

The Greatest Class We Ever Took

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When Chris Whittle decided that two semesters of his scholarship program would have to be spent overseas, he did so with the understanding of how much his international experience influenced his life. Rather than developing some restrictions on programs students could be involved in, he left the guidelines ambiguous so students could challenge themselves however they deemed appropriate. Chris Whittle had an understanding that spending time outside of a student's comfort zone will only help him/her to grow as a person. When the time came to decide what we wanted to do with our time overseas, we opted to see as much of Europe as we could. This paper is our attempt to share how our experiences have enriched our lives and taught us new ideas. In many ways this trip was the greatest class we ever took, and we hope that the reader has as much fun reading our stories as we had living them.

In the five and a half months spent overseas, we visited twenty-five countries on two continents. Sometimes our impressions of a country were based on a month's travel throughout the countryside, while other times our impressions were limited to one large metropolitan city. We encountered communication barriers constantly: at least sixteen different languages. Now, we can ask if a vacancy exists, where the bathroom is located, how much an item costs, or where an ATM can be found almost anywhere in the world. Our itinerary was an aggressive one as we traded the age-old Eurorail pass in for our own set of car keys. Along the way we added over twenty-four thousand kilometers to our car, affectionately named the "Sea Bass", while blowing out two tires in Spain and a water pump in Switzerland. We never knew where we would spend our next night or eat our next meal; we slept in seventy-seven different places and ate meals of unknown

constituents in hundreds of places. We rode on fourteen metro transport systems from bus to tram to train to ferry to water taxi. We even used a horsecart. One day we actually used a boat, a taxi, a plane, two busses, a train, and a metro system. Another day we spent time on the soils of five different countries. Collectively, we read over thirty thousand pages of literature, primarily focusing on the history of western civilization.

At times the trip seemed like a vacation, while at other periods more like a curse.

Nothing is easy when you can not communicate, and although playing charades for a couple of weeks may be amusing, six months is a different story. Getting lost in a city for the afternoon is a blast, while getting on a train unsure of its destination is an entirely different feeling. All of this is leading to the fact that our trip was not always easy.

Among the great memories there were some tough times and for every friend we made there was somebody who attempted to take advantage of our tourist status. This trip was a learning experience – the greatest class we ever took. The following observations are ours and ours alone. Some readers may find some points to be shallow or ill founded, and them are. We have tried to give an accurate depiction of what we thought and felt on our journey and hope that the positive side of the experience will shine through.

Below is a map that details our route. We both flew into London, and we stayed in England for approximately two weeks. There we purchased a vehicle and went to France. From there, we took a southerly path to Andorra, Spain, Portugal, and Morocco before turning north and east for our trek to Italy. In Rome, we caught a flight to Athens, and then a ferry to the Greek Islands. Upon returning to Rome, we made a circuitous route

through Eastern Europe and Germany before crossing the Channel for a tour of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland.

France:

Before entering France, we had been inundated with horror stories about the snobby French and their sense of importance. We must admit that we were absolutely prepared to despise the French and to do our part in propagating that myth; however, much to our chagrin, we encountered no such people. Almost without exception, the French were a very nice and helpful group. They came across as extremely proud of their country and, in particular of their language. A French-Canadian that we met at one hostel said that, although he was fluent in French, the people of Paris insisted on speaking English to him rather than a “mongrelized” form of French. They are very proud of their language, and we were told on several occasions that they did not agree with English becoming the international language.

We always opened up any conversation with a French phrase. This seemed to work like a charm because we encountered very little animosity about thereafter switching the conversation to English. We feel that the French, like the English, to a certain extent still bask in the past and its traditional ways. This trend is reinforced in particular by the repetition of day-to-day commerce. Most of the French have their daily shopping pattern with the majority of buying taking place at small, family-owned shops. This is most prevalent and obvious in the buying of the greatest of French natural resources - the baguette. The most striking thing about the French town life was the percentage of

people on the street of any small town carrying bread. After some crude approximations, we determined that at least 10 percent of pedestrians on any town street were carrying a loaf of bread. Whether on a bike, moped, or just walking - they all had it. We found out that a national law exists making it illegal to close a bakery any day out of the year. This law quickly made sense after attempting to bite into a one-day-old loaf of bread and nearly chipping a tooth. All this is evidence that the French love their bread, and as a society they deem it essential to carry on the tradition of going after bread every day regardless of its lack of efficiency. France, more than any of the other countries we visited, had the indelible imprints of socialism. The solution to any national problem generally was - we need more government involvement. While we were there, a large, extreme right wing rally was occurring in the city of Strasbourg. This proved to be a good forum for hearing the average French citizen's opinion of capitalism - an overwhelming rejection. They are comfortable relying on the integrity of their government.

