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**International Learning Adventures: A phenomenological exploration of
international backpacker style study abroad**

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Abstract

Self-awareness, cultural competency, environmental consciousness, and economic empathy are often achieved through study abroad travel experiences. This phenomenological study was intended to shed light on the international backpacking study abroad experiences for college students, describing the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and its meaning for those participants. The literature on international travel and study abroad experiences suggest that sojourners are often transformed from the travel experience through personal growth; gaining an alternative perspective to their current understanding of the world and also becoming more globally aware. The purpose of this study was to understand what kinds of personal experiences occurred for the individual travelers while participating on a short-term (two weeks to two months) international backpacking adventure travel experience. The focus of the study was the Mesa State College Outdoor Program's International Learning Adventures (ILA), designed to provide participants with the opportunity to develop international understanding, cultural and global awareness, and personal transformation through adventure/experiential based education. Participants for the study were selected ILA team members from Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado, who participated in the program between 2003 and 2009.

Through a phenomenological study and photo elicitation interviews, the individual traveler's experiences were explored to gain new insights on the backpacker travel study abroad phenomenon. The methodology, based on the descriptive phenomenological model, included in-depth individual photo elicitation interviews with

10 participants. Data was analyzed to determine emerging themes and describe the traveler's experiences.

The research uncovered four main themes. First, backpacker style travel played a significant role that led to a sense of exploration, adventure, fun, and serendipity. Second, students increased their global perspective and awareness. Third, the participants experienced significant personal growth. And finally, the participants expressed feeling connected with the world and other cultures, leading to a kind of transformation in their thinking and attitude towards other cultures, themselves, the environment, and life in general.

The information gained from this study will help shed light on a new manner of study abroad experience that integrates backpacker style travel into short-term study abroad opportunities. Sustainability education requires that students see the connections between all things on this planet. By understanding and developing themes surrounding an ILA experience, perhaps this new research can help create awareness of sustainability issues on a personal and global level.

Keywords: backpacker travel, study abroad, transformation, sustainable education

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Chapter 1. Effects of Education on a Sustainable Existence

Globalization and the neoliberal mindset within education have played a major role in resource depletion, climate change, species extinction, poverty, and over-population (Boron & Torres, 1996; Freire, 1970; McGinn, 1996, 1997; Mulenga, 1996; O'Sullivan, 1999; Pannu, 1996). Humanity is now at a new frontier. Never before have human actions and choices so fundamentally altered the ecological, economic, and social landscape of our planet. Traditionally institutions of higher education have informed students on how to be useful citizens and professionals through informative education. However, in a globally connected, postmodern, and rapidly changing world, knowledge based education cannot serve as the primary form of education. More of the same kind of education will not prepare students for the realities of today and the unknown challenges of tomorrow. The existentialist Paul Tillich (1987) explained that by avoiding our frontiers and boundaries we will simply remain habitually entrenched. Now is not the time to hunker down and simply work harder on the same old systems that created our modern day dilemmas. Rather, now is the time to promote a transformation towards seeing the vital connections between all things on this planet and break down the boundaries that prevent a more sustainable and peaceful world.

To combat destructive ecological, economic, and social trends; governments, universities, NGO's, businesses, and people around the world are promoting the idea of sustainable development. These organizations seek to meet the demands of today without compromising future generations. In regards to higher education, the idea of sustainable development has entered the halls of academia, especially when considering building design, procurement, and energy consumption (Webster & Dautremont-Smith, 2008).

However, the stark reality is that the majority of our universities are modeled as industrialized knowledge factories, designed to deliver “knowing in fragments, knowing without direction and knowing without commitment” (Rowe, 1990, p. 129). The modern day education system must challenge our preconceived notions of the world, teach us to reflect on our actions, and encourage a more sustainable existence. In other words, the students of today must not only know the facts but must understand that their individual choices of today will create the realities of tomorrow. At the core of transformative and sustainability education lies the very idea of responsibility of our choices and using our knowledge to create a more integral, stable, and beautiful world.

Formal definitions of sustainability are included in the literature review, but for the purpose of this paper I will incorporate my own definition of sustainability and sustainability education. Our modern day education system often focuses too much on dividing the world into neat subject areas that do not represent reality. The world is made up of interrelated systems. One of the fundamental purposes of education should be to facilitate the understanding of connections between our actions, the ecosystem, society, and our livelihood. For this reason I believe, in the simplest terms, that sustainability is the ability to “see connections” and then acting responsibly to sustain these connections. Sustainability education is simply creating the environment for your students to see the connections and helping them to foster a sustainable existence. This simple definition comes with a caveat. It assumes that once people make the connections they will want to understand and nurture the vital relationships that sustain our planet. However, as sustainability becomes more of a buzz word, we must fight the temptation of connecting

the word sustainability to our current unsustainable American education system and lifestyle.

To many people around the world, the idea of a sustainable existence is attractive as long as they do not have to change their lifestyle. The “inconvenient truth” (Gore, 2006) is that a sustainable existence will never be realized without a transformation in lifestyle and thought, particularly many first world countries ways of life. Americans, who consume more resources, emit more greenhouse gases, and produce more waste per capita than any other people on earth, must recognize the consequences of the American dream before any kind of sustainable existence can begin (Moran, Mathis, Kitzes, Goldfinger & Boutaud, 2008). However, many Americans are creatures of habit with strong ideologies and a yearning for the status quo. Perhaps President George H. W. Bush stated it best when he infamously declared, on the eve of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, that “the American way of life is not negotiable” (Tehranian & Lum, 2006, p. 41). Sixteen years later, his son, President George W. Bush, even after admitting that “Americans are addicted to oil” in the *2006 State of the Union Address*, still believes our way of life is not negotiable, but instead, can be maintained with government subsidized ethanol based fuels and drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Koplow, 2006; Sandalow, 2008). Instead of joining the global community and ratifying the Kyoto protocol, the first major international agreement on greenhouse gas reduction, the Bush administration chose to alienate our nation from an intergovernmental agreement and focus on a domestic voluntary approach to carbon reduction. The environment, social systems, and economy cannot wait for the American government to take action (Adler,

2008). Indeed politicians will never be able to make true changes unless the American public is ready for change.

Change is not easy, it involves critical reflection of personal values, points of view, biases, and assumptions. Jack Mezirow (1997), an expert in the field of transformative learning, suggests that transformation is a process of effecting change in personal frames of references. A frame of reference helps our ego understand our experiences and relationships in this world and consists of points of view and habits of mind. In order to realize a sustainable world, Americans will need to reflect on personal biases and assumptions to reposition our understanding and to change our worldview. Indeed we are talking about a great personal and social transformation. Thomas Berry (1999) explained this transformation as the “Great Work” of our age, a “transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner” (p. 3). Indeed the world situation looks bleak and only a major transformation in thought and mind will lead us away from our current trajectory.

