Here's my Study Abroad Story

Kelsey Cherland
IFSA-Butler, England: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
London, England, United Kingdom

Major: International Relations

Program: With IFSA-Butler's program in London you'll have the opportunity to hop the Tube to your delights, explore the outdoors of Wales, walk along the rocky beach of Brighton, England and taste the foods of a truly cosmopolitan city. In a matter of months, you will experience the history and future of London while learning at a renowned research University focused on Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

In London, you'll take four courses. I had the chance to take classes toward my I.R. major that were outside my government focus. I learned about NGOs, Middle Eastern film, and the anthropology of New Media. In addition, I studied Arabic and had the chance to hear Arabic every day on the streets. I was in London, but the diversity made you wonder about the other cultures within the city! The program encourages students to take advantage of the resources available through the University of London, and their tips and resources for travel within the United Kingdom and throughout Europe are excellent. My favorite cultural adventures were exploring the British Museum, canoeing through a lake in Wales, tea and biscuits in Kensington Palace, and the spicy curry from Brick Lane. The kinds of friends I made in London were diverse in experiences and backgrounds. I gained such a wide variety of perspectives in this program and fell in love with London.

Typical Day: I would typically wake up at 8 am to make tea and toast for breakfast or I would grab some food from the Union. Either way, I would take a brisk 15 minute walk from my dormitory to the buildings where my classes were. From 9:00 am until noon, I would have class. Then, I would eat lunch from the Hare Krishna cart on campus, where a diverse line of students, professors, locals, and the homeless would queue up for a free vegetarian dish with rice and fruit. Then, I would often have a course or a tutorial (discussion component of the course). The discussions and my readings were thought-provoking. In the evening, some other students and I would walk back to the dormitory or stop at a Middle Eastern restaurant for a cheap dinner. Sometimes, I would arrive earlier or leave later to study at the SOAS library, which is divided by regional focus and is fun to explore. On the weekends, my friends and I would usually go to a pub or explore the city's nightlife!
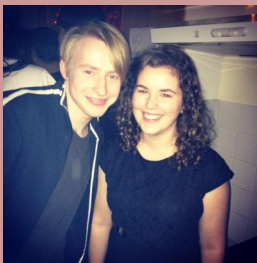
On the weekends I would often enjoy walking around the city and witnessing the diversity. As the weather became warmer, my friends and I would study outside in the parks scattered throughout the city. During exam period there was a combination of downtime and study time, so I used this time to explore the more "touristy" areas of town. The River Thames is an amazing view at night!

Highlights: I loved making a wide variety of friends! I felt included in the diversity that London has to offer. Exploring the museums and restaurants were a delight. Even just chatting about cultural similarities and differences over local cider and ales was always a treat.

Challenges: London is a "cold" society in that it's initially difficult to make friends. I wish that I would have become more involved in the Societies at SOAS because I think it would have been a great opportunity to make friends more quickly. I also found the distance between my dorm and school to be challenging on some colder days. It's definitely not like CMC!

Advice: 1) Get creative with how you spend your time! There are so many things to do and explore, so get started right away because there is no "right" way to study abroad. Go to museums. If you "get lost," wander around because the streets themselves are fascinating.

2) Study early! Do not get behind on the readings and do not procrastinate your writing or studying. But also do the best you can and do not make your books the ONLY experience you have. The academic system emphasizes testing more than the United States.

3) Make a conscious effort to be social. Get involved at your University. Join a Society, go to parties hosted by the University, talk to your flatmates about your cultural experiences and their experiences. Attend the events offered by IFSA-Butler. Their office is a great source of information and also has some friendly faces!