Strangely enough, we learned the most about French national pride in a hostel in Trieste, Italy, where we happened upon two young French students, both fluent in English. They eagerly spoke of the grandeur of their home country and how it was the original "melting pot" due to its heterogeneous background. Also, one of the fellows informed us that France had every landform on earth within its boundaries. He then proceeded to launch into a critical monologue on the violence of the United States. His performance was over-the-top jingoism, but we interpret it as an extreme love of country.

Andorra:

We must say that we did not know that this country even existed prior to our departure.

Andorra is a tiny principality nestled within the safe confines of the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain. The culture of Andorra is heavily influenced by Spain, but the soul of the country has been sold along with its virtually tax-free cigarettes and electronics. It is a shrine to the almighty dollar or franc or peseta or whatever else you're spending.

Spain:

While France is a place of extreme nationalism, Spain thrives on the diversity of its regions. The structure of Spain reminded me of the Confederate States of America - one central, weak national government kowtowing to states' rights. The organization is much the same in Spain as much of the political power is given to the provinces. When we were in Leon, in the northern part of Spain, we went out for a walk along the river. On the bank, a spirited game of Bolera was being played. Bolera, a cross between bowling and horseshoes, is the game of choice for the fifty and over crowd in this area. Since we are both somewhat proficient in Spanish, we struck up a conversation with one of the spectators, asking him the rules for scoring the game. He responded with a confusing description, but eventually, we caught the drift. Once we gained an understanding of the game, he launched into a discussion about how this area was not governed by Spain but by a local government that met here in Leon. While he did not resent the other areas of Spain, he was dedicated to his part of the country. We found it interesting that the man

felt strongly enough about this political point that he would attempt to educate two young Americans.

Once again, language plays a role in this loyalty. Everyone in Spain speaks Spanish, but the various dialects serve as the dividing lines. Nowhere was this more prevalent than in Barcelona where the Catalyud, a Spanish dialect, street signs rested right below the Spanish. This is a very serious issue. So serious, in fact, that the government is currently battling an internal terrorist organization, the ETA, that is pushing for the separation of Spain.

The Spanish culture was absolutely fascinating. We spent longer in Spain than any other country and consequently feel as though we have the best understanding and appreciation of this country. At first, we felt that the people of Spain were not a logical people, but eventually, decided that this is faulty reasoning. The Spanish people are just as logical as anyone else. It is just that their priorities are different from those we see daily in the United States. The number one priority is without a doubt the family, followed closely by an intense devotion to friends and community. This is vastly different from the American approach of customer service and convenience. In Spain, these philosophies do not exist. Nothing is open twenty-four hours a day, because in order to do so, someone would be forced to work the late hours instead of being home with his family. Consequently, things are not always open. A shop owner will not keep his store open during the Descansado “siesta” even though theoretically he could make a lot of money during this time. Instead, he goes home and spends time with his family. The idea of

staying and keeping the shop open does not exist within the Spanish system because of the importance of tradition and family.

Tradition is as evident in Spain as it was in France. Sunday is the day to walk around. Everyone dresses up, women in fur coats and men in trench coats and berets, and walks around the city from midday to nightfall. It was strange to see what seemed to be the entire population of Burgos promenading up and down the streets in their Sunday best, stopping only to eat the traditional large meal in the middle of the day. Only restaurants, bars, and newsstands are open. The Catholic tradition of Spain is very much alive, with a large section of the population attending Mass every day. Enormous cathedrals abound, and it seems as if every woman on the street is wearing a crucifix charm around her neck. While many of the Spanish traditions are kept alive by the older segment of the society, the youth have definitely broken free to create their own traditions, in large part because their parents grew up under the fascist dictator Franco, who ruled until the 1970's. This legacy of oppression has resulted in a youth that revels in its freedom. So the young Spaniards are the most fun-loving people that we encountered. The Spanish pursue social interaction with a fury, and their partying energy was staggering to two American lightweights. This carefree attitude results in living, to a large part, stress-free lives. Although the Spanish lead Europe in alcohol, cigarette, and fat consumption, they have the longest average lifespan. They seem to have a good thing going.

