

Travel Study Design

Destination: SEMESTER AT SEA

Start date of trip: January 19, 2009

Locations: Nassau, Bahamas; Cadiz, Spain; Naples, Italy; Istanbul, Turkey; Alexandria, Egypt; Chennal, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Hong Kong, China; Shanghai, China; Kobe, Japan; Yokohama, Japan; Honolulu, Hawaii; Puntarenas, Costa Rica



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GOAL STATEMENT

This is not the first time I have traveled outside of the United States for the purpose of international study. I spent a month in Japan the summer after eighth grade as an exchange student. I continued my study in Japanese throughout High School, but since then my command of the language and particular interest in any singular place has waned. When I started my college career in the Fall of 2002, I learned of a program called Semester at Sea that would give me an opportunity to experience a vastly different view on the world as I knew it as well as giving me a chance to learn in a unique environment. Where I plan to go then, is everywhere I can. Primarily this would be study on the boat itself but a list of places in the program I intend to apply for might help out here a little more. The Spring 2009 itinerary currently lists: Nassau, Bahamas; Cadiz, Spain; Naples, Italy; Istanbul, Turkey; Alexandria, Egypt; Chennai, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Hong Kong/Shanghai, China; Kobe/Yokohama, Japan; Honolulu, Hawaii; Puntarenas, Costa Rica; and Miami, Florida.

When considering whether or not the program would be a good fit for my goals in life, I need to see if they match up with the personal, cultural and academic goals that I have set up for myself. To simplify matters, I want to look at immediate achievable goals that I can reach within the near future (one step ahead is easier than three or four.) My academic goal is: Given my general interest in teaching English as a foreign language as a possible career choice, I will need at the very least a college degree and certification. My cultural goal is: Given my desire to experience as much of the world as I can, I will need a way to travel to multiple destinations, as well as the ability or knowledge to survive in unfamiliar environments. My personal goal in life is: complicated. It's hard to simply identify any singular specific goal that I have in life. Assuming that this goal is related to our choices in international travel and study, I run into the problem of having too many things that I want to accomplish. So if I want to make sense of all this, the main thing I need to focus on is this: Given my desire to experience more than I likely will have time for, I will need the ability to make selective choices on what I want to do. This requires time, and clarity, both of which I need more of.

My first goal can be achieved here without the need for studying abroad at all. I can finish my degree here, and a certification program is offered through the College of Extended Studies here at State. The thing I will get from the program is the opportunity to experience, if only briefly, a multitude of different places outside of the United States to help me choose both if teaching English abroad rather than in America is the right choice for me, as well as to help me make a decision as to where I would like to relocate. In addition the program offers (at least a few) of the classes I will need to take in order to complete my graduation requirements. The main benefits of the program will be in helping me make decisions about how I proceed in my future, as well as giving me a way to have fun while doing it. But in order to make sure I am prepared, there are a few things I need to accomplish first. First and foremost I need my passport, I need to find out how to get my photo taken and learn how the application process works before I can actually get one. Secondly, I don't need to know any foreign languages in order to participate in the program, and with so little time comparatively before I would leave, it would be impossible to learn all of the languages spoken in the countries that I will be traveling to. However, it would be in my best interest to learn important phrases and words to help me get around in each place that I go. There are often books that have this kind of information in different languages, and I would need to doublecheck to see if they are available as well as get them for my own reference. Lastly I need to find a way to pay for the program, which means I need to apply for financial aid and loans as necessary well before setting off. This includes planning a budget for spending that is not included with the program itself.

In order to keep a record of my achievements, I intend to keep up with the google page website I started with this class. The basic structure is there for keeping a record of my academic career as well as keeping people up to date with the rest of my life. The photography and blog sections are in place (though fairly barren for right now) and I intend to create a new section on the site for my experiences with Semester at Sea. Most importantly, I find it easier to keep a written record, so my primary source will be a travel journal I will take with me, and I hope to write as often as I can to help me remember my experience. I will add selected transcripts to the travel section of my website. I will also post a link to the class blog in the links section and at the front page of the travel section on my website.