Societal and personal change often involves a cataclysmic event such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor, The Great Depression, 9/11, or the tsunami that destroyed a great part of Southeast Asia. But more often than not, true change requires personal and public awareness of the issues in order for the catalyst to have a lasting effect. In other words, a person needs to become intimately connected with the issues at hand in order to have the motivation to change. In the first nine years of the 21st century our nation and the entire world have experienced the effects of war, peak oil, terrorism, global climate change, rising fuel costs, and a worldwide economic recession. Perhaps these events will

personally connect Americans to the issues at hand and provide the catalyst so needed for an American lifestyle transformation. In order for these events to transform us personally and socially our government and educational institutions will need to create public awareness and a sense of connection to the ecological, social and economic impacts of our current lifestyles. The next great social transformation, as all great movements prove, will not be isolated to a particular race, geographic location, or social class; we are all in this together and each of us will play a vital role in creating a sustainable planet (Berry, 1999; Edwards, 2005; Orr, 1994; Sachs, 2005; Senge, 2008). As such, a social transformation will need to occur on the individual level and indeed we will need to create the environment and learning experiences necessary for change. Sachs (2008), author of several sustainable economic books and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, explains that:

Great social transformations, the end of slavery, the women's and civil rights movements, the end of colonial rule, and the birth of environmentalism, all began with public awareness. Our political leaders followed rather than led. It was scientist, engineers, churchgoers and young people who truly led the way. If as citizens we vote for war, then war it will be. If instead we support a global commitment to sustainable development, then our leaders will follow, and we will have peace. (p. 40)

The individuals who make up our society will have to lead the way for transformation. In a world of nations, states, divisions, borders with fences and political lines on maps, citizens of the world will need to overcome these obstacles in order to work together and live in a sustainable manner.

For Americans to participate in the great social transformation of the 21st century, going from the ideology of endless growth to the realities of a fixed global ecology, they will need to understand how connected we are to the environment and to the other people and species around the world and become change agents for a more sustainable planet. In an interconnected world there is no escaping the reality of cross-cultural interactions and conflicts. In order to share our common planet, we will need to become familiar with the attitudes and values of other people and other cultures around the world. Elias and Merriam (1984) state that “in order to understand another’s behavior, one must enter that person’s world. An empathetic identification with other human situations lays the foundation for the humanistic goal of promoting a better world for all humanity” (p. 120). Indeed, we will need to find a path that allows for cross-cultural understanding, educates us about the values of sustainable living and promotes transformative learning.

Sachs (2008), in his latest book *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, lays out principles of how each of us can play a role and have a chance for leadership that can help transform our society. First, study the issues in school, on the web, in books and magazines. Become an informed and knowledgeable citizen about our greatest challenges of environmental sustainability, poverty and global politics. Second, he stresses that we must travel and see the world. Sachs believes that the best way to understand our common interest is to see other cultures and places and to experience firsthand the destructive forces of human nature, such as climate change, water shortages and economic hardship. Sachs (2008) further explains in a recent article in *Time* magazine that:

There is no substitute for seeing extreme poverty, or deforestation, or the destructive forces of nature in New Orleans, to understand our generation's real challenges. There is no substitute for meeting and engaging with people across cultures, religions and regions to realize that we are all in this together. (p. 40)

Sachs (2008) explains that most colleges promote foreign study that immerses students in foreign culture and society. He further stresses "These are life-changing and life-shaping opportunities not to be missed whenever available" (p. 337). His recommendation of travel suggests that travel should be a part of any educational endeavor, especially for college graduates or any person for that matter.

Third, become an active member and change agent of your community by getting your business, church, or student group to promote sustainable development. Pockets of Americans are already taking charge in government, at colleges and universities and in businesses across the nation, initiating green practices, erecting solar panels, building energy efficient facilities and buying wind energy. Finally, we must personally transform our lives to meet the standards of the Millennium Promises, addressing the issues of climate change, poverty, healthcare, and the fight against hunger; choosing to reach across countries, cultures, religions, and class divisions to find the common interest that we all share. We must donate time, money, and energy to the causes and social networks that promote sustainability and cross-culture awareness (Sachs, 2008). In other words, we must learn to change our own practices through self-evaluation and gain a worldview that incorporates sustainable practices and the other people and species of the world.

These four methods provide a great way to promote sustainable development; however, only one of the methods of interaction stands out in terms of experiential

learning and having a profound interaction with an alternate reality. Sachs' second suggestion of 'travel' is the most significant form of interaction that gives a person an actual chance to live in a different manner, to gain insight to how other cultures perceive the world, to see the effects of global consumption, to smell the raw sewage running through neighborhoods, to feel the spirit of tribal kinship, to learn what it is like to live without electricity, to witness poverty, to see entire towns without cars, and to see the world as it truly is, a wondrous planet enshrouded in the "unresolved problem of combining economic wellbeing with environmental sustainability" (Sachs, 2008, p. 40). As there is no alternative to experience, it may be inferred that one of the most effective ways of learning is experiential learning. Harris and Schwann (1961) explained that "learning is essentially change due to experience" (p.1-2). In fact, some argue that learning only occurs when a distinguishable change occurs in the learner (Burton, 1963; Collins, 1987; Mezirow, 1990). This paper attempts to marry the powerful transformational experiences of international education and travel to the core values of sustainability education. International experiences have played a critical role in transformation for thousands of years, from the classic pilgrimage to the modern day backpacker seeking answers to today's complex questions. If international education and travel could somehow become an integral part of our educational paradigm then perhaps the sojourn experience could provide a catalyst for creating connections and sustainable change.

To aid economic, social, and environmental prosperity many educators are promoting the idea of sustainable education. Sustainability education strives to educate about sustainable practices as well as educate in a sustainable manner. In other words,

teaching that emulates praxis. It is one thing to learn about sustainability in a classroom and another to actually go out and practice sustainability. Very few models of education teach environmental, social, and economic awareness as interconnected concepts and in an experiential manner. At the heart of sustainability education lies the idea of transformation, for why teach about sustainability unless we intend to change the way we think as a culture? Clearly our modern education system helped teach us to think in a particular manner and had a hand in leading us to this juncture of economic, social, and environmental degradation. Indeed, our failure to live in a sustainable manner has played a role in prompting education reform, the idea that we need to teach about sustainability and in a sustainable manner in order to transform our society. Luckily, much work in the field of sustainability has penetrated the walls of academia and education in the form of global education, international education, experiential education, adventure education, transformative education, environmental science, and interdisciplinary education. Each of these areas of education encompasses aspects of sustainable education, allowing students to see connections. Global and international education promote cultural and societal awareness; experiential and adventure education incorporate learning through experience, risk and reflection; environmental science teaches about the core science of our environment and its importance; interdisciplinary education attempts to connect and transcend the arbitrary disciplinary boundaries; and finally transformative education challenges us to incorporate these educational endeavors into a different frame of mind, potentially changing the very nature of how we live on this planet (Sterling, 2001). As great as these ideas appear, very few educational opportunities exist that truly integrate these sustainable forms of education into a style that teaches about economic, social, and

environmental issues in an experiential format that incorporates various disciplinary fields into a transformative model.

If we are to live up to Sachs' principles, then we will need to experience them and transform our current way of thinking. We will need to create the environment and learning opportunities for sustainable principles to flourish and be integrated into our world view. Institutions of higher learning are in the perfect position to craft curriculum and opportunities of experiential, international and sustainability learning. However, as Orr (1994) bluntly states, "More of the same kind of education can only make things worse" (p.170). Now more than ever education needs to change directions. Berry (1999) continues by saying, "As now functioning, the university prepares students for their role in extending human dominion over the natural world, not for intimate presence to the natural world" (p.72). Clearly our university settings will need a little reorienting. Just as President Nixon help to transform U.S. environmental policy in 1970 with the National Environmental Policy Act, we need an act that can help align education reform with economic, social and environmental sustainability (Whitaker, 1976). The Environmental Education Act of 1990 started the process but did not change the educational structure; rather it simply added another subject area to an already broken system and in many cases, environmental education has largely been underfunded and ignored (Zoller, 1990; Braus, 1995). The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 to 2014) provides yet another opportunity to educate students about the social, ecological, and economic problems of our time. One possible avenue is for American colleges, universities, and study abroad programs to create international education opportunities that incorporate Sachs' methods of information, travel, activism, and a personal

transformation towards sustainable concepts. For many Americans, the college or university study abroad programs could provide the perfect travel opportunity to experience other cultures, environments, and social problems that we all share on this planet. However, many college students cannot spare the time or expense to travel overseas for five or six months and most programs do not stress the values of sustainable development and our connections to these issues. Likewise, many travel opportunities are expensive and do not include educational, transformative, and sustainable components. For example, two popular methods of travel entail being on a cruise ship or partaking in all-inclusive packages, neither of which allows for authentic interaction with a foreign culture. To make international travel and sustainable awareness more accessible to students; universities, colleges, and international education organizations should create short-term (two to eight week) international learning opportunities that are affordable and flexible for the average student and incorporate the ideals of sustainable travel, cross-cultural awareness and experiential education. In fact, many colleges, universities, and international study abroad organizations are answering this call.