Portugal:

Portugal can be separated easily into two distinct parts - north and south. The north is more industrialized while the south is basically a resort area for European tourists.

Portugal is a small country whose national identity is still somewhat tied to its impressive seafaring past. Monuments to explorers and traders abound, and the cuisine is universally tied to the ocean. Portugal lacks a distinctive culture because, with a population of just over ten million, it lacks the resources to promote the arts on a wide scale. This has led to an adoption of English as its overwhelming choice for a second language, and with the English language comes the culture of both the U.K. and U.S. Consequently, Portugal is a sort of hybrid of Spain and England, where people wearing Tommy Hilfiger clothes and Nike shoes watch a bullfight. That is Portugal. The people were very friendly and hungry for western culture. Often they seemed as confused as we did over their international identity.

The Algarve, the southern part of Portugal, could be mistaken for an English colony. The majority of the signs there are in English, providing an almost surreal atmosphere when we were there. It is not hard to see why this area is inundated with tourists: it has fifty miles of the nicest beaches on the continent. Filled with people whose jobs are to support the tourist industry, the Algarve is also heavily populated with expatriates from a variety of homelands.

The heart of Portugal is, without a doubt, Lisbon. Twenty-five percent of the nation's population comes from this unusual, utterly disorganized, sprawling metropolis. The city is totally unlike any other. Around the turn of the century, a violent earthquake almost

leveled the entire city. It sprang up again in a disorderly and haphazard fashion. We must say that we loved Lisbon although neither of us could say why. Perhaps the reason stems from the fact that there is no pretentiousness about the place. It is simply the way it is - love it or leave it is the attitude of the people, and we found it charming. The Alfama section of the city is particularly interesting. It is the one major area able to emerge from the earthquake largely unscathed. The Alfama is the old fishing district and is made up of twisting and turning streets that wind through a collection of dilapidated houses and buildings. The atmosphere was great, as named streets would have a set of stairs in them. Everything was totally unorganized, and the locals loved it. Driving here is unimaginable. We wisely left our car outside the city. The major Lisbon monuments all focused on the ancient sea-faring tradition that caused Portugal's star to rise so long ago.

Morocco:

Morocco is totally unlike any other culture that I have ever encountered. First and foremost, the overwhelming majority of the people are Muslim. This is most important when analyzing the culture. However, unlike many of their sister nations, Muslims live in relative peace with Jews and Christians. We hired a tour guide to take us through the capital city of Tangier, and he pointed this out more than once. He said that Moroccans love peace and that they have no problems with people of other creeds. The Muslim principles were very noticeable: women are not allowed into restaurants or bars. Women were a large presence in the market. They staffed many of the booths and purchased various goods. Most were dressed in traditional regalia with face and head covered. Many men also dressed in the traditional fashion, but almost as many dressed in the

western style. Islam forbids alcohol so we never saw anyone drinking; however; many people took part in the local “coffee” - marijuana. When we took a horse cart ride in the country, our driver would fire up his marijuana pipe every couple of minutes. This is another example of a difference in American and foreign perceptions.

In the course of the day, several times we brought up the status of women in the culture of Morocco, and our guide, a 24 year-old male, said that he felt that their role was changing somewhat. He felt that many of the men his age were becoming more in favor of being married to only one wife instead of the multiple wives of the past. He, himself, had only one wife and felt that his marriage was a fifty-fifty partnership. When I asked about women in public places, he said that he felt as though a woman’s place was looking after the children and managing the affairs of the house. He said that when he saw European and American women in the public places drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes, he felt embarrassed. He felt as though the women were mocking him.

We also had heard horror stories about Morocco. Unfortunately most of these were true. The people accost you in a blitzkrieg fashion, and they will not leave you alone until you acquire a “guide” of some type. Once you have this guide, they will all leave you alone. It is a very humbling experience when a street hustler, who can speak five languages, comes up to you. The society is multilingual. The best description of the culture of Morocco is to share the conversation we had in our taxi ride from the village of Asilah back to Tangier. There was another passenger in the back seat with us for the forty-minute drive. He was a twenty-five year old engineering student from Asilah, who is

studying electrical engineering in Paris. A very impressive young man, he was on a scholarship from the Moroccan military and spoke five languages. We asked him to describe the culture, and he described it as comparable to Brownian motion. Now, we were probably the only people in Morocco who would have understood this metaphor, but the illustration was perfect. He said, “if I go into a cafe and order a coffee, one day it will cost 5 dirhams. The next day, I will go into the same cafe and order the same cup of coffee, and this time it will cost 6 dirhams. The next day it may cost 3 dirhams. You see, Brownian motion.” Our new friend, Hamid, made a very valid point. Moroccan culture is chaotic. One never knows what to expect. He also expressed concerns about his countrymen, particularly, their stiff-necked adherence to the past, which killed any hope of economic improvement. He said that the richest people in the society were either drug dealers or members of organized crime. This distressed him, but he felt that much of the youth were beginning to see education as a ticket to economic prosperity. After the pushy treatment we had received from some of the Moroccan pushers, Hamid really reassured our faith in humanity.