CULTURAL & LINGUISTIC ISSUES (AND COUNTRY PLANS)

Language will, most likely be one of the most difficult barriers to entry that I will encounter on the trip. As the above image illustrate, the voyage will pass through a multitude of entirely different cultures each with distinct language structures. There are three things I have to consider when preparing to leave the boat each time we leave off from port. First, what percentage of the population speaks English (if at all). Second, do I have any experience with the host language and how might I deal with the issue when it arises. Lastly, am I attending a planned “excursion” with a professor from the program. If I am, the language barrier will be alleviated slightly with the planning in place by the program to provide for English speaking students.

What this means for me, is that I should stick to the specific programs provided by Semester at Sea in the countries where language will be a significant impediment. I don’t feel like getting lost or left behind. However, as a contingency plan, I will get a phrasebook for each language I will come across before I leave in January, and I can prepare in the weeks ahead of time while I am still on the boat. I can also leave the ones I don’t need in my cabin while I am away, so I can bring only one at a time. So if I *do* end up running into a situation where I can’t communicate, I have a backup. As I learned in my recent trip to Mexico though, I had a lot of fun listening to people talk, and trying to learn little bits of the language without help. I still have that opportunity as well.

Beyond the issue of language as something I will need to approach at each of my destinations, every stop has its own specific set of problems or considerations I will need to address before setting out. The easiest way to do this is to approach each one individually. In each I will plan out how I will deal with language barriers, briefly address expected social behavior, plan out my social events (i.e. the SAS Field Programs), and any personal travel. There will be some overlap here with the expectations for the Learning Experience section, and I will refer to the information presented here in that section.

BAHAMAS

Unfortunately, my stay in Nassau will consist of the flight in, and the departure out. So my experience will be extremely limited in relation to the other countries. As a primarily English speaking province, language will not be an issue. Although there is a significant number of Creole speakers among the population due to immigration from Haiti (approximately 8 percent)¹. The likelihood of running into a situation where I would be confronted with a language barrier is low. All the same, I intend to present myself with poise and kindness, even if the only time I spend in the country is on a cab ride.

SPAIN

If my recent trip to Mexico has taught me anything, it is that I feel comfortable with the Spanish language, and I have nothing to fear when pressed to communicate in Spanish speaking countries. I don't by any means have a command of the language, but I found myself learning how to say a few basic things even without the phrase-book (Just Enough Spanish) I brought with me. However, despite the language similarities, Cadiz is by no means the same place as Rosarito. There will likely be a far smaller presence of English speakers outside of the port city itself. So I will be focusing the majority of my time in the city. As one of the oldest cities on the Iberian peninsula and in the entire southern area of Spain, there is an excellent opportunity to see the religious history of the region. Spain is mostly Roman Catholic, but has significant Protestant and Islamic populations⁸. So one of the trips I will be taking is a tour of the cathedrals in the area (its cheap too). The other two are going to be an orientation of the city and a hike at Grazelama Natural Park.

ITALY

My experience in Italy should seem very familiar following the stop in Cadiz. I'll be bringing along a copy of "Fast Talk Italian - Essential Language for Short Trips" to help me while I'm in the area. If I can afford it I would like to visit Florence or Venice, but both are relatively far from Naples, and a trip out there would be cost-prohibitive due to related expenses (transportation to and from Naples, and making sure I'm back on time). Because the stop in Naples is so early on in the trip, I doubt that I will travel to far outside of the area. So, like Spain, my focus while visiting will be on the historical. I will be visiting the San Gennaro

Catacombs, as well as short trips to Pompeii and Paestum (a city founded by the Greeks in 600 BC devoted to the god of the sea - Poseidon). I'll be bringing along my copy of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Marble Faun to see how well his descriptions of the catacombs hold up, and hopefully gain some insight into how he wrote Italian landmarks into his novel.