One great example of a university and international organization creating a unique learning environment is International Student Volunteers (ISV). ISV provides travel opportunities that combine education, conservation, and adventure into life transforming experiences for the participants; while giving back to the local communities in the countries in which they travel. ISV encourages participants to earn academic credit from their home institution through independent study programs. The University of Australia offers 12 credit hours for participating on a two-week ISV program. This is but one of many programs promoting a great international experience. The subsequent literature

review will give other examples. However, of all the examples explored, not one incorporates the idea of backpacking travel with international education. The typical international education experiences are very organized, pre-arranged, and completely designed to take the student by the hand and lead them through the whole experience. In essence, most study abroad programs are so regimented and structured as to water down the actual authentic learning experience that travel affords. There is great value in following a structured program especially for analytical thinkers but there is also tremendous value with just getting off the beaten track, diving into another culture, and allowing serendipity to play a central role. Backpacking travel provides a means of introducing people to a style of travel that is more affordable and allows students to explore a deeper cultural experience. The concept of backpacking travel includes low budgets, use of public transportation, cheap hostels, meeting the locals, and seeking the unique, adventurous, and authentic experiences that can lead to profound self-transformation and interconnectedness (Noy, 2004; Sorensen, 2003). Considering that backpacking style travel incorporates many of the attributes discussed by Sachs (2008), such as traveling, becoming informed about the issues, and transformation; curriculums should incorporate more backpacking style adventures to facilitate transformative educational experiences. Perhaps the expertise does not currently exist to facilitate such programs within higher learning. However, as the literature review will reveal, several programs are becoming very innovative with their travel experiences but still fall short of true overland backpacker style travel.

The idea of traveling and seeing the world is a wonderful concept, but travel has many faces, often contributing to global problems rather than enlightening people.

Travel usually describes some kind of leisure activity in the sand, surf, and sun and indeed many skeptics believe the very nature of travel is unsustainable, especially when considering the carbon-spewing jets, all inclusive mega resorts, luxury cruise ships, mass tourist deluges to fragile ecosystems and coastal locations, and the infusion of Western ideas into indigenous populations (Liu, 2003). If people are to learn about sustainable concepts, escaping to Jamaica for the weekend to lounge around a man-made pool next to a beach where a mangrove forest once stood is not going to do the trick (Hawkes & Kwotnik, 2006). Mass tourism and some study abroad programs could in fact promote unethical and unsustainable behavior abroad and at home. In contrast to the mass tourist version of travel, other kinds of sojourners exist, travelers with a conscience, sometimes referred to as the moral tourist (Brown & Lehto, 2005). At a minimal, the methods of ecological friendly travel should be combined with study abroad programs to help instill the values of sustainability and cultural sensitivity. These characteristics should play a key role in any travel experience especially when teaching sustainable concepts during study abroad travel. There is no better way to learn about sustainable principles than actually living and practicing the concepts. These experiential learning opportunities help internalize the events, leading to more authentic learning through discovery and self-evaluation. Perhaps a better approach to study abroad programs could infuse the ideals of backpacker style travel with responsible tourism within an educational setting. Students could learn how to travel on a budget, be more flexible with their time, and potentially be transformed though intense cultural and authentic travel experiences. These experiences could lead to the kinds of connections that students will need in order to solve today's complex problems. Today's educators need to create a whole new style of educational



travel that includes the time tested backpacker travel methods with the new concepts of sustainable travel.

The modern day education system often focuses on gathering data and information and at times seeking knowledge. However, rarely does our education system strive for understanding and wisdom (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008). A person can learn about sustainable practices in so many ways, from buying books and studying in college to joining your local environmental organization and researching on the internet. However, a sustainable learning experience, such as an international backpacking travel experience conducted in a sustainable manner, has an element that the other methods of interaction simply do not have. On an international sustainable travel experience, a person actually experiences and lives in such a way that practices sustainable concepts and most importantly allows the student to seek explanations as to ‘why’ our planet is under duress. In other words, the sustainable traveler actually participates in methods that promote alternatives, are culturally sensitive, make meaningful connections, give back to communities, and conserve natural resources for future generation (Sustainable Travel International, 2008). When students are allowed to explore their world for knowledge, seek understanding, and evaluate their findings, they find wisdom. For example, students could become conscious of unsustainable aspects of travel such as flying and critically discuss the merits of carbon offsetting. Living in a sustainable manner is simply having the wisdom that all things on this planet are connected and that our actions are part of the whole system.

The value of sustainable education in study abroad programs and international travel cannot be understated, especially if the traveler truly understands and incorporates

the concepts of sustainable travel. Dewey (1938) said that, “all genuine education comes through experience” (p.25). No doubt, eco-friendly international education opportunities provide the experience of a lifetime, setting up the ultimate experiential learning opportunity. Some of the hallmarks of experiential education are encouraging the big picture perspective, creating emotional investment, the re-examining of values and learning outside of one’s perceived comfort zone (Warren, Sakofs, & Hunt, 1995 p. 245-246). On an international backpacker sustainable travel experience, a person will most likely encounter these key experiential learning opportunities through such means as buying at local establishments, engaging in service learning projects and learning about local cultures.

International travel experiences often provide learning opportunities. Elias and Merriam (1984) explain that to most learners, especially adult learners with diverse past experiences, what is “learned” is different for each individual and therefore very personal in nature and highly dependent on a person’s interests, attitudes, and beliefs. When learning is meaningful to a student, it is internalized and becomes a part of the person’s beliefs and perceptions. Four main concepts in learning are requisite to internalization: self-evaluation, intrinsic motivation, self-concept and perception (Elias & Merriam, 1984). Each of these ideas can be fostered most effectively when learned in an environment of discovery. Inherent in every human being is the desire to discover. International travel experiences provide an environment of discovery, especially the more exotic and foreign the location. Environments of discovery promote self-evaluation which can lead to a revision of self-concepts and one’s perception.

This begs the question: Do Americans have many chances to explore and discover new cultures and regions that promote critical self-evaluations? And if they do travel and explore overseas what does the traveler actually experience? Trying to measure the amount of students and travelers going overseas, can be attained through comprehensive quantitative analysis; however, determining if the sojourner experienced meaningful transformations and connections could prove difficult if utilizing traditional quantitative approaches. A better method would be to describe the international travel phenomenon and to search for greater understanding surrounding the experience.

