clouds

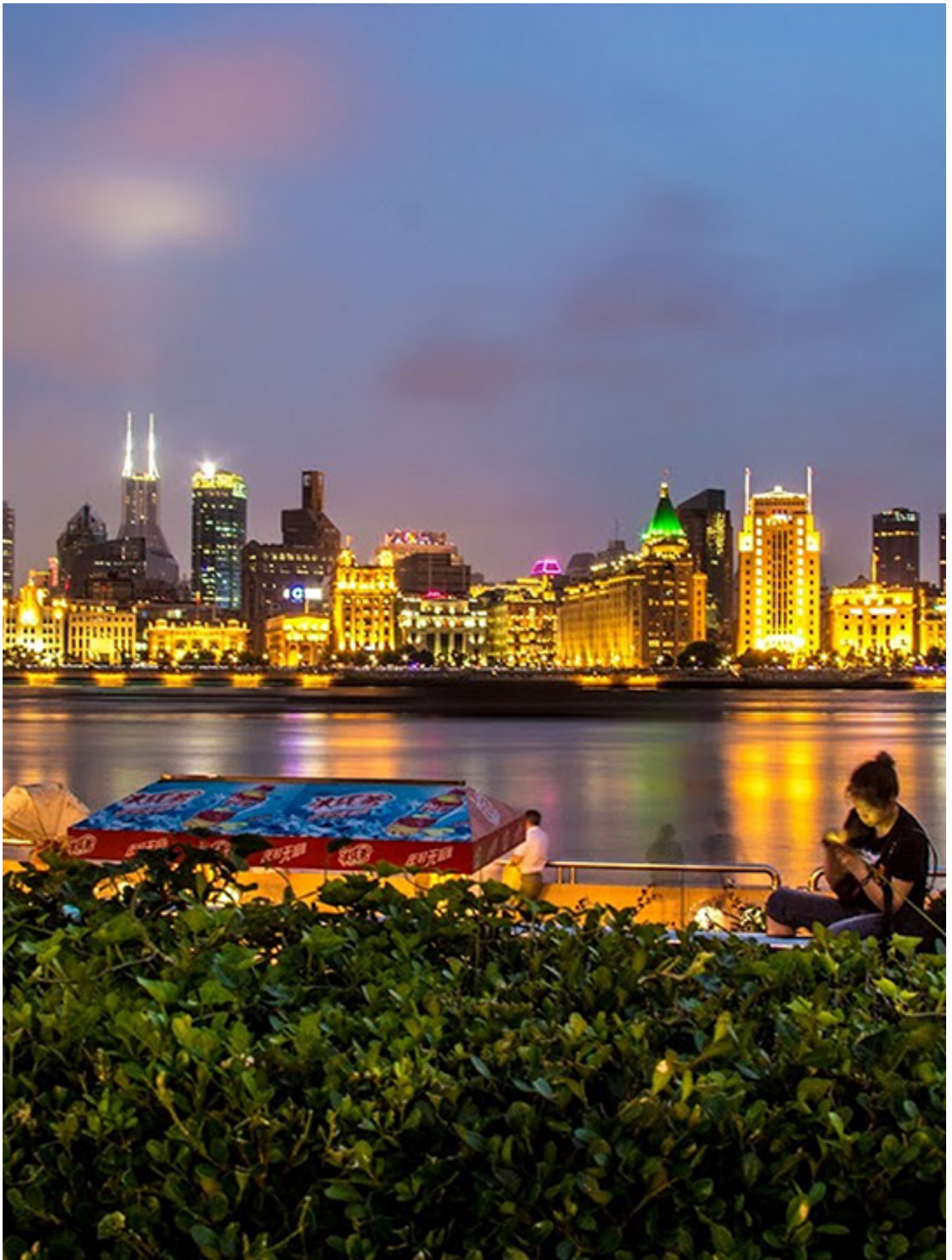
The harsh here meets the beautiful
Like ash that spurs new growth
The wretched with the sacred mate
And all the best are both

I know now that the clouds and clouds
And gods are just a dream
And mountains mark the path across
Like stones that mar a stream