TURKEY & EGYPT

The official language of Turkey is Turkish, but there are also Kurdish, Zaza, Arabic, Armenian and Greek speakers¹⁰. Because such a low percentage of the population speaks English, I will be sticking closer to the group in Turkey. I also feel that it in my best interests to stick with the group due to the region's current perspective on Americans as a people. Though I would like to present myself as an example of positive aspects of the American identity, I think it would be best to keep a low profile. Therefore, this will be the first time during the semester that I will be taking advantage of the extended tours offered by the program. I will be visiting the Gallipoli (Gelibolu) peninsula, and passing through Gallipoli, Troy, Bursa, and Iznik. I also hope to attend an exhibition on Islamic faith and art in Istanbul.

My focus in Turkey as well as Egypt will be on religion and the origins of middle eastern philosophy. Since Troy dates back to 3600 BC and Bursa was the original capitol city of the Ottoman Empire²², I can't think of a better place to learn. When we move into Egypt I will face the transition to a primarily Egyptian Arabic speaking nation⁴. However, unlike Turkey, the U.S. Department of State profile lists English, as well as French as having a significant enough presence to warrant a mention⁴. I will continue to focus on Islamic religion (90% of the population is Muslim⁴) in Egypt, but I will also make time to see Cairo, the City of the Dead, and plan to visit a secondary school in Alexandria. The visit to the school will be exceptionally useful, especially if there is a program that is dedicated to teaching English as a foreign language. Because I have my heart set on teaching in Japan, this is my best opportunity during the entire trip to gather a broader perspective on the profession (teaching English as a foreign language) before making any final decisions.

INDIA

India might prove to be one of the most difficult areas to approach due to its vastly diverse cultural population. India as a whole speaks Hindi, English, and sixteen other official languages⁵. My best bet would be to focus on bringing along a book that would help me with Hindi and Urdu statements. However, especially in dense cities in India (ones with a lot of international traffic), and due to the emphasis on the English languages in higher society since the days of colonialism there is a much higher chance of encountering an English speaker than in some of the other countries I will be visiting. If possible, I would like to attend one of the many festivals put on by the Hindu temple held in the city while I am there (supposedly there are more than 500)²¹. Also, if I can arrange a homestay visit (I have a few friends with a lot of family in Southern India), I would be able to

experience the family structure that is so integral to Indian culture. Fortunately there is a program through SAS that is a visit to the college as well as an optional homestay visit (though brief) that I can apply for if my other options fall through. There are two other programs that feature homestays as well that take up the entire period. In any case I need to be prepared to give a modest gift to the families I will be staying with. Hopefully I'll be able to help out the family as well. The college visit though will give me an opportunity to examine the school structure in India, and if I intend to arrange a short meeting with an English speaking professor to ask him questions on what it is like to teach in a predominately non-English speaking nation. I will also be attending a seminar on poverty and gender issues, held at the college.

THAILAND, VIETNAM & CHINA

While Thailand, Vietnam, and China are culturally distinct, I have grouped them together for two reasons: their regional proximity, and the unique linguistic problem that they raise for me. With the exception of the Japanese language, the East-Asian tongue is entirely alien to me. This is a major reason why I chose phrase-books that will help me with pronunciation. Specifically the Chinese handbook I selected²⁰ advertises the use of phonetic English as a learning device. It will be especially useful given that meaning in the Chinese language can vary significantly with small changes in the way a word or phrase is pronounced.

My intention is to focus on rural culture and lifestyles in these three countries. In Thailand, I will attend the English camp “Volunthai”, which would give me an opportunity to experience the “teaching” of English to High School Students from nearby schools²³. Though it is not the whole of the program (only a few days of it), it will be an invaluable experience for me. In Vietnam, I will visit with an Elementary school and spend three days near Cat Tien National Park. In China, I will spend a day in the “Folk Culture Village” of Shenzhen²⁴. I will also get the chance to experience a simulated “day in the life of” a Shanghai citizen by attending a specific program. Lastly, I will attend a reception at the Jiao Tong University in Shanghai.