Monaco:

What can be said about Monaco? While a country of only 0.6 square miles seems to have no unique culture of its own, it does. Some of the most lavish living on the planet takes place within its confines. Monaco, like southern Portugal, is basically a resort; however, it is for a slightly different crowd. Both English and French are widely spoken, and the culture has a distinctive international feel. The entire French Riviera is like that - a playground for the rich and famous, and we did have one particular experience that

reminded us of the fact that we were neither. We decided to go to the world famous Monte Carlo casino to play a little bit of Black Jack. After paying our 50-Franc entry fee, we walked in to find ourselves the only men not dressed in tuxedos. The Black Jack tables were a minimum bet of hundred dollars. So, needless to say we felt a little out of place. We slid back to the one-Franc slot machines where we quietly lost our little bit of money before exiting. The experience was a reminder of the elite culture that is Monte Carlo. This high-priced existence is evidenced everywhere by the Ferraris, Porsches, and Lamborghinis, parked beside our little Austin Metro.

Italy:

The culture of Italy is much like that of Spain. The chief concern of the average Italian is a fierce loyalty and devotion to family. We were taken aback by the extreme affection showed by the Italians toward their friends in public. The best example of this affection was exhibited as a group of adolescent males were saying goodbye to each other at the main train station in Rome. They tearfully hugged each other and said obvious heartfelt good-byes. We observed numerous situations like this on the streets as friends would hug and kiss each other goodbye for the day. This passion is on display in Italy much more than anywhere we visited. Everything that the Italians did was filled with passion from the old men and women arguing loudly on the street to the families boisterously toasting each other in the restaurants. Overall, the idea of putting anything, like work, ahead of family is inconceivable for the stereotypical Italian, and the rural attitude is very laid back, focusing a great deal on relaxation and entertainment.

The next characteristic that we would like to discuss concerning Italy is something that is difficult to put into words. The culture of Italy seems to be tied very tightly to its cultural outputs - music, art, religion, drama, and architecture. The life of the average Italian is filled with these cultural experiences. We do not think that there is necessarily more cultural output in Italy, just a higher percentage of the Italian's time is spent in these pursuits. The romantic images of vineyard-lined Tuscan hillsides and the richly colored paintings of Raphael and Michelangelo are alive and well in this country, and the art of the renaissance is still a great source of pride among the people.

Another facet commonly seen in Italy is the gentle irony found between the slow-moving culture and the high-paced driving habits. Once we crossed the border from France into Italy it was immediately apparent that almost every car on the road had some dent, scratch, or missing mirror. With a low stress work environment, lots of relaxation and recreation, and plenty of free time, the Italians might be thought to leisurely ramble down the road. Instead they pursue their driving with the same passion that controls their everyday lives. Consequently, driving in Italy was a major lesson in chaos. Passing three cars wide on a two lane road, pulling the parking break in the middle of a lane to create a new parking space, or passing trucks in town while dodging bicycles are all so common that the experience of driving becomes more like playing a game of Asteroids. The only apparent rules are to try to get from point A to point B in the shortest period of time and to try not to hit any other cars, cyclists, or pedestrians. Although if the latter rule should inhibit the former rule to a great extent, go ahead and nudge somebody. They'll understand because they're following the same rules.

Greece:

First, we present a disclaimer concerning our travels in Greece. Our trip was limited to Athens and to a couple of out-of-season resort islands, but even in this limited exposure we gained an appreciation for the Greek existence. It came as a shock that Greece has a population of only eleven million, four million of which live in Athens. Therefore, Greece has a somewhat insignificant role in the modern world. However, it seemed to us that the Greek people were making strides to meet the rest of the world half way. Their language is difficult to learn because of its unique alphabet. Consequently, an incredibly high percentage of the people we met spoke English fluently. The people of Greece were among the most friendly that we encountered, and they were intensely proud of their country. However, their pride was in a much less nationalistic way than that of France. We always got the impression that the Greek people were eager to share their culture with the rest of the world. This was exhibited in displays of their traditional dancing and cuisine as well as the obligatory drinks of Uzo that every restaurateur offered. The people for the greater part understand that Greece is not preeminent in the world, so they focus their attention on sending a part of their culture home with everyone. They want to give us a taste of Greece and not force the entire culture down our throat.

