

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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SIT: Regional Integration, Development, and Social Change

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Major: International Relations & Psychology

Program: I was in a group of 25 American students, which I found to be a perfect group size. We took social and economic development classes at a local research institute in Buenos Aires, and Spanish classes at the University of Buenos Aires. We had alternating local professors who specialized in the subject we were studying at the time. Additionally, the Spanish teachers were incredible, and my Spanish increased substantially during my time there.

One of the unique aspects of SIT is its emphasis on experiential learning; rather than always sitting in classrooms to learn, we were taken to visit places that were relevant to what we were studying. For example, we visited a shantytown to study social change and a recovered factory while we were studying the economic crisis. We also stayed in a rural town called Arrecifes for a week, which is an important center for soy production. We visited soy farms and factories, and lived with a homestay in order to understand the way of life in rural Argentina. On our second trip, the whole group went to Brazil, and then the group split into two; one went to Paraguay and the other went to Uruguay (but not before visiting the famous Iguazu Falls!)



Another amazing feature of SIT is the Independent Study Project (ISP.) For the last four weeks of the semester, we spent our time researching the topic of our choice in order to write a forty-page paper in Spanish. Although the idea of this seemed daunting at the beginning of the program, it wasn't nearly as difficult as everyone expected. We had access to amazing tutors and resources, and I know that for many students (including myself), this project became their senior thesis topic.

Typical Day: It is hard to say what a typical day was because we traveled extensively, but while in Buenos Aires, I would wake up, meet up with a friend, and go for a run in one of Palermo's incredible parks. After having a cup of coffee at a café on my street, I walked twenty minutes to the research institute where our morning classes were held. At 12:00, I would have lunch at one of the amazing cafes in the neighborhood. My friends and I would sit at an outside table while munching on empanadas. We then took the subway to the University of Buenos Aires for Spanish class. After getting out of class at five, a group of us would often go to a nearby café and do homework before heading home. My family typically ate dinner around 8:00 or 9:00, so I would return home and sit in the kitchen with my family, while eating more incredible food and discussing our days in Spanish.

Highlights: It is so hard to just choose one or two highlights. I cannot even begin to explain how incredible my homestay family was. I lived with a mother and her two children, who were 20 and 21 years old. I felt like the third sibling almost immediately. My host sister introduced me to her entire group of friends, who took me out with them on the weekends. I went shopping with my host mother, and went on weekend trips to visit their friends who lived in the suburbs. They truly adopted me as a part of their family, and I feel that as a result, I became immersed in Argentine culture.

I also really enjoyed the traveling that I was able to do for classes. The trips to Brazil and Paraguay were amazing because it allowed me to see the other countries in the Southern Cone that we were studying. In addition to the academic excursions that we went on during those trips, the program took us to really cool cultural places such as a mouthwatering Brazilian steakhouse that had traditional dance performances while you ate.

Challenges: As someone who grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, my biggest issue was adjusting to the size and fast paced nature of Buenos Aires. Trying to navigate public transportation, be aware of pickpockets, and generally tackle the huge city was initially a struggle. But at the same time, this was one of the positive aspects of my semester because it forced me out of my comfort zone and I feel like a more capable person as a result. The size of the city really allows you the opportunity to explore new things throughout all four months – there is no shortage of places to see and things to do.

Advice: Embrace the homestay. In all honesty, initially when choosing programs I thought that I wanted to live in an apartment in order to have more independence. Yet the homestay ended up being the best part of my semester. My Argentine family became my second family, and my fondest memories are those in which I was with them. There is truly no better way to immerse yourself in the culture. In addition to this, just have an open mind and be flexible, and you'll have an incredible experience.