To live inside this ghostly world
Of white as all that's known
One must first brave the giant's mouth
And sit on Sapa's throne







To Firmly Grasp Time

By Honoré Cole

Class of 2017

Beijing, China


I was adopted from a small city in Guangdong Province, China when I was twenty-one months old and brought up by my mom, a single parent, in a Jewish household. As an adoptee, China has always been an integral part of my life. Following my senior year of high school, a National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) scholarship allowed me to study Mandarin in Beijing for the 2012-2013 academic year. While I was in Beijing, I went to a local high school where I studied the language alongside other international students. My classmates came from all around the world, primarily from other parts of Asia, but also from Europe, Australia, and Africa. During the week, I stayed in the dorms and every weekend, I lived with my Chinese host family.

I believe that we oftentimes forget where we are capable of going; we forget the number of stops we can make, the number of lines we can ride, and where it is we really want to go. For most people, the Beijing subway station is a beginning point, an ending point, or a meeting point. For me, it was a beginning point. Going back to China was not only about learning a language, it was also about exploration and looking more deeply inside myself. It was about questioning and confirming my identity. Living in China allowed me to make greater connections between my past and my present, the place I came from and the place I grew up in, myself and others. When I came back from Beijing two years ago, I did not come back a different person. Rather, I came back a person who knew more about herself, more about others, and more about the world.

Living in a culture completely different from the one I grew up in came with its challenges, of course. There was the frustration of not always being able to express myself in Chinese the way I wanted. Nodding at a friend to indicate that I heard what he or she said, even if I barely understood a word of it. Receiving funny looks after saying something completely nonsensical in

Chinese; and, learning how to break open sunflower seeds in my mouth at a rate that would make doing so worth the effort.

As time went on, I noticed that, while certain words in English would suddenly slip out of my mind, my Chinese was gradually improving. I adjusted to having school from 7:15 to 4:15 or 5:15 and spending many of my evenings in my room memorizing Chinese characters. Milk-tea runs became a regular outing, as did going to KTV (Korean Karaoke). And hearing TOEFL practice questions being played over the dorm's speakerphone on my way to class no longer seemed so strange.

Each morning before starting school, I woke up to my dorm mom shouting the phrase, “抓紧时间.” After living in Beijing, this phrase will guide the way I live the rest of my life. “抓紧” literally means “firmly grasp” or “pay close attention to” and “时间” means “time.” Living in China was an incredible period of personal growth and a turning point in my life. The time I had there was extremely precious; every month, every week, every day, every hour mattered and I could choose how I wanted to spend it. The phrase “抓紧时间” not only inspired me to try to improve my language skills every day, but also to volunteer at a Chinese orphanage for special-needs children, organize Frisbee games with my friend at the school we attended, and take advantage of the time I had with my host family and classmates. Living in China ultimately made me realize that the time I have *anywhere* is valuable. 





Charted Memories

By Sarah Copel

Class of 2015

Dublin, Ireland

I never really cared that much about maps.

I mean, I mostly knew that they were useful tools to get you from Point A to Point B. My uncle's passion is cartography, and in his spare time he draws maps for cities he invents in his mind. My parents love exploring new places and then looking them up later on a map. Good for them, not for me. I always used maps only as necessary, but generally I prefer to write down people's directions.

About two years ago, while I was at my grandparents' house, there was a book lying on their coffee table titled *Ireland*. There wasn't anything going on at the time, so, feeling slightly bored, I perused the back cover and started reading the first few pages. The novel incorporated Irish folklore into the story of a young man coming of age at the turn of the twentieth century. The boy meets a wandering storyteller, the last of his kind, who travels around Ireland on foot and tells stories in people's homes in exchange for a place to sleep and some food. My grandfather saw me reading the book and said I could borrow it. I took it home and didn't think much more about it.

Half a year later, mostly because of their strong academic programs, I chose to study abroad in Dublin. Meanwhile, I had been slogging through the book I borrowed from my grandparents. The main premise was intriguing, but I wasn't a big fan of the author's writing style. However, it piqued my interest enough that I brought it along on my adventures and enrolled in an Irish folklore class.