The Middle Eastern influence is definitely visible in Greece. The obvious manifestation is simply in the skin color of the people. They are much darker than the other Europeans we encountered before. In fact, they bore a much stronger resemblance to the people of Morocco than of Italy or Spain. Physical appearance is not the only manifestation as

behavioral similarities to the Moroccans were also evident. One such behavior involved the aggressive selling style exhibited by shopkeepers. Restaurant owners would call out to us as we walked on the streets encouraging us to come into their establishments. The people were exceedingly friendly and not nearly as pushy as the ones in Morocco, but they were firm in their pleadings.

Another factor motivating the behavior of particularly the elderly Greek people was the overwhelmingly presence of the Greek Orthodox Church. One did not need to wander far before seeing constant reminders of the main church in this area of the world. Small concrete chapels, almost always painted bright white and blue, were literally on every corner in the towns on the islands. Seemingly all cut out of the same mold, they were usually small concrete structures with a domed roof topped with a two-tiered bell tower. We found these little chapels everywhere - along the beach, in the cities, on the top of a ridge, and even dug into a vertical cliff side overhanging a deep blue bay. We had trouble imagining anyone being able to reach this out of the way shrine, but upon further investigation, we discovered a steep, loose gravel path leading down to the little chapel. Another noticeable characteristic of the religious makeup of the culture was a habit that we noticed on the city buses. Whenever the bus would drive past a church, almost all of the elderly women on the bus would instinctively cross themselves. We found this to be quite a consistent phenomenon throughout the country.

Switzerland:

The day that we drove from Italy to Switzerland was one of the greatest culture shocks of this trip. Almost the instant we crossed over the border, the driving suddenly became sane again, the streets became wide and smooth, and all of the towns were immaculate. Switzerland has no distinct culture in and of itself, but the strange multi-culturism gives it a flavor unlike anywhere else we traveled. To begin, the country is set against the most breath-taking collection of scenery that we saw. The towering Alps, the green meadows with their innumerable yellow flowers, and the crystal blue mountain lakes paint a picture that is truly awe-inspiring. Therefore, the serene and immaculately clean villages, full of well-built stone and wood buildings, inherently make sense. The foreground runs an interesting parallel with the backdrop, each complimenting the other.

Switzerland is wedged in between three of the world's top seven producing countries, and they make every effort to accommodate their neighbors. Naturally, Switzerland is still the world's most important banking nation. This status is evident as the main cities' streets are lined with international banks of all kinds, and the Swiss make every effort to kowtow to foreign money. This is accomplished by the multilingual nature of the Swiss people. Almost all of the Swiss people speak four languages - generally German, French, Italian, and English. The first language spoken in greeting depended on whether we were in the east, west, or south portion of the country.

Swiss society, for lack of a better metaphor, functions like clockwork, or more specifically a SWATCH. The perfect example occurred when we were taking a train from the picturesque town of Interlaken to the tiny mountain village of Grimmelwald in

the Jungfrau region. We had become accustomed to the typical delays associated with rail travel in Italy and Spain, and that is why the following scene struck us as strange. We had boarded the train and were sitting and looking out at the station. No one was waiting on the platform; the entire area was totally deserted. We looked over and saw the train operator standing underneath the clock at the end of the platform staring at the clock above her. She stood patiently and waited until the second hand crossed the twelve mark. At that very instant, she pushed the button in front of her and the train was set in motion, but not until the little hand had passed the minute mark. That's a small vignette illustrating how precise these people are. Precision is not a luxury or a joke to them - it is their way of life.

Liechtenstein:

Liechtenstein looks like Switzerland. They are famous for their stamps. We had some good spaghetti there and then we left. How's that for a great impression?