JAPAN

My experience with the Japanese language, along with prior visits, will make this the easiest transition out of all the countries that I visit. I plan on taking an early level Japanese course in the fall to brush up a little bit, but my intention is to explore downtown Tokyo as if I had just moved there to see what it feels like. Even though I will be arriving in Kobe, and leaving through Yokohama I plan on spending the majority of my time in Tokyo to focus my attention on modern Japanese culture. I plan on spending a lot of time in the Shibuya and Akihabara districts, which are known for their position on the bleeding edge of Japan’s technological and youth culture. Before leaving for Tokyo, I will spend the first day in Hiroshima and attend a Japanese Tea ceremony. Most of all, my experience in Japan will give me the best opportunity to gauge my comfort level with being on my own (my previous trips were with groups) in a foreign country.

HAWAII & COSTA RICA

Like the Bahamas, these will unfortunately only be one-night stays. They will, however, provide an *excellent* opportunity to relax by the beach before finals. I will be taking the opportunity to visit the Honolulu Academy of Art in Hawaii and Carara National Park in Costa Rica when I am not taking a break.

The information gathered above was taken primarily from the U.S. State Department's website, and the New York Times International Database. Both will be my go to sources for gathering information about the countries I will be visiting. See the bibliography for links to each country's Department of State profile. The CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>) is another excellent resource. The information in detail for each of the phrasebooks is also located in the bibliography, along with a link to their Amazon ID. In addition, I have set up a RSS feed for top news stories from English written periodicals from each country that I can see on my Google reader. It is also available in part on my website.

LOGISTICAL ISSUES

PAPERWORK

I currently do not have an up to date passport, however I am currently in the process of getting a new one (it'll be in the mail soon). That way my passport will be valid throughout the entire trip. Most of the countries I will be traveling to require a passport that is valid between three and six months beyond the entry date, so I won't have to worry about that either. I will also file my taxes online with help from my dad who will be able to securely send me the information on my year end W2 forms. Visas are a little more complicated. Semester at Sea recommends using Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (<http://www.traveldocs.com>) to help expedite the process of applying for visas for each country. I plan on doing this 12 to 14 weeks in advance (around mid September once I hear back from my scholarship applications). For the purposes of the program, I am encouraged to apply for travel visas instead of student visas because of the limited duration of each stop. However, should I choose to apply for student visas I need to contact each consulate individually. In addition, the Pinnacle service charges \$45 for each visa application, so it will be much more expensive to go that route. Ideally, I plan to apply for each individual entry as a travel visa, and not use the service if possible. In fact, I will not need a visa when traveling to Spain, Italy, Thailand, Japan, and Costa Rica. Though I will need proof of onward travel, or an itinerary documentation. Also, for India I also need to process the application online, as well as provide an accurate photocopy of my driver's license. For reference, the visa and entry exit fees in total for each country (if there is a cost) are as follows: Turkey, \$37; Egypt, \$15; India, \$73; Vietnam, \$65; China, \$130.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The MV Explorer, or the ship that I will be traveling on, has a full on-board clinic that will serve for the majority of any health issues that may arise during my trip. In case anything *should* go wrong, I am signing up for a medical plan through MedEx International. They provide a plan that covers specifically for the duration of my trip, and provides insurance for emergency situations and evacuations. The total cost for the plan with a \$100 deductible is \$336. I am up to date with my immunizations, but I might need to get immunized for Yellow Fever prior to my trip. This is because China, Thailand, Egypt, and Turkey require proof of certified documentation (the "International Certificate of Vaccination for Yellow Fever") if I am arriving from an infected area within five days.

