

Study abroad: Worth the risks?

Despite potential safety concerns, most students agree that studying abroad is a valuable experience

By Holly Sanders
Oregon Daily Emerald

Study abroad. For some college students the idea conjures up visions of the Eiffel Tower and the Great Wall, while others think of customs inspections and lost luggage.

Either way, most students at some point in their academic careers have wrestled with the idea of going overseas. From the traditional year in Great Britain to an exotic semester in Sumatra, the allure of going abroad often proves irresistible to restless college students. But is studying abroad the ultimate road trip, or a risky game of travel roulette?

The flow of American students to foreign destinations is growing, according to the Institute of International Education, a nonprofit cultural exchange program based in New York. More than 89,000 students were studying abroad in 1995-96, continuing a 10-year upward trend. Although U.S. students abroad still represent only 1 percent of the total enrolled in higher education institutions, the change reflects the increasing emphasis placed on overseas experience.

"Employers are looking for students who have an international awareness. It really is related to the changing nature of the world," says Bill Hoffa, an independent consultant at the School for International Training in Vermont.

Students have been quick to recognize the advantages of a sec-

Foreign destinations

A total of 496 students traveled to the following regions on University-sponsored programs during 1996-97 school year:

East/SE Asia	51
Middle East	4
Africa	2
Europe	301
Latin America	112
Oceania/Pacific	26

SOURCE: Office of International Education & Exchange

CARA STRAZZO/Emerald

ond language and international experience when writing their résumés. Their keen interest in overseas opportunities has motivated colleges and universities across the nation to expand foreign exchange programs.

But while many students are eager to take advantage of overseas opportunities, others are thinking twice before buying that plane ticket. St. Mary's College, a small liberal arts college in Maryland, is still in shock after a two-week tour of Guatemala ended when five students were raped on a tourist bus.

The incident has generated concern about the safety of American students studying overseas and has led some to conclude that certain foreign trips are just too risky. In the latest withdrawal, Spring Arbor College in Michigan recently announced that a group of 16 students and two faculty members were being brought home early from Guatemala as a result of the attack there.

Though the tragedy underscores the potential risks of going overseas, few students are changing their travel plans. Paul DeYoung, director of overseas programs at Reed College in Portland,

says the violence in Guatemala has not deterred students from traveling to foreign destinations. "Ultimately, we have to remember that these are adults. They have to make their own decisions."

And more are choosing to go abroad. Foreign trips, even to countries where risk is involved, can be enriching and rewarding experiences for many students.

During her junior year, Katy O'Mealy spent a semester at East China Normal University in Shanghai, where she studied Chinese for four months. Now a senior at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., she is a top candidate for the Fulbright Program and hopes to continue learning the language while in Taiwan.

Her experience overseas is the main reason she is looking forward to graduation. "I'm not worried at all," O'Mealy says. "I just can't wait for what lies ahead."

Roads less traveled

For an increasing number of students, the road to a successful trip overseas is the one less traveled. Two-thirds of college students still head for Western Europe, according to the Institute of International Education. But now

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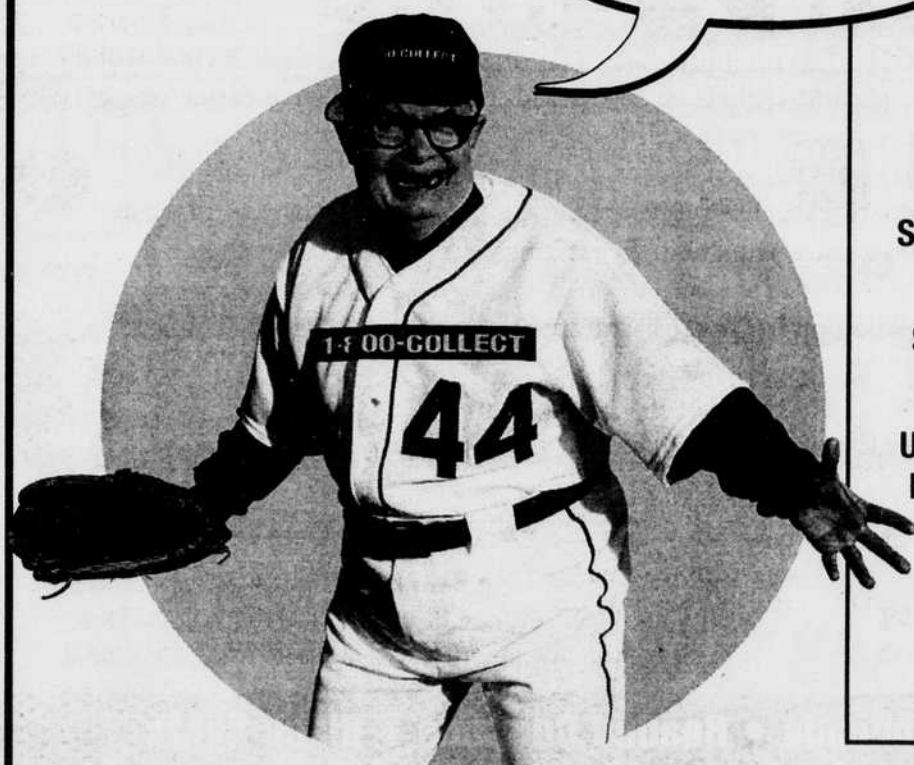
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