Austria/Germany:

Try as we might to separate these two countries, we could observe no appreciable differences between the two cultures. Granted, we did not spend a great deal of time in these countries, still we were surprised at how similar they were. We did get the feeling that for the most part the German/Austrian people are proud of themselves as a people, but they are not proud of themselves as a nation. The cloud of World War II seems to lie just beneath the surface. We came across a statistic from a survey taken in 1995. When asked what they thought of first upon hearing "Deutschland," sixty percent of high school

seniors replied “Aushwitz.” We both felt that this statistic was appalling, but at the same time very telling of the national attitude. The German/Austrian children seem to continue to conform to the national obsession with efficiency and following rules. Most of our experience with Germans, ironically, took place outside of the country in hostels from England to Budapest to Italy. During our stays at these hostels, we often got into discussions with travelling Germans (it is always easier to get into conversations with people outside of their homeland - something about being removed from one’s comfort zone). In the course of these conversations, the Germans always seemed perplexed by our easy-going, ready-to-compromise American attitudes. One of the best examples of this happened in Mainz, on the Rhine River in Western Germany. We were on our way back from dinner on a Sunday evening and much of the downtown area was deserted. We walked up to the street crosswalk and even though the little red man signaling “Don’t Walk” was on, we casually looked both ways, and upon seeing no cars anywhere in the vicinity, walked leisurely across the street. On the other side of the street a young German man was standing on the corner. We noticed his eyes following us as we walked across. He then looked up at the little red man and shot us a perplexed glance. Still, he waited. Finally, the green walking man came on and he ran across the empty street.

We were able to gain a lot of insight into the German/Austrian social construct through discussions with Americans who had actually lived in the countries for an extended period of time. These people could speak the language and dealt with ordinary people day in and day out. The most striking and consistent trait we found from these people centered on the Teutonic people’s desire to follow rules. In America, our system of

government is founded in distrust of government and power, designed so that the average citizens can check up on the government, and if they are dissatisfied, they can “throw out the bum” at the next election. The branches of government are built around the idea of checks and balances so that no one entity can gain too much power. For the large part, Americans naturally expect that the government is crooked and that any new law that is passed is done so to fulfill some secret agenda. We are a nation who believes and expects big government conspiracies and cover-ups from the Kennedy assassination to the alien landing at Roswell, New Mexico. We do not trust our government. In Germany and Austria, people do not question the government as much. Rules are in place for a reason. They are there to ensure a consistent and efficient operation of a society. People follow these rules. Every train station has the exact same system and methodology in place. Everyone was to go from this area to this area and finally to that area. The layout was an efficient one, and the entire system made sense.

In Bavaria, beer is king, and because of this, they have a system of purity rules concerning the making of the lager. They have a purity law in place that was drafted in the 1400's requiring that beer made in Bavaria only be brewed using the following four ingredients - water, barley, hops, and yeast. That's it. Today in Germany, they make a beer from wheat called Weissbeir. To make this beer, they had to seek an exemption from the government to be able to make this special concoction. Even though the recipe called for all natural, healthy ingredients, they had to seek government approval before proceeding.

Germany and Austria are very beautiful places and it is very easy to generalize about them and their citizens' obsession towards order and efficiency. But for the most part, the people are very pleasant and are interested in making things go as smoothly as possible for all visitors. Not limited to government alone, the German/Austrian people are in love with music and art. In Vienna, the people are devoted to their composers. We did not have to wander far around the city before running into a band playing Beethoven or Schubert. Classical music is the pride and joy of the German/Austrian people, and the evidence is everywhere.

Hungary (Budapest):

Our swing into Hungary was limited to the capital city, Budapest. We did not venture into any of the countryside. Our entire Eastern European trip was done by train after we left the car in Vienna. Budapest did not seem like a city that had been under communism only a decade ago. The city was bustling and bursting with vitality. In outward appearances, it seemed a modern, western city like any other we had visited. Western companies have not wasted any time in descending into the ripe fields of the former Eastern Bloc. McDonalds, Burger Kings, Kentucky Fried Chickens as well as Nikes and Levis are all over the city. We were taken back by the influx of the western world into this area. It seemed the only difference between Budapest and Paris or Rome was the prices were about one-fourth as much. Budapest is thriving and the main shopping area in downtown is beginning to boom. However, one does not have to journey far into the outskirts of the city before seeing the indelible marks of communism. The infrastructure seems to be old and sagging - roads and bridges are in poor shape. The plumbing is bad,

and most of the buildings are well past their prime, but we sensed an optimism that these problems will soon be solved. Strangely enough, we found Budapest to be one of the most convenient cities that we visited. Many restaurants and stores were open around the clock, something we found hardly anywhere else on the continent.

