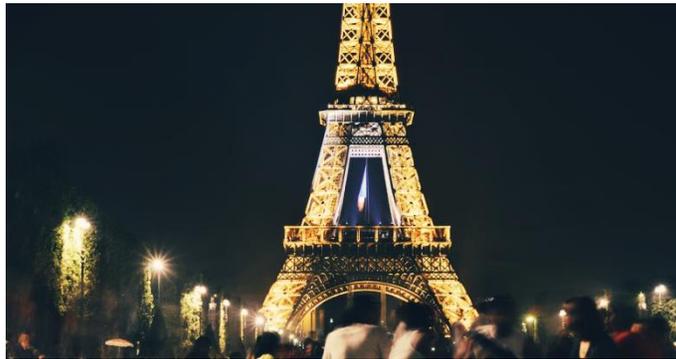


The Value of Experiencing a Different Culture

By Sarah Zeran



Our exchange programs increase cultural awareness through a direct learning experience from the students. In the 21st Century, our global access has increased tremendously with the introduction and popularity of the internet and social media. With this easy communication that can bring us closer to even those on the other side of the world, it is beneficial to be more aware of what other cultures are like, and there is no better way to learn this than through visiting and living another culture.

You can get a short glimpse of another country by paying a visit and spending some vacation time there, but that is incomparable to the experience of actually *residing in* the country. This involves actually interacting with other people who live there, and spending several weeks engaged in the day to day life. Attending school, making friends, visiting the stores, and tasting new foods, all make up a unique, immersive experience.

By taking part in this experience you will develop a deeper understanding of the world and how different each and every culture is. While Canada and Europe aren't the most diverging cultures in the world, there is a language barrier and many other subtle and significant differences in how things are done. Once you see this in smaller increments, it will be easier to see it with other countries you have not yet visited as well, and will open you up to learning more about these other places and asking questions.

Being aware of cultural variances could even benefit you in your future endeavours. When meeting someone from another country, you may already know how to greet them or will be curious enough to learn before said meeting. It will allow you to have more fulfilling conversations, and it will make your whole worldview that much larger.

Learning about other cultures is also just fun! It's deeply interesting – at least to me – to see how other people live and to take a step in their shoes and compare that to your own experiences. It also breaks down harmful stereotypes regarding other cultures by showing you

just how human every single person is, whether they participate in the same things as you or are completely different. No one likes to be reduced to a stereotype, and it is more important than ever to help everyone to feel comfortable, no matter what the situation.

It pays to know what is going on in other parts of the world, and to pick up on the differences between countries. It is inevitable you will develop opinions on which types of things are the best in what culture, and what the greatest one-of-a-kind feature is in each! This is perfectly okay, as long as you are aware of the fact that it is okay to be different and always keep an open mind that is willing to learn more.