Traditional study abroad programs in many ways resemble modern day mass tourism and are embedded in the traditional educational paradigm. Students most often spend their days studying in classroom environments and shuttling back and forth between their familiar college environment and their host family. Study abroad programs need a paradigm shift, based on the ideas of sustainable travel and sustainable and experiential learning. In order for sustainable education to prosper, people need to remember what circumstance helped them see the connections and then they must recreate that experience for others. For me, the connections came on my first international trip. For this reason I propose a new style of study abroad, one that gets back to the transformative power of travel, that is about the journey and not the destination, that incorporates adventure and exploration, being pushed outside one's comfort zone, fear, fatigue, pleasure, self discovery, transformation, and ultimately a realization of interconnectedness. Each of these areas will be addressed in the literature review.

Background and Theoretical Framework of International Learning Adventures

The Mesa State College Outdoor Program (MSCOP) in Grand Junction, Colorado offers winter and summer international learning adventures (ILA) between the academic semesters to help students better understand the world in which we live by developing connections and insights to other cultures and the environments around the world. These trips are not designed as vacations but rather adventures in personal transformation and intense immersion into the environments of developing countries. Typically a group consists of 9 to 14 cohort members of students, faculty, alumni and the trip facilitator. The trips strive to incorporate Sach's (2008) ideas of information, travel, activism and a personal transformation towards sustainable concepts. Instead of addressing each idea separately, ILA programs combine all aspects into one international trip by combining international travel with information on environment, society and economics and transformation through personal self-reflection, and interacting and practicing the principles of sustainable travel.

The trips focus on student involvement and the group's collaborative effort to shape the itinerary and events of the trip. The group usually starts with a trip plan with the idea that it will evolve as the trip unfolds, allowing for the possibility of intuitive interaction to shape and change the orientation of the trip. In this way students learn how to travel and accept change on a continual basis, building understanding and tolerance towards members in the group, new cultures and ways of living. Quite often it is the unplanned events on trips that become the most unforgettable memories. I like to call these the 'micromoments' of travel.

Students handle their own expenses so that they learn how to budget for a trip; overspending in one area will mean consequences in another area. Each student is responsible for buying their own plane ticket, food, in-country transportation and any other expenses while in country. The intent is to provide an authentic, empowering and affordable short-term study abroad experience for students who may not have the funding or time for a semester abroad. Also the focus of the trip is to get away from the "packaged" study abroad experience where a third party handles all the expenses, makes the majority of travel arrangements and predetermines locations to be visited. These trips are not designed to be vacations, but rather real world experiences that make the individuals actually think about their actions and the consequences for the local environment, economy and cultures.

The ILA group spends eight weeks preparing for the trip, meeting regularly to discuss geography, politics, culture and travel techniques for the regions we will be traveling. The students design a basic itinerary, knowing that they must be flexible as a group and open to other opportunities that may arise during the travels. The participants read literature about the region and share this with the group. Students are provided ample opportunities to apply their foreign language skills in practical situations.

A key component to the international adventure is introducing responsible and ethical travel techniques that promote sustainable awareness abroad and hopefully will influence behavior back at home. It is the intention of every trip to connect the participants to their environment, the natural resources used for the trip, the cultures encountered, the profound influence of Western ideals on developing nations, and the overall interconnectedness of everything on this planet.

The ILA expeditions are embedded in the theories of experiential learning where there is a:

...mixture of content and process, an absence of excessive leader judgment, the participants are engaged in purposeful endeavors, students are encouraged to see the big picture perspective, teaching with multiple learning styles, the role of reflection, creating emotional investment, the re-examination of values, the presence of meaningful relationships and learning outside of one's perceived comfort zone.

(Warren, Sakofs, & Hunt, 1995, p. 245-246)

The key components of sustainable travel combined with experiential learning in an international context provides one the greatest learning opportunities imaginable. The hope of these ILA experiences is that the students have the “opportunity to better understand and interact with complex systems and environments in order to understand firsthand the interconnectedness of all things and their place in the web” (Warren, Sakofs, & Hunt, 1995, p. 245-246).

Since the summer of 2003, the MSCOP has lead 11 international trips to 24 countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, India, China, the Himalayas, South America, Central American, Mexico, Canada and the Caribbean. Over 100 students have participated in these experiences and informal testimonials suggest that through these international adventures, students have become more educated about other cultures, the environment, and have developed a greater understanding for the causes of ecological and social deprivation and have a more holistic view of how to solve today’s global problems. The goals of the ILA experience are the same principles put forth by Sustainable Travel International: to promote cross-cultural understanding; support environmental

conservation; protect cultural heritage; respect the values, customs and beliefs of local people; to make meaningful connections with local people; to conserve natural resources; and to give back by volunteering, donating and buying locally produced goods and patronizing locally owned businesses. During an ILA expedition, students not only learn about the goals but practice them on the daily basis. For example participants patronize local restaurants and hostels, travel by local transportation, and give back to communities by working at local schools, painting murals with orphans and helping with math in remote Himalayan villages. Twain (1966) once said, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness” (p.377). ILA expeditions provide unique international travel opportunities, hopefully broadening the minds and transforming preconceived notions about our world.

Purpose and Rationale

Cultural, environmental, and economic awareness are usually attained while traveling abroad, particularly when visiting developing countries with vastly different cultures (Comp, 2000; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Gmelch, 1997; Laubscher, 1994; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995; Sell, 1983). The majority of literature on the effects of international travel focuses on long term university study abroad programs, Fulbright scholarships, and business exchanges. The literature on sustainable travel centers around the effects of international and sustainable travel on local regions and motives for choosing sustainable travel companies (Batta, 2006; Brown, & Lehto, 2005; Lee & Moscardo, 2005; Mbaiwa, 2004; Okello, 2005; Orndorff, 1998). It is clear that longer programs of six months to a year can have profound impacts on cultural understanding, a sense of place, and international issues (Sandgren, Elig, Hovde, Krejci & Rice, 1999;



Orndorff, 1998; Sikes, 2006; Pyvis & Chapman, 2005). No research exists, as evidenced by the lack of articles in Academic Search premier as of 12/12/2009, on the short-term international backpacker style study abroad experiences. In fact I am not aware of any other college or university study abroad programs in the U.S. that incorporate international study abroad, backpacker style travel and sustainable travel into a single travel experience. The only teaching organizations that come close to backpacker style international travel are the National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound. Both organizations conduct international trips but mainly focus on wilderness travel. While an ILA trip does incorporate wilderness settings, a large portion of the experience connects students to the culture. Some colleges, as discussed later, are creating unique short-term study abroad opportunities but still do not incorporate backpacker style travel.

So the question remains, what actually happens on an ILA study abroad experience of two to eight weeks and does the experience have an influence on the participants' ecological and social awareness, especially when the experience emphasizes sustainable practices and values? Does the ILA experience help create connections? In light of the many international travel educational experiences appearing in colleges, more research needs to shed light on the phenomenon of these unique study abroad travel experiences.