It was easy to become entrapped in the new wave of capitalism and assume that the entire country was like Budapest. We saw evidence to the contrary. On our train rides through the country we could see the devastation that Marxism had brought with it. Most of the houses were old and dilapidated. The lawns were littered with garbage, and the grass was growing up wild. The picture was depressing, but the strong spirit of optimism will overcome the depression. Another interesting reminder that we were no longer in the west was when we went to a flea market on the perimeter of the city. The market was like many others that we had visited before. It had old furniture and trinkets as well as new clothes and leather items; however, what made this market unique was all of the Soviet and Nazi paraphernalia for sale. They had Soviet army medals as well as hats, jackets, and even busts of Lenin. There were Nazi medals, Hitler watches, and SS lapel pins. The entire market had a very unusual feel to it. It portrayed a side of WW II that we had not before encountered.

Poland:

Our Polish trip was also limited to the city of Krakow, located in the southeastern section of the country, and to a day trip to the small town of Oswiecim, home of the Auschwitz concentration camps. Krakow was much like we expected of Eastern Europe. The city

had a run-down appearance and convenience did not exist. We stayed in the private room of a man who approached us at the train station. The house was in shambles and garbage was strewn about the unkept front yard. The room was filthy and dirty, but strangely enough, we agreed that staying in a place like that was the proper way to experience Poland. Krakow was not a beautiful city. It's eclectic, thrown-together style of architecture told the Polish story of repeated reconstruction throughout the ages. We had some difficulties. None of the ATM's would work because we arrived on a Sunday and everything was turned off. Consequently, we began to worry about money. It was the same with pay phones. There are only ten pay phones in Krakow, and Krakow is the second largest city in Poland. The lines were very long, and our international connection would not work. The entire system seemed very faulty. The final straw concerned toilet paper - a hot commodity here. At no public restrooms was the paper free, and naturally our rented room did not provide any. All of the grocery stores are closed on Sundays. We were forced to wait in a long line outside a market to buy toilet paper. How is that for experiencing a part of communistic life?

Our bus ride to the Auswitchz concentration camp gave us a portrayal of Polish rural life. The buildings were old and simple, the roads were in poor condition, and there seemed to be very little industry. What surprised us the most was a Polish farmer plowing his land with a horse and plow. Imagine the last time one could have seen this scene in America, probably sometime during the forties or fifties. The agricultural age was two ages ago. We, in America, have already segued from the agricultural age to the industrial age, and now, to the information age. The image struck home.

Czech Republic:

Our stay in the Czech Republic was limited to Prague, the first of the former Eastern Bloc cities to become a hip travel destination for western travelers. Prague is a city of great beauty with many spires dotting its skyline. A mecca for expatriates, the city has a permanent population of eighty thousand Americans, plus the huge daily influx of tourists. All this makes for a theme park atmosphere. Tourism is king, and almost everyone in any kind of service industry is fluent in English. English plays, movies, and bookstores abound in the city.

We felt that the city itself is a lot like Budapest. It is full of the hustle and bustle that comes along with any westernized city, but it has the old world Slavic charm that is so mysterious to westerners. The attraction that brought people to Prague a decade ago were the ridiculously cheap prices for everything, and today, while everything is still appreciably cheaper than other big cities, prices are definitely on the rise. We experienced almost none of the Czech culture. The people focus on making the city appealing to tourists. Consequently, national identity suffers and is not the focus.

England:

Of all the countries that we visited on this trip, England is the one that we probably obtained the greatest understanding. This is true for two reasons, language and duration of stay. Our stay in England was almost exclusively with local people. (Josh has an uncle that lives in southern England.) Through our stay with these people, we gained an

appreciation for the English people. To truly understand the English, one must first appreciate imperialism. The British Empire does affect the national consciousness even today, some fifty years after its demise. The British are an extremely nationalistic people, and many still feel as though they should be running things in the world. They are somewhat stubborn in their nationalism. They still adhere to their right hand driving and to the English standard of measurements much to the chagrin of the continentals. but what we found so charming was the endearing sense of humor they all shared about their status in the world. They freely admitted their stubbornness while showing no signs of an eventual compromise. They seem quite happy to keep doing things their way.