TRANSPORTATION

The majority of my “transportation” will take place aboard the ship. However, I plan on budgeting around forty dollars per country as general travel expenses. Unfortunately, we are unable to stay aboard the ship while it is at port (not that I would really *want* to, but it’s cheaper that way). And the structure of the offshore programs do not allow for much freedom in choosing a place to stay. They are also expensive, and given my choice to stay with the group to help maintain a level of communication with the host country, I will be participating in one at every stay except Japan. On the other hand, travel planning is taken care of, as well as booking of rooms and the majority of travel expenses. In Yokohama, I plan on purchasing a train pass, and will try to find a cheap hotel. That way I can travel to Tokyo on one of the off days without having to spend money staying there. Included below is the current Spring 2009 voyage itinerary from the Semester at Sea website

Destination	Arrive	Day	Date	Time
	Depart			
Nassau, Bahamas	Depart	Monday	19 January	1700
Cadiz, Spain	Arrive	Wednesday	28 January	0800
	Depart	Saturday	31 January	2000
Naples, Italy	Arrive	Tuesday	03 February	0800
	Depart	Saturday	07 February	2000
Istanbul, Turkey	Arrive	Tuesday	10 February	0800
	Depart	Saturday	14 February	2000
	Arrive	Tuesday	17 February	0800
Alexandria, Egypt	Depart	Saturday	21 February	2000
(Transit Suez Canal - Sunday, 22 February)				
Chennai, India	Arrive	Wednesday	04 March	0800
	Depart	Sunday	08 March	2000
Bangkok, Thailand	Arrive	Saturday	14 March	0800
	Depart	Wednesday	18 March	2000
Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam	Arrive	Saturday	21 March	0800
	Depart	Thursday	26 March	0600
Hong Kong/Shanghai, China	Arrive	Saturday	28 March	0800
	Depart	Thursday	02 April	2000
	Arrive	Sunday	05 April	0800
Kobe/Yokohama, Japan	Depart	Thursday	09 April	2000
(Cross International dateline, add one day)				
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA	Arrive	Saturday	18 April	0800
	Depart	Sunday	19 April	2000
Puntarenas, Costa Rica	Arrive	Thursday	30 April	0800
	Depart	Friday	01 May	2000
(Transit Panama Canal - Sunday, 03 May)				
Miami, Florida, USA	Arrive	Wednesday	06 May	0800

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Fortunately, the Semester at Sea program is run by the University of Virginia, so obtaining credit for classes is a *little* easier to work out with the academic offices on campus. Mostly because it is an American run institution, so there are no issues in the *way* classes are taught, and it is much easier to get a transcript for future reference because of its location within the United States. In order to get credit, I need to complete two forms I got from the ISC at SDSU: The “SDSU Study Abroad Academic Approval Form” and the “Education Abroad Special Enrollment Agreement”. The first requires course approval from my International Advisor, my General Education Advisor, and my Major Advisor *before* I leave. Unfortunately, the final class schedules have not been posted yet, so I will need to complete this in the fall. However, I have already spoken with my major advisor and the courses I plan to take according to the tentative class schedule (World Literature, Women and Literature, and Poetry From Around the World) can be taken for credit towards the Comparative Literature requirements of my major. Any other classes would be just for my own benefit, as the only classes I have left are major specific.

This is why the Semester at Sea program is so appealing to me. I am excited particularly for the incredible breadth of knowledge I will be exposed to. The flexibility of the program, and my choices of activities while onshore give me the opportunity to learn the things I never got a chance to during the time I have spent at college so far. Not to mention that I will be able to experience for myself places that classroom discussion alone would do no justice. Whether its for architectural and art history in Europe, religion in Turkey and Egypt, family in India, rural community and teaching experience in East Asia, modern cultural immersion in Japan, or the overall global perspective I will gain as a whole, the incredible expense of the program is *absolutely* worth it. I can’t wait.

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- 11) "Vietnam." U.S. Department of State. Dec. 2007. 3 May 2008 <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>>.

Phrasebooks

Note: The following is a link to an Amazon.com wish list with links to the product pages for each of the phrasebooks. I based my choices on customer reviews, sales rank, product description and weight. <<http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/39N66PWTX439C>>

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