Based on the ideas that the citizens of the world need to learn about ecological and sustainable consciousness, that learning must involve change, that learning is more effective through self-discovery and experience, and that true transformation can only occur when the meaningfulness of the experience is based on the individual critically reflecting on their own assumptions and beliefs, the phenomenon of the MSCOP's ILA

expeditions is analyzed from the perspective of the participants, focusing on describing the participants experience. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will utilize a qualitative phenomenological approach, based on the idea that perception and assumptions are key components in learning and that learning is evident when transformation of perceptions and assumptions occur. The focal point will be the short-term international backpacker travel experience of adult learners, its significance to the participants, and the connections and transformations which the participants perceive as having taken place as a result of their experiences. Possible connections and transformations may include, but are not limited to, adjustment in behavior, assumptions, self-concept, perception, and perspective, as well as increased understanding of sustainable development and global awareness. The specific travel experience will be the MSCOP's ILA expeditions.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ILA study abroad experience as perceived by the individual travelers while participating on a short-term international backpacking travel experience, particularly through the MSCOP's ILA expeditions. Through a phenomenological study and photo elicitation interviews, the individual travelers' experiences will be explored to shed light on the travel experience and possible transformative and connective moments. Since the program has never been studied, there is no research based data regarding the extent of which the goals of the program are being achieved, if at all. It is intended that this study will add to the knowledge of sustainable backpacker travel, help create a new style of backpacker study abroad and to foster transformative experiences that promote cultural and ecological consciousness. It is important to note that the findings of this research cannot be generalized to other

sustainable travel, study abroad and international educational experiences at other organizations. The nature of qualitative research is to provide a more in-depth analysis, in this case the phenomenon of ILA expeditions. It is also hoped that the study will give the MSCOP a practical basis for further research and improvement for future ILA expeditions.

In a globalized world, it can seem daunting to an individual to make meaningful connections and create sustainable change that will influence the greater global community. However, an ILA expedition can make sustainable practices seem much easier to accomplish and the participant can directly experience how sustainable practices can affect the world through local actions, one small act at a time. Travel also has the benefit of making the world seem a bit smaller and more reachable, especially when most places on the planet can now be reached in 48 hours. The short-term ILA experience, provided by the MSCOP, may have affected the ecological and cultural awareness and understanding of the participants. However, as the MSCOP's ILA expeditions have not been studied, what the actual effects are is unknown. It is hypothesized that through these international learning experiences, personal transformation, meaningful connections and global awareness do occur as a result of immersion in another culture, environment and practicing sustainable travel principles.

Limitations and Assumptions

Even though criteria will be applied for participant selection, the possibility for bias exists due to the reality that the researcher ultimately will choose the participants. Selected participants will be based on the initial inquiry and criteria which are explained in Chapter Three.



Another limiting factor which may have importance is the issue of time. As the participants distance themselves from the travel experience, the potential to forget facts and meaning could affect the data. Likewise other events and factors may have changed the impacts of the original experience. However, it is also possible that the participants had more time to internalize the experience and therefore give more information about the effects and impacts of the experience on their lives. To help with remembering the experience, photo elicitation interviews will be used to help arouse and rekindle memories from the past experience.

Finally, the researcher directed and facilitated all the ILA expeditions which could lead to a biased interpretation of the data. However, as the researcher is an intricate part of each trip, this could aid in better understanding the experience and help probe deeper into potential areas of inquiry. Qualitative research allows for biases to exist and realizes that a researcher's point of view will always have some impact on the data. The researcher will take every action to remain unbiased during the collection and analysis of the data.

Summary

The short-term international backpacker experience, as offered through the MSCOP's ILA, was intended to shed light on the world's ecological, cultural, and economic issues, as well as promote self-awareness of one's own actions in creating a more sustainable planet. Having never been studied, this program's effectiveness is not known. The central focus of the study is to describe the actual phenomenon of the ILA experience as perceived by the ILA participants. Through a phenomenological analysis

and photo elicitation interviews, the study attempts to explain the experience as perceived by the selected travelers, describing its meaning and significance to the participant.

Chapter two provides the theoretical basis for the study through a thorough investigation of the literature related to sustainability and sustainable development, sustainable education, experiential education, transformative learning, behavioral change, culture shock, international education and short-term study abroad, sustainable international travel and finally backpacker travel. The literature on sustainable development was examined to help define its meaning and relate it to ecological friendly travel. Literature related to international educational was explored to find potential impacts from overseas study experiences. As international travel is very experiential based, the literature related to experiential education was researched to find connections between transformations as related to experiential education and international backpacker travel.

Chapter three describes the methodology used for the study, including a literature review on phenomenological research and photo elicitation interviews. As many readers may not be familiar with the foundations of phenomenological research, the investigator explains why this research method was the best for the study. The chapter also includes the selection criteria of participants, procedures for gathering and interpreting data, and limitations of phenomenological research and the use of photos during the interview process.

Chapter four will describe the data, including common themes identified from the interviews and descriptions of each participant's experience. All descriptions were based on the individual interviews. The bracketing technique, characteristic of

phenomenological research, helped the researcher recognize personal assumptions and judgments. The combination of thematic descriptions and personal descriptions gave a clear picture of the experience as perceived by the ILA participants.

Chapter five will have a general description of the findings and explain its significance and implications for future research. The final description of the ILA experience could have significant implications for developing future study abroad programs that utilize backpacker style travel and incorporate sustainable travel principles.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature review is broken down into the following categories: sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable education; experiential and transformational learning; behavioral change; culture shock; study abroad; sustainable international travel and finally backpacker style travel. The literature relevant to international travel as related to ILA is limited due to the uniqueness of the program. The majority of research on international travel education pertained to long-term study abroad experiences, ranging from three months to one year and pre-planned packaged events. An ILA expedition is neither long-term nor follows a pre-planned structure which is a vital component to the overall experience. Most study abroad programs and sustainable travel options do not involve continual backpacker style travel throughout the experience. Most of the expenses and logistics are included into a package deal, often preventing students from being central to the decision-making processes and alienating the student from a more authentic experience. Further limiting factors of the research included the lack of programs incorporating multiple components. For example, a student traveling abroad to study may never learn a single concept about sustainable travel, giving back to communities or exploring the outdoor adventure opportunities because it is not part of the structure of the program. Conversely, some travel companies may operate in a more sustainable manner but do not focus or inform their guests about sustainable practices and concepts.

The literature review incorporates several themes based on the idea that in order to reach a sustainable existence we must have a transformational catalyst that restructures our current way of thinking and operating. Considering the need for this catalyst and the

need to implement transformative moments into our current education paradigm, we need an experience that helps us see the connections. Based on the literature, an international travel experience can serve as that catalyst (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen & Hubbard, 2006; Bond & Jones, 1994; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Harf, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Rubin, 1995; Orndorff, 1998; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova & DeJaeghere, 2003).

Traditional junior year study abroad programs have filled the international education niche for years, however, many students cannot afford the time or money to spend a year or semester abroad. Based on the need to get students overseas to experience an alternate reality, a new avenue of study abroad is proposed, one that incorporates the ideas of short-term study abroad, economic feasibility, backpacking and sustainable travel and experiential learning set within an international overland adventure.

Since ILA incorporates international travel, study abroad, sustainable education, experiential learning, and personal transformation, the literature review will focus on the individual components. Literature related to the research method is discussed in chapter three, Methodology.

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

As the word ‘sustainability’ becomes ever more popular and incorporated into businesses, education, economics, the environment and development, it is important to note their similarities and historical ties as well as their distinct attributes. Regardless of the respective avenues within sustainability, the literature suggests that in general, the concept of sustainability is to live in a manner that maintains all the interconnected ecological, social and economic systems on Earth. No doubt given our current lack of education on the issues of sustainability and our burgeoning population demands on

natural resources, the actual achievement of a sustainable existence remains elusive. I will first focus on how the idea of sustainability became part of the mainstream dialogue and then how education became a part of the sustainable development process.