It is impossible to separate England from her past. It seems that the English have fought every other country in the world, and old habits die hard. One gentleman with whom we ate dinner with in London spoke of England's oldest ally, Portugal. As he described it, Portugal was the country that "we had it out with longest ago." That is an amusing way to put it, but it shows the thought processes of the average English citizen. The English continually make jokes about the continentals whether it be the Germans or the French or anyone else. They will make allusions to wars fought five hundred years ago as though their fathers had fought in them. As Americans, we have no such sense of history. As a whole, the English are a structured people. Their first impulse is to increase government regulation of anything and everything. The English economy took a hard fall due to Margaret Thatcher's privatization efforts in the 1980's, and in general, the people have a low opinion of her term as Prime Minister. However, when we were there, Tony Blair

and New Labor had won the election and were ready to return the government to its old high regulation days.

In leisure time, the English people are passionate about three things: football (soccer), cricket, and pubs. England definitely has a pub culture. There is a pub on every corner in a town, and all of the people have their “local” pub that they will visit almost every evening. There the people discuss local issues, watch the football game, or throw darts. The atmosphere is great at these pubs, and the time spent there serves to bind the neighborhood together. The “local” really seems to give a sense of community.

Scotland:

Scotland and England are two separate entities entirely, and we feel as though we would be being unfaithful to the Scottish friends we made if we did not point this out. First, the Scottish people really do not like the English. We will not say that they hate them; it is just that they are not real excited about the English history. Their philosophy toward the English can be summed up best by a joke a Scotsman told us in a pub in St. Andrews: “A long time ago God and the saints were up in heaven laying out the way that the world was going to be set up, and one of the saints said ‘God, what are ya gonna call that little country down there in the North Sea?’ God said, ‘That one there, I’m gonna call it Scotland.’ The saint returned, ‘Aye God, that’s a good name, but I wonder God - have ya looked at this real closely. This country, Scotland, it has beautiful windswept beaches, towering highlands, and serene lochs. It has rich oil reserves in the North Sea and coal in the mountains. God - don’t ya think it’s a little unfair? Ain’t ya bein too good to the

people of Scotland?’ God just shook his head and smiled, ‘Wait’ll ya see the neighbors I’m gonna give ‘em!’” The joke was well received by us, but all kidding aside, it gave us a glimpse of the Scottish consciousness that can best be described as depressed. They hold the English in contempt for being stiff, but they were colonized by stiff. Where does that leave them? The point was well taken, and while the Scottish may feel somewhat depressed by their national identity, they are some of the warmest and most gracious people that we met.

Ireland:

Ireland is an unusual country. We did not visit Northern Ireland, but we drove basically the entire perimeter of the southern part. Ireland is a country with a population of 3.5 million people, 3 million of whom live in Dublin. Therefore, the rest of the country is rural and unpopulated. We expected Ireland to be extremely green and extremely wet; we were not disappointed. The land was overpoweringly green, and it did rain or drizzle every second of the week we were there. Due to Ireland’s concentrated population, the country is lacking in infrastructure outside of Dublin. We estimated that there are only about forty miles of four-lane road in the entire country. Ireland is still very much connected with its fishing and agricultural past.

Without a doubt the most important aspect of our journey was the ideas and concepts we accumulated to take back and integrate into our daily lives. Often people have a tendency to view their travels as enlightenment and to claim that their lives have been completely altered by the experience. However, if that new knowledge is not applied once they

return to their everyday life, what is the redeeming value of the experience? On our journey, we had the opportunity to look at cultures from their perspectives. From many of the stories in this paper one can see where things do not make sense when one tries to look at them from an American perspective. Only when we were in the situations could we begin to scrape the surface of understanding the other culture. We, as Americans, can easily believe that our ways are best and all other cultures are lagging behind. In some aspects we are correct and in others we are wrong, but more times than not both cultures are correct as long as you look at them from their own priorities. As we open up more global markets the ability to deal with different cultures from their perspectives and ideas will become an increasing demand in the business world.

Even more than opening our minds to new ideas and cultures, the great gift of this trip was the new love of country we found only when leaving it. For all the controversy and problems in the United States today, we truly have fantastic concepts at work. Our democratic society working with our capitalistic principles has so much more potential than any of the other systems of governments we encountered along the way. Although questioned continuously in today's society, America still has the dream she always provided. One woman, we traveled with for a few days, made an interesting point about this. She said that she has traveled all around the world, and she hopes to see many more places; however, every time she fills out her tax returns, she counts her blessings for being able to live in a country like the United States. That is how we feel after "seeing the world". Our trip has developed a greater appreciation for what we have at home, and

it also opened our eyes to the fact that improvements and suggestions can be found all around the world.