While abroad, the book was an unbelievably perfect introduction to Ireland. I hardly knew anything about the country's history, and the book exposed me to information I wouldn't have encountered in a classroom in the United States.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Irish ancient history is that it's riddled with fairies and demigods. Magic is in the lifeblood of Ireland. It runs through the River Liffey and soars through

the rainbows in the countryside. It's tangible in the hundreds of shades of green across which sheep roam, and lives in the leaves of trees with knotted bark. It's alive in the names of natural formations, such as Giant's Causeway and the Hill of Tara. Of course, the Dubliners I met and befriended were just as passionate about the modern era, science and technology. They weren't living in the past. The one time I heard someone mention a leprechaun was an American mentioning a leprechaun museum on the North Side of Dublin. The "magic" is more along the lines of riding a bus to Cork or hiking in Glendalough and understanding how the ancient inhabitants of Ireland would believe their land was carved by something otherworldly.

When my study abroad program took us to visit Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, our tour guide was a sweet, witty woman named Virginia. She immediately pointed out the irony of having a US state as her name, especially given that she had only been in the country one time and the vast majority of the Irish have much more traditional, Gaelic-influenced names. Despite her name, Virginia was one of the most passionate Irish history buffs I've met. As we approached the Giant's Causeway, she told us the history of the landmark. Fionn Mac Cumhaill (pronounced Finn McCool), a beloved giant of Irish folklore, and his wife outwitted a Scottish giant. The Scottish one was so furious, he stormed across a path back to Scotland, breaking the causeway and leaving octagonal stone columns that remain to this day. As Virginia wrapped up her story, she noted, "There are some people who claim that the real cause of the formations has something to do with a volcano erupting, lava cooling, and octagonal rocks resulting. But of course that's all made up." We all laughed along with her and applauded loudly.


One day in Dublin, I received a care package from my parents. They had thrown in an old map from a National Geographic they'd found in some boxes in our garage back home. It showed the Republic of Ireland and the U.K. on one side. On the other side, there was a detailed map of the central part of London. Not being map-inclined, I kept flipping over the card they sent looking for an explanation of the map. It wasn't particularly useful, because I had already been to London,

