

So what is to be said on the prospect of leaving your dear campus for a semester (or more) in search of more exotic shores? Insite interviews two veteran study-abroaders, Chloe Graham and Chris Hodges to get the dish from the horse's mouth...

INSITE: Where are you from?

CHLOE: Cold Spring, Minnesota. I go to the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota, but my study abroad program was through the University of Wisconsin-Plattville; they have their own program in Spain.

CHRIS: Grand Rapids, Michigan. I went to the University of Michigan. My program was University of Michigan sponsored through CIEE (Council for International Education and Exchange).

INSITE: Where did you study abroad?

CHLOE: Seville, Spain. At the Spanish American Institute, so all the teachers were Spanish. It was basically a school for American students from all over the States; there were very few native Spaniards.

CHRIS: I went to Charles University in Prague, the Czech Republic.

INSITE: What did you study while you were there?

CHLOE: Spanish and some Psychology.

CHRIS: Czech - language, literature, history and architecture. The whole kit 'n' caboodle.

INSITE: Why did you decide to go abroad?

CHLOE: Because I had visited Spain before and I knew that I wanted to go there again. And because I study Spanish in college.

CHRIS: I was an area studies major and I figured when else am I going to get to go abroad? When I work for some job that pays me way too little and only gives me 2.4 days vacation per year, or when I have three screaming kids.

INSITE: What was the best aspect of your study abroad program?

CHLOE: The school that I went through (U-Wisc) because we got to live with Spanish host families and the program took us on trips on the weekends.

CHRIS: Getting laid. No, um, friends I met on the program...beyond the fact that I was in Prague, which was pretty damn cool.

INSITE: Did you feel fully immersed in the culture?

CHLOE: Yes, by the host families and traveling around and just walking through the streets and going to the discos and all...

CHRIS: No, because I lived in a foreigner dorm and the other kids on my program were pretty much there to party.

INSITE: Did you stay longer in Spain that expected?

CHLOE: Well, I traveled around after my program was over, but I had planned that.

CHRIS: Yeah, an extra month after the program ended, which involved some haranguing to find a place to stay.

INSITE: What was your biggest challenge while abroad?

CHLOE: The distance from my family, and the language barrier at first, but of course that got easier with time.

CHRIS: Learning what to do in a foreign country. The program director was really bad, so we had to learn things in a foreign language pretty much by ourselves, like buy train tickets, how to use public transit, buy groceries, etc.

INSITE: Did you get homesick?

CHLOE: Yeah, of course. Especially around the holidays. But it was more bittersweet, and it was well worth it. I had e-mail and phones and letters, and my boyfriend came and visited me.

CHRIS: I missed my friends, but not my family.

INSITE: Do you have any closing advice for students planning to go abroad?

CHLOE: Pack light! And it is worth spending the extra money to do things related to the culture you're involved in. I regret that I didn't travel more.

CHRIS: Either take a class in the language where you're going, or at least have a degree of interest in where you are - don't just go to drink and party and travel. You get so much more out of it if you want to learn about where you are.

Having done a semester abroad in London herself, your Insite reporter couldn't recommend the experience more heartily. If you can afford it, by all means give yourself this gift and GO, party like a rock star, and then spend the rest of your life trying to figure out how to get back.

