Traveling Beyond The Eyes of a Tourist: The Importance of Cultural Immersion in Study Abroad

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Conclusion

I have learned through this Study Abroad experience that China is much more than its historic past or current politics. I am thoroughly grateful for the opportunity to see such a different place and would encourage everyone to explore a country different than their own. However, what I have found is that the most memorable experiences are those that are not scheduled or planned.

Introduction
In the Summer of 2011, when I was a freshman at the University at Buffalo, I was given an opportunity to Study Abroad in China. Allowing me time to explore, study, and expand my knowledge of Chinese culture, and traditions. I began to lead my own explorations and see sides of China that many might overlook.

The Difference between Traveling and Exploring
While traveling to the Great Wall of China, Forbidden Palace, and seeing the 2008 Olympic Village are all monumental to developing your knowledge of China, exploring beyond those sights are what really allow you to see China through the eyes of the locals. Whether it be the Hutongs that have managed to survive through China’s rapid modernization, or the conversations with locals who took the time to understand your accent, China is full of surprises.

Beyond the Great Wall
The villages around the entrance to the Great Wall greatly depend on tourists. Fruit stands, souvenir shops, and refreshment stands all line the walk up to the Great Wall. As you go you see locals who have carried packs of water bottles and other goods to sell at the top. Many carry their goods strapped to a pole and balanced on their shoulders, making multiple trips a day to sustain their business.

Beyond the Forbidden Palace
During the morning hours of the Forbidden Palace being open you find that many locals come there to exercise, play Chinese chess, or play a game of badminton. It is fascinating to see how even little children get enjoyment out of such a historic place.

Beyond Taxi rides
Public transportation can be the scariest thing to try and navigate in a foreign country. Be it the subway or city busses, both give you the added awareness of your surroundings. They allow you to truly understand the ins and outs of the city you are in.

Beyond the doors of CNU
CNU (Capital Normal University) was the University that I stayed at in Beijing. Some of the most exciting times that I had were when I asked locals about where the best places were to go. I was led to the “best dumpling restaurant” in Beijing, local farmer’s markets, and beautiful parks. With out these interactions I would have never found these places.