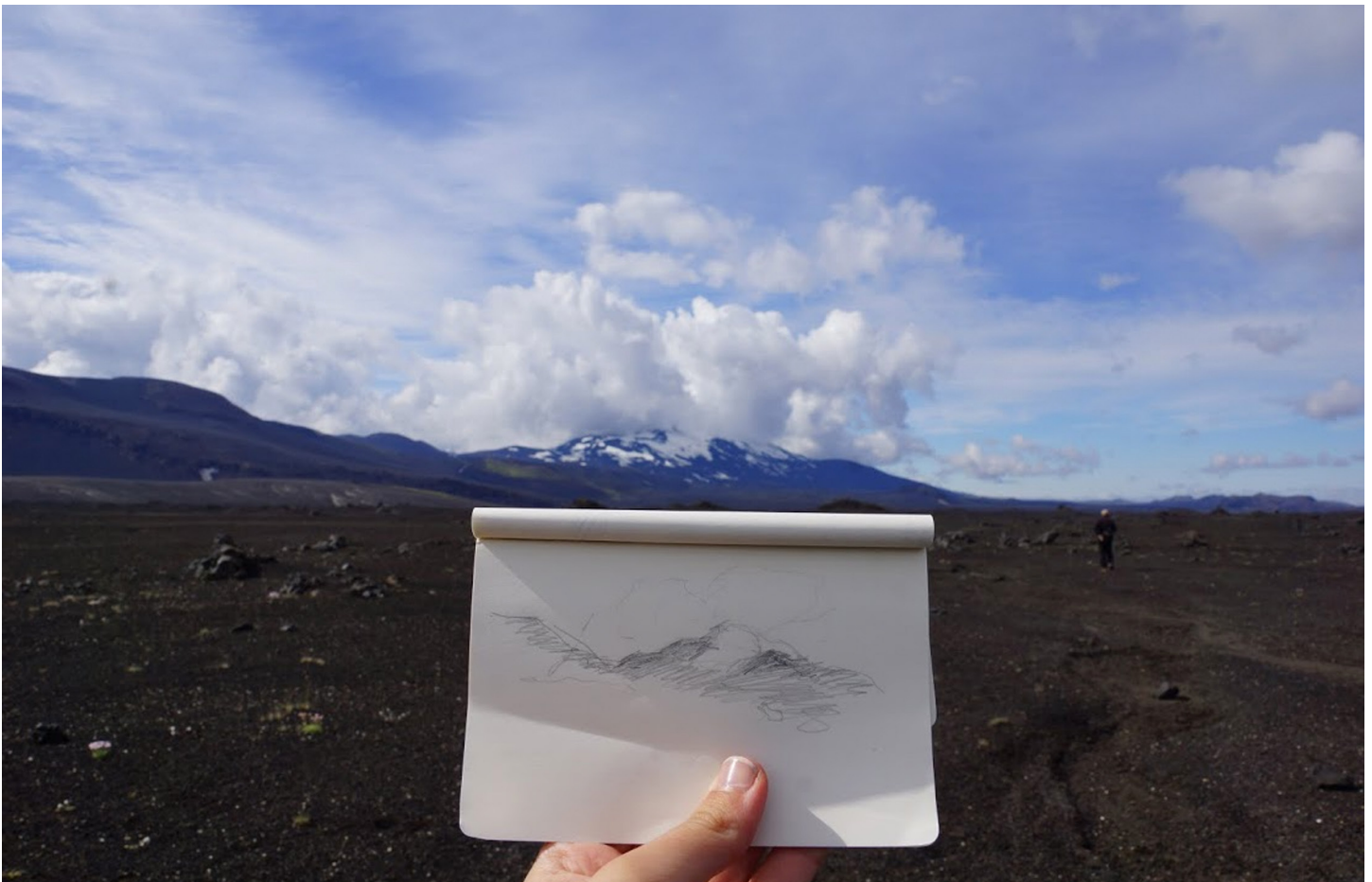
and the rest wasn't in enough detail. Also, if I had needed a map, I wouldn't use one with embarrassingly quaint paintings of tourist attractions dotted all over it and descriptions of the most popular towns. However, I wanted something to put up on my mostly-blank bulletin board, and it reminded me of my parents, so I dutifully tacked it up.

As the semester progressed and time seemed to slip through my fingers, I found myself staring at the map more and more often. All of those towns I would never visit, all of the folklore I would never hear, the people I would never meet, the beautiful stony beaches I didn't have time to visit, reminded me of how much I had come to love this country and its people. I had left for Ireland excited but terrified. Why would anyone leave Brandeis and their home, places of comfort, for a place they knew next to nothing about? But as I sat in my dorm room, gazing at that map and mulling over everything I learned about the country, its people, and myself, I knew why.

That map is up on my bedroom wall, almost a full year after my return to the States. I

still find myself standing in front of it sometimes, examining every craggy detail and turning the names over in my head. More often, though, I will focus on the place I had the fortune to learn the most about. The city where I met some of the most welcoming, hilarious, and caring people I have ever met. I will stare at Dublin and the star symbol next to it. My brain goes into overdrive, zooming in until I see the streets I walked on, the faces of every person I met, the buses zooming too close to the curbs and pedestrians, the pubs sitting ironically close to the churches, the drizzly rain, and my study abroad program's office with the water boiling and the tin of biscuits next to it. I follow the bus route in my head to the university where I can see my friends playing Frisbee under the stadium lights, breath coming up like fog.

My vision zooms back out, and I'm standing in front of the ragged map again. As I go back to my daily routine, I can't shake the feeling of all the new places I ache to explore, just as I day-dreamed in that dorm room. However, I realize now what's more important is the day when I return to the city and people I miss the most. 