The most commonly-used definition of sustainable development (SD) is the 1987 Brundtland definition. Born out of the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development in a document entitled *Our Common Future*: “SD is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 43). The World Conservation Union in their publication *Caring for Earth* defines SD as a process of “improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems” (Dobson, 1999, p.23). Both definitions provide great foundations for the idea of sustainable development, but as Jacobs (1999) questions, what exactly must be done in order to achieve SD in practice? Some believe the term ‘sustainable development’ is an oxymoron and simply a slogan that will allow humanity to continue the “plunder of Nature and get away with it” (Livingstone, 1995, p.60). For example buying carbon offsets for carbon spewing plane flights could simply be an avenue for the rich to pay more for the same lifestyle and is there any true evidence that carbon offsets work (Dale, 2008). Others believe ‘sustainability’ is the ultimate goal of humanity and ‘development’ is the process for achieving the goal. Clearly, a meaningful definition must be agreed upon in order to further the idea of sustainability, especially in the current linear way of thinking, i.e. not allowing for a multiplicity of ideas and values to exist (Sen, 1987). For example what exactly are “needs”, what is being “sustained”, and how is “carrying capacity” measured? Some argue that the word “sustainability” is so

encompassing that it may render no meaning at all or the lack of its clearness allows practically anything to be in the realm of sustainability (Dobson, 1999).

In Agenda 21, a United Nations Environment Program (1992) document, the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” are used interchangeably throughout the text. The term “sustainable development” helped incorporate environmental concerns into the mainstream of modern economic thought. By using the word “development”, environmentalists harnessed a political agenda that did not undermine economic growth, but rather sought to find a balance between environmental and economic concerns (Dresner, 2002). This approach helped amend unsustainable practices while appeasing more rigid economic concerns. In essence, the term “sustainable development” is a suitable term that helps both environmentalist and economic developers tackle the modern issues of resource depletion while maintaining world economic growth. It sounds like a winning combination but there are many disagreements on what is meant by “development.” For example development has traditionally stood for industrializing the world and promoting material consumption but could also stand for improving non-material areas such as education and health care.

The term ‘development’ encompasses many meanings. Often development invokes images of tall sky scrapers and mass transit systems but there is another type of development, one much more conducive to the ideals of sustainability. ‘Human development’ measures a society’s living standard according to a person’s ability to live the life they choose according to their level of income. It is a system where material goods hold very little value unless they can improve education, health, self-confidence and the ability to contribute to your community (Sen, 1987, 1999). Sen (1987), a Nobel

Prize winning Indian economist, humorously describes the different ways a person could explain quality of life:

You could be well off, without being well. You could be well, without being able to lead the life you wanted. You could have got the life you wanted, without being happy. You could be happy, without having much freedom. You could have a good deal of freedom, without achieving much. (p.1)

Just as ‘development’ can take on several meanings, ‘quality of life’ shares the same attributes.

Sen, in order to address living standards, developed the Human Development Index (HDI) which collects statistics for world income levels combining it with other measurements such as life expectancy, literacy, fertility rate and equality (Dresner, 2002). The Human Development Report (2005) results showed that wealthier nations such as Saudi Arabia had the same HDI rating as Thailand, even though the Saudis had a far greater income than the Thais. Guatemala, with almost twice the average income of Viet Nam, ranked lower on the HDI ranking. When considering economic indicators alongside HDI ratings, it is clear that a high level of income is not the only way to determine a meaningful standard of living. Some scholars, utilizing the concept of the human development model, have put forth a unique interpretation of SD as “the enhancement of present and future human well-being as it is understood through the dimensions of human capability” (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008, p. 225). This definition could have a significant impact on the concept of SD by consciously including quality of life within the scope of the economic and environmental factors.

As all contestable concepts prove, there are indeed varying levels of meaning as perceived by the differing ideals of politicians, economists, environmentalists and any other person viewing the subject. The different values and interests must be explored rather than the simple semantics of the word. Jacobs (1999) explains that “core ideas” about the subject must be revealed in order to understand the complexity of the idea. Ideas such as “futurity”, a concern about the current impacts on future generations, and “quality of life”, recognize that income growth is not the only factor to a person’s overall happiness (Dobson, 1999, p. 26). These are concepts with deep cultural roots and not easily defined under a universal meaning. In fact, the task of clearly defining every aspect of sustainability is practically impossible. Perhaps looking at SD from a different angle will shed new light on the subject.

One of the key notions within sustainable thought is the idea of interdependent systems and the overall connectedness of all people and matter. Senge (1990) suggests that every person is part of a system, whether it is in a community, a school, or a family unit, and that each system is enveloped in an environment. The ability of a system to sustain itself in relation to its environment is the essence of sustainability (Corcoran, 2004). This idea can help a person stop focusing just on the word and instead look outside the word and view the context and environment that supports its meaning. For example, a picture of the earth from outer space shows that everything on the planet is truly interconnected. The earth’s system envelopes millions of other systems and each system affects the other (Corcoran, 2004; Miller, 1982). Once people begin to understand the fundamental concept of interconnectedness then the word “sustainability” will begin to have more meaning.

Wheeler (2000) explains that SD has three interconnecting subsystems that allow multiple perspectives. Environmental sustainability concerning replenishing natural resources; economic sustainability referring to maintaining levels of consumption that meet but do not exceed current needs; and social sustainability that ensures social equality based on resource allocation. In order for sustainability to work, the environmental, economic and social justice needs must all be included within the scope of SD (Allen, Tainter & Hoebsha, 2003). Each component is connected to the other. Without social justice, sustainability cannot work because individual rights to pursue happiness and financial stability must be recognized. Along with this idea, the system must be economically stable because without a steady economy, many people will not have the means to sustain within our modern economic system. Without the means to live a healthy life, people are forced to live outside the realm of sustainability just to survive, often over pressuring the ecological system, thus affecting the social and economic systems negatively.

Clearly the idea of sustainability is a broad concept. However, this is not all bad, because a narrow view would probably lead to sustaining only environmental concerns such as rivers and forest systems (Bonnett, 2002). The ideas of human development, sustainability and quality of life are such rich subjects that a neat and easily agreed upon meaning would ultimately reduce their value. It is the very ideas of these words that stir the imagination and open up free thought and dialogue. For this reason, the overall concepts behind the words should guide their meaning and not personal and political semantics. In fact some argue that SD's ambiguity has "started a dialogue between economic and environmental worlds (Sauvé, 1996, p.9). Regardless of the arguments, the

very idea of SD helps to link the concepts of environmentalism, economics and social justice, giving it a kind of “universal” appeal that allows for both “preservation and development” (Rauch, 2002, p.47).

The many definitions of sustainability share a common theme of an interconnectedness between the human world of economics and social systems and the earth’s environment. Ultimately, sustainability must be integral to our everyday actions, including an awareness of how we impact the social, economic and environmental systems that sustain our very being. The course of human history since the industrial age has largely ignored the human footprint on the earth. As a result, practically all living systems on which human lives depend are in decline (Dale, 2001; Hawken, 1993). To address this issue, the idea of change must clearly echo within the idea of sustainability. The fact that we must change directions, not merely slow down, needs to resonate. Since humans are the only species on the planet capable of destroying the earth’s ecosystem, the actions of humans must be paramount within the definition. The operational definition of sustainability for the research at hand is the individual and collective conscious understanding that all economic, social and ecological systems are interdependent and interconnected and that we must transform our current destructive personal and collective actions to ensure future generations will live in a clean, peaceful and prosperous world.

Sustainable Education

Some experts believe sustainable education is simply environmental education that incorporates economics and social systems into environmental studies. Paden (2000) argues that indeed environmental education does recognize the importance of



incorporating human influence; however, the values are mainly centered on environmental processes within the context of social equity and economic systems. Paden explains that sustainable education, “demands that environment, equity and economics be considered as a whole and its values involve promoting all three together” (p.8). With our current way of separating academic disciplines, the difficulty in combining and promoting the environment, economy and social systems as a whole is a complicated task.

