

At EASE in the world

Oregon National Guard member Kristy Fitzpatrick will return to Italy before being deployed to Afghanistan

BY SABRINA GOWETTE
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

When Kristy Fitzpatrick arrived at the train station in Macerata, Italy, she immediately lost the comfort and ease of verbal communication. Although she had spent the summer taking Italian classes for her study abroad trip, nothing prepared her for the difficulties of speaking a different language.

Fitzpatrick said going to Italy last fall was the first time she'd been in a country where no one speaks English.

"It was the most traumatizing time in my life," she said.

However, Fitzpatrick made an effort to make Italian friends and learn the language.

"Language is a struggle, but all you have to do is try," she said.

Fitzpatrick has stayed in contact with the people she met while traveling, and she will stay with friends when she returns this summer for a month-long post-graduation vacation.

After going back to Italy this summer, Fitzpatrick will be deployed next spring to Afghanistan for a year as part of the Oregon National Guard. She has been in the Army for three years, in part to help pay for school.

For now, though, Fitzpatrick is focused on her second trip to Italy. She said she's saved up all year just to go back.

"It's a graduation present to myself," she said. "A last hurrah before I go overseas for a year."

Fitzpatrick sits amid the hectic rush hour of students coming in and out of Starbucks, but her energy overpowers the surrounding commotion. Her animated hand gestures bring life to the details of her past traveling experiences.

At 22, Fitzpatrick, an international studies major, has lived in three countries and visited many others, including South Africa and Ireland.

When she was 14 years old, Fitzpatrick lived in Johannesburg, South Africa, with family friends her mother met on an exchange program when she was a teenager. Fitzpatrick studied there for a year and realized

she loved traveling.

"Traveling teaches you a lot about the world," she said.

Fitzpatrick's grandmother, Evelyn Moore, is a resident of Aumsville, Ore., and has hosted several exchange students over the past 30 years. She said Fitzpatrick was able to meet people from other countries, such as Hungary and Japan.

Moore said traveling has encouraged Fitzpatrick to understand why people do things differently.

"It modifies your own culture," she said.

During her stay in Italy, Fitzpatrick traveled to Ireland and England for three weeks. She said she was excited to swim in the Irish ocean and enjoyed Ireland's green scenery.

Fitzpatrick also visited Belfast, Ireland, where she saw a memorial honoring people killed during conflicts with the Irish Republican Army.

"Northern Ireland is definitely a sad, sad place to go. You can just feel it," she said, referring to the history of violence there.

After she completes her deployment in Afghanistan, Fitzpatrick said she wants to go to law school at Willamette University. She said she would like eventually to be an international corporate mediator for American and Italian businesses.

Also, she said she wants to speak four languages, including Russian, Italian and Spanish. She hopes to become fluent in Italian and Spanish, the two languages she already has studied.

"Chinese would be awesome," she said. "I want to be very versatile."

Fitzpatrick's mother, Diana Fitzpatrick, said the way her daughter travels — staying with friends and experiencing different cultures — is more interesting than going on guided tours. She said traveling is good for her daughter because she learns compassion for others.

Fitzpatrick shared similar sentiments. "Understanding different cultures is fundamental to being a human being," she said.

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