

# Developing a New Perspective: Why Studying Abroad is Important

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DISCOVERY MODEL  
INTERCULTURAL

HISTORICAL

PROFESSIONAL

ENVIRONMENTAL

SOCIOPOLITICAL

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My Portuguese friend and I looked at each other, both amused and aghast at the xenophobic comments we'd just heard from a tour guide. "He's very... old Europe," she noted. While I hadn't heard the phrase before, I picked up on the implications. Just as in the States, newer generations of Europeans have had to navigate an increasingly globalized economy, culture, and discussion. Words like "patriot" have evolved into words like "global citizen" seemingly overnight, resulting in generational (and sometimes interpersonal) tension between those who hold competing priorities.

There is nothing wrong with loving one's country or with loving one's world, of course. But over and over again, I've noticed that studying abroad deeply shapes how one even approaches these questions of identity and responsibility in the first place. That said, here are two ways that studying abroad has re-shaped my own perspective:

## 1. Independence vs. Interdependence

Often, advocates of travel extoll the virtue of leaving the country to develop "your own path"; they aren't wrong. The first time you use your passport, it is an exercise in independence. However, about the third or fifth time you use it, it's a symbol of interdependence. Why? Because that's about the time that you've realized your own life is inextricably connected to the lives of millions of others you may never meet or know. Those who leave their country often feel a greater sense of international responsibility because they've been the beneficiaries of a world outside their own nationality.





*As you travel in Europe, you'll often see a series of flags like the ones pictured here in Budapest, Hungary. European countries are deeply connected to each other, in part because of the EU. As a result, there's an understanding of interconnectedness, as well as the opportunities and challenges that accompany it.*

## 2. What's "Normal"?

Just as you soak in the differences and reconsider what constitutes "normal," you recognize that you are building upon centuries and centuries of inquiry and work. Various iterations of "normal" exist and have existed or ceased to exist over the years. Leaving your own country allows you to begin to see the extent of that inquiry—the variety that exists within "normal." When you *do* eventually come home, it's with many more questions and far fewer assumptions.



*This was on the side of a building in Rotterdam, Netherlands*

I cannot list the number of times I've spoken with friends and said the words, "It's probably a matter of leaving/not having left the country." Though there are many ways to grow in your own home, I have seen and continue to see a difference in those who have traveled. Just as in Plato's Cave, sometimes the best way to know something is to step outside and see it.