Senge (1990) explains that “the unhealthiness of our world today is in direct proportion to our inability to see it as a whole” (p. 68). Since the very first day in kindergarten, a student starts the long journey of dividing the world into little bits and pieces until they graduate from college with their degree in a specialized field of study. The idea of breaking things apart, imbedded in science and analytical education, helps us understand the complexities of our systems however, we sometimes lose sight of the other influential factors. For example, how is it that an economic major is not required to take an ecology class even though the economic system is based on the very raw resources provided by the earth? Or better yet, why would an economic and ecology professor not team teach in an interdisciplinary manner? In order to realize a sustainable existence, we will need to know how things work, but more importantly how things work together and the consequences of these actions to other parts of the system (Mortensen, 2000). Our educational paradigm is going to need a radical shift to bring about a sustainable existence.

The relationship between education and sustainability was made clear at the largest ever international gathering of world leaders, the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth

Summit. More than 178 governments declared that the world's educators' greatest challenge and responsibility must be to prepare the citizens of the world for a sustainable future (Sitarz, 1993). *Agenda 21* (1992), the United Nations comprehensive action plan for sustainable development, states that education programs must "reorient education towards sustainable development" (p. 36.2) Educators for the first time since industrialization are being asked to rethink our individual roles in nature by revising our standards, thoughts, perspectives and actions (Orr, 1992). Education must now concentrate on preparing students to live a sustainable lifestyle and position the ideas of living within an ecosystem at the center of all disciplines (Disinger, 1993). These ideas and concepts will not be easily realized with our current educational paradigm. Albert Einstein said, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We have to learn to see the world anew" (Sterling, 2001, p. 12).

In order to realize the goals of a sustainable existence we will need a radically different education paradigm. Our education system needs a transformation, not simply an adaptation to old ideas, not simply revamping and streamlining the current system but rather we must learn to see things differently, through different eyes and alternative perspectives. The new education paradigm must include the ideas of systems thinking, holism, sustainability and complexity (Sterling, 2001). Sustainable education according to Wheeler (2000) will require educators to combine and integrate three intricate systems:

- First, teachers must learn how to cultivate systems thinking, interconnections and multiple perspectives while learning about sustainability.
- Second, students must gain practical skills on how to apply the new thinking and learning to their own lives and communities.

- Third, remember and understand the “ah ha!” moment that lead to your new way of thinking. Most importantly be able to reflect and communicate this transformation to others who share the same experience.
- Fourth, combine the knowledge and understanding of the “ah ha!” moment and recreate this experience for students so that they can reach the “ah ha!” moment as well and have the self-awareness to reflect on its meaning. (p. 2)

These ideas must be integrated into a new educational system that empowers students to be change agents for a better life on a healthy planet. The key component is seeing the world as an interconnected system that is influenced by the choices we make every day.

Sterling (2001), an expert in the field of sustainable education, explains that in order to create deep change and learning, we must make a clear distinction between first, second and third order change or learning. First order change or learning describes our current educational system which focuses on integrating knowledge within our customary limits; essentially it is adaptive learning that does not challenge current values and beliefs. Second order change or learning involves examining and reflecting on our preconceived notions about learning, sometimes referred to as ‘learning about learning’. At a deeper level, third order learning or change is when the student sees the world through different eyes, gaining insights on alternative perspectives and ways of doing things. In order to reach second and third order learning and change, our educational system will have to change in order to create change. A good example is the idea of requiring students to take a class in sustainability, such as ‘sustainability 101’. Although a class would get the knowledge out to students, the learning would not be transformative but rather information simply adapted to the students current views. In order for our

students to see the connections we will need to create the opportunity for students to be transformed.

To recap, sustainable education is not about knowing the definition of sustainability or the history of sustainability, although this knowledge is very important. Rather, sustainable education is about taking the knowledge of systems thinking, social equity, economic vitality and ecological wholeness and incorporating the knowledge into your everyday values and beliefs. Sustainable education is about transformation. If the learning is not transformative, then it is simply the same teaching that got us here in the first place. It is important to note that sustainable education can occur and should occur in any academic field, from business and math to art and science. All disciplines have the potential to transform students. As long as the change is towards a more sustainable existence based on social equity, economic longevity and ecological wholeness, then you have arrived at sustainable education. Of course for any transformation to occur it must be imbedded in a meaningful experience.

Experiential Learning

At the heart of sustainable and transformative learning is the need to actually experience sustainability in action. Experiential learning provides the perfect model for assisting in sustainable and transformative learning because it requires reflecting on one's personal doings. It focuses on the learning process for the individual as opposed to the learning between a teacher and student, thus creating a learning model that does not depend on the framework of a structured learning environment. Experiential learning in essence allows for any situation to be a teachable moment, especially when one becomes conscientious of his/her actions through reflection and adaptation. This is particularly

important for sustainable education because we cannot just rely on a structured education system to teach about sustainability but rather we need to create individuals who routinely reflect upon their own actions. Kolb (1984) explains that our biological trait for adapting does not rely on a special skill but rather depends on our ability to learn. Kolb states that, “We are the learning species, and our survival depends on our ability to adapt not only in the reactive sense of fitting into the physical and social worlds, but in the proactive sense of creating and shaping our worlds” (p. 1). The statement implies a kind of responsibility that comes with our ability to choose and create our own future and clearly relates to the idea of sustainable decision making. The academic model of learning through abstract and classroom centered techniques has largely alienated us from authentic experiences. As such we no longer embrace an experiential source for personal learning and growth; rather we value the rational, reductionist, scientific and technological concepts of learning (Kolb, 1984). We must remember that our current form of academic learning created our modern unsustainable world. Now we must embrace a new paradigm and create the kind of experiences that aid in authentic learning.

According to Kolb (1984) for genuine experiential learning to occur a student must be willing to participate in the activity, able to reflect on the experience, possess skills to conceptualize the event and have the ability to use the new ideas acquired from the experience. Most people are taught and evaluated in our modern day education system through memorizing and recalling facts, figures and concepts, often through multiple choice tests and essay questions, hardly introducing the concepts of experiential learning. If we do not have authentic experiences or learn how to reflect, generalize and implement the new information gained from the experience then it will be hard to have

meaningful learning. It is important to note that experiential learning requires no teacher and focuses on the meaning making process for the student from the direct experience. However, this does not mean a teacher cannot facilitate in the process of learning. Indeed much facilitation will need to focus on bringing students back to an experienced based learning. John Dewey (1938) believed that the teacher's responsibility should focus on creating 'good experiences' that motivate, support and allow students to seek out other positive experiences. This does not mean a haphazard approach to education but rather a semi-structured approach, allowing an ebb and flow of more structure or less structure according to the student's individual personality, background and learning style. A popular Chinese proverb says, "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand" (Lowy & Hood, 2004, p. 267). One could say that academic learning focuses on the 'tell me' philosophy and at times the 'show me' approach, whereas experiential learning involves analysis, initiative and immersion or an 'involve me' ideology. Modern day education must create opportunities for authentic and life transforming experiences.

Rogers (1994) believes experiential learning is synonymous with personal change and growth. In order to facilitate experiential learning teachers need to create positive environments that promote student oriented, self-evaluative and personally relevant learning. Boydell (1976) stated that experiential learning is not simply about students being able to recall principles, facts and rules, but rather meaningful learning based on understanding and comprehension. For learning to be meaningful it must be relevant to the student's life perception. As more information is acquired, the individual must sort out the new, compare with the old and eventually come to a new outlook, leading to a

new perspective (Boydell, 1976). Merriam and Clark (1993) agreed that learning is only significant if the student was transformed by the experience, otherwise the experience was not relevant enough to be meaningful learning. These authors suggest that transformation is essential to learning. The learner must integrate the new knowledge into their personal lives. According to the previous statements, if a student learns the importance of recycling but chooses not to recycle, then the learning was not transformative and therefore was not meaningful learning.