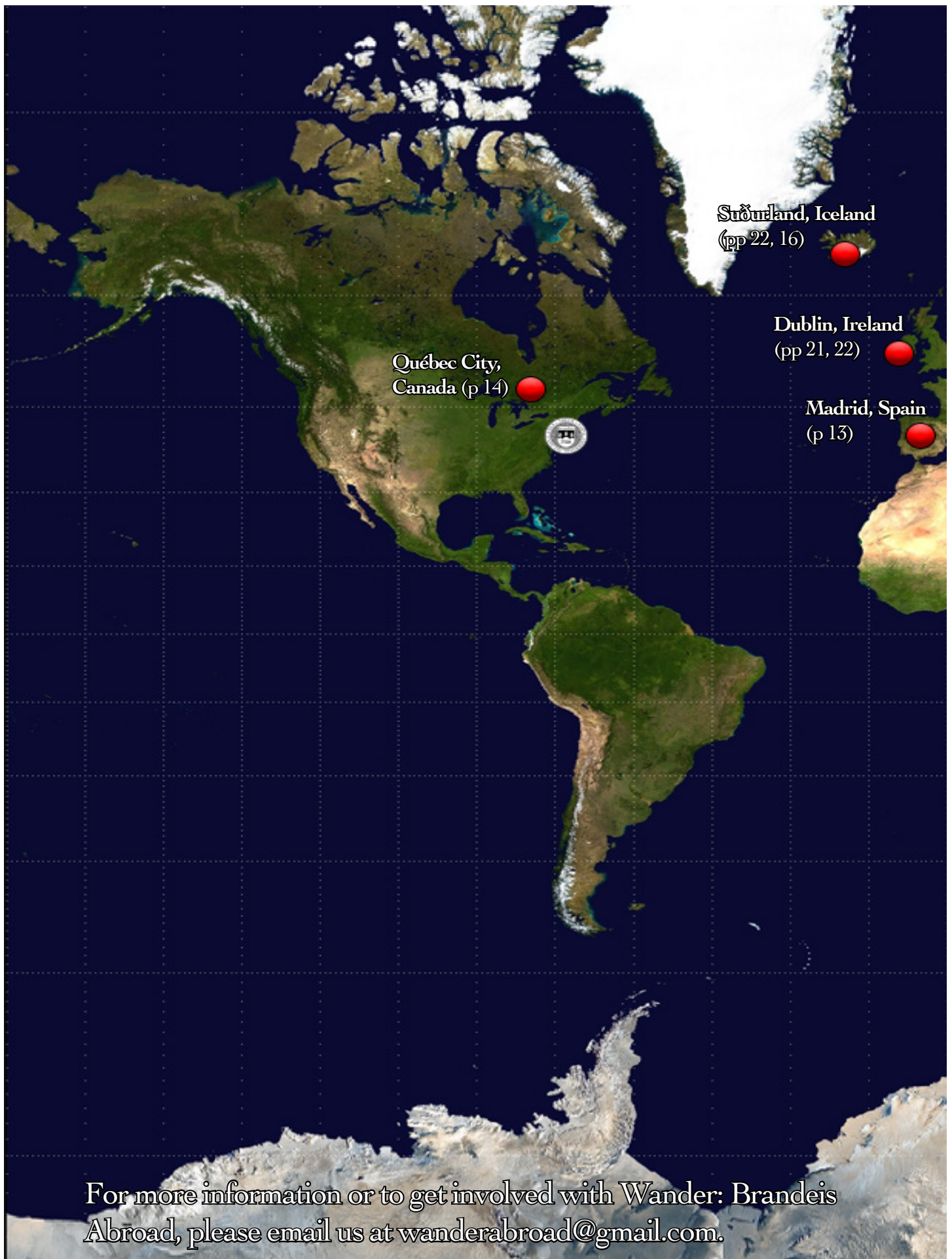
A Trip to the Market

By Margot Grubert

Class of 2017

Saigon, Vietnam

The fabric for an ao dai
Orange and hand painted with tiny flowers
But tinged fluorescent grey
A hue that only exists here
In the markets of Saigon
Where old friends barter like enemies
And the stalls are a maze of smells and tastes and colours
Baskets of fish
Still flecked with salt water
Alongside exotic perfumes
In flowery glass bottles
The narrow wet concrete below
Beckoning
What will I find today?
What will you?



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Dublin, Ireland
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Québec City,
Canada (p 14)

Madrid, Spain
(p 13)

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