

# The Globetrotter

Study abroad helps chart life's course

By Kristin Luna ('05)

**I**t was never a question of whether I would study abroad, but rather a matter of where. When you have an entire map from which to choose, how do you go about throwing a dart at it and picking where you'd like to live for a semester? Paris, Sydney, Costa Rica, Tokyo? Each had its own special appeal.

The first time I went abroad, I spent a semester at the University of Edinburgh. I loved every second I spent in the Gothic city and even tried to relocate there permanently upon graduating. Little did I know that was only the beginning.

Being surrounded by such architectural beauty and natural splendor, living in Scotland gave me a passion for writing about such places and inspiring others to follow in my footsteps. Suddenly, I no longer had much of a desire to be a sports reporter and set my sights on travel writing instead.

After finishing my bachelor's degree in journalism and electronic media, I went abroad for a year via the Europe in the World program. I had worked at *Newsweek* during the summer but wasn't ready to settle into a job—at least, not just yet. So, armed with a good friend—a fellow UT graduate—it was off to study abroad again. I bulked up my freelance portfolio while taking on a number of European travel assignments. I became a regular correspondent for *Newsweek* and began collecting story ideas to pitch to other magazines, as well.

While in Holland and Denmark, I saw an ad from MTV calling for writers for a new series of guidebooks. Out of more than a thousand people, I nabbed one of sixteen spots and found myself in Spain writing my first book at twenty-three years old.

In 2010, a chance occurrence in Cape Town, South Africa, altered the course of my career. My sister, an undergrad at UT, was studying abroad via the mobile campus Semester at Sea,

and my mom and I had gone to visit her along the way. I ran into former UT chancellor Loren Crabtree. Upon hearing that I was working as a journalist in the travel sector, he suggested I apply to work for Semester at Sea. A year later, I was on my first voyage around the world.

I've immersed myself in the program and sail as often as they'll have me. (I'm currently writing from the ship.)

I love the idea that I'm thirty years old and still "studying abroad." Had I known earlier about Semester at Sea, I would have gotten on that ship as a student and never left.

Along the way I also started my own travel blog, *Camels & Chocolate*, which has propelled me into the digital world. Now, on top of being employed as a journalist and working stints on the ship, I run a digital marketing firm, Odinn Media, with my husband. I'm also executing a first-year tech conference, KEEN Digital Summit, in Nashville this October. I'm confident none of this would have happened had I stayed grounded—or rather, remained stationary.

Studying abroad instilled in me a thirst for knowledge, a passion to see what's out there, and an empathy for humankind that I didn't have before venturing overseas for the first time. Every time I encounter a student who opted to not study abroad for any reason—didn't want to leave a boyfriend, didn't want to miss out on a semester of sorority life, didn't want to assume the financial burden of a loan—I wish I could offer them a peek into their future and what it might hold if they'd put aside all the "what ifs" and adopt the mentality of "Why not?" instead. I know I'm glad I did. 

*Kristin Luna is a travel writer, who has visited more than eighty countries. In 2011, she returned from a round-the-world voyage by ship, which she calls, "the coolest experience I've ever had."*