The theory of experiential learning has evolved over the years into various models that break down the learning process. For example an ‘Outward Bound’ experience could facilitate learning in itself. However, some believed reflection was critical to learning, thus a two-stage model appeared involving an experience and reflecting upon it to build meaning (Bacon, 1987; James, 1980/2000; Neill, 2002). The cyclical three-stage model involved doing, planning and reviewing (Dewey, 1938/1997). While Kolb’s (1984) four-stage model, dubbed the ‘Experiential Learning Cycle’ included experience, reflection, abstraction and then experimentation with the new concept and eventual transfer of knowledge. The fourth step generally leads to the next experience and the process repeats. These models of experiential learning all show experience as the key to gaining knowledge but add critical components of reflection so as not to simply ‘do’ but to learn through reflection and adapt in order to ‘do’ better. This may involve ‘chasing’ the learner around the cycle, asking questions that foster reflection, abstraction and experimentation (Atherton, 2002). However, as stated earlier, the learning does not need facilitation by an instructor, but can be self-managed or better yet ‘unmanaged’ in the

sense that learning from experience becomes an everyday occurrence (Greenway, 2002; Kolb & Lewis, 1986).

Most experiential learning literature suggests inclusion of a meaningful experience, reflecting on the experience and coming to a new conceptual framework. However, some argued about the method by which experiential learning was accomplished. Techniques ranged from Cohn (1975) who believed any experience could lead to meaningful learning to Hughes (1974) who stated that experiential learning could only occur within a controlled environment and facilitated by a trained professional. Wexler (1974) fell somewhere in between, believing that any experience could lead to meaningful learning but the process was more likely to occur if in a controlled environment. Thus the creation of experiential education and the focus on methodologies that led to experiential learning. Joplin (1995) expressed that all learning is experiential, however, many of our educational settings only partially support learning. She also stated that although all learning is experiential, it does not have to take place in an educational setting or structure and need not be intentionally planned. However, for experiential education to occur, several components must be addressed.

Experiential education as a methodology requires key components, all of which are equally important and must be present during experiential learning (Chapman, McPhee, Proudman, 1995):

- Mixture of content and process
- Absence of excessive teacher judgment
- Engaged in purposeful endeavors
- Encouraging the big picture perspective

- Teaching with multiple learning styles
- The role of reflection
- Creating emotional investment
- The re-examining of values
- The presence of meaningful relationships
- Learning outside of one's perceived comfort zone (p. 243)

These principles are all required regardless of the experience or the environment where the learning takes place.

Experiential education methodology must also stress being emotionally engaged learning, or learning that is so meaningful and relevant that the student can hardly separate from the learning experience. In order to achieve this, experiential education must foster dynamic and two-way relationship building: the learner to self, the learner to teacher and the learner to environment (Chapman, McPhee, Proudman, 1995). In this way the learning is not solely focused on the activity but rather the relationships and environment that surround the activity. By including the concepts of relationships and principles outlined above, experiential education can provide a powerful platform and basis for sustainable and transformative education. As Proudman states, "Experiential education is transformational" (p. 246).

Transformative Learning

O'Sullivan, Morrell, and O'Connor (2002), authors and editors of several books on transformative education, combine the rational with the emotional and put forth an integrative definition of transformative learning:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 11)

O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor's definition incorporates the power of transformative learning into our current ecological crises of resource depletion, climate change, consumerism and the repression of developing nations. O'Sullivan (1999) applies transformation to all of society saying that "modernity, with all of its excellences and wonders, has reached the full fruition of its limitations" and that "we are living in the terminal stages of modern history, experiencing the full force of the limitations of the rational-industrial mode which is now self-cancelling" (p. 17). His concepts challenge the preconceived notions of almost any Western world view, stating that in order to save our planet we will need a radical evolutionary transformation to rise above our modern way. We must include our modern technologies with a new integrated outlook on life, one that envelopes the notion of biomimicry and living within a sustainable planetary habitat of interdependent life forms.

Transformative learning theory evolved from Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation which is:

“the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Cranton, 1994, p.22)

It is a process of education that transcends traditional knowledge acquisition of truth gathering and instead uses our world of facts and figures to fundamentally change our preconceived notions. Transformation involves questioning our assumptions, beliefs and values and considering multiple view points (Mezirow, 2000). When we gather information traditionally from lectures and books, the information can change our beliefs and attitudes or “meaning schemes” but in Mezirow’s opinion this is not transformation (Marriam & Caffarella, 1999). Only when we change our fundamental view point and perspective do we really transform.

Mezirow (1997) contends that transformative learning occurs when an individual critically reflects on their assumption and beliefs. As a key concept to transformation, reflection can be distinguished between three areas. Content reflection refers to simple problem solving about the aspects of the problem. Process reflection describes a rational and orderly analysis of strategies that can solve the problem. Premise reflection questions the assumptions, beliefs and values that give relevance to the problem. This last process is distinct from simple cause and effect problem solving and can lead to transformative learning. According to Cranton (1994), if the process of reflection “leads to an awareness of an invalid, undeveloped, or distorted meaning scheme or perspective; if that scheme or perspective is then revised; and if the individual acts on the revised belief, the

development has been transformative” (p. 113). Mezirow’s process of transformation stresses critical, unintuitive and rational reflection; however, transformation can also be a very emotional, intuitive and creative process rather than a deliberate and intentional procedure.

A more intuitive process of transformation appears in the late 1980s, one based on the work of Robert Boyd (1988), who believes Mezirow’s theory of transformation overstates the ‘rational’ aspect of reflection. Boyd believes transformational education is based on analytical psychology or the deep forces and motivations underlying human behavior such as an individual’s unconscious archetypes. With this understanding, transformation is a “fundamental change in one’s personality involving the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration” (Boyd, 1988, p. 264). Boyd’s process of discernment or being able to comprehend what is obscure or not evident to the average mind plays a huge role in transformative education. One must use the Jungian concepts of dreams, symbols, images and archetypes to assist in creating a new personal perception (Boyd, 1991).

Boyd and Myers (1988) describe three factors in the process of discernment: receptivity, recognition and grieving. A person must be open to receiving “alternative expressions of meaning” and recognize the genuineness of the new meaning. The last process of grieving, considered the most important by Boyd and Myers, occurs when old patterns of perceiving are no longer appropriate, the person chooses to adopt new manners and finally integrates the old and new meanings. Boyd’s process of transformative learning is more open to exploration and movement between the old and new forms of meaning. The mind often moves back and forth between a known reality

and the new found reality. Usually, one must return to a central frame of mind to regain strength and then venture out for new meaning, much like a child exploring its new world but returning to its mother for comfort and protection.

According to Mezirow we must undergo phases or steps to truly change our perspective. These phases of transformation include “experiencing a disorienting dilemma; self-examination; critical assessment of assumptions; recognizing that others have gone through a similar process; exploring options; formulating a plan of action; and reintegration” (Mezirow (1978, 2000). Much of the processes mirror behavioral change. For this reason a brief review of behavioral change is included.

Behavioral Change

The literature on behavioral change is extensive, to the point of overwhelming, however, much of the research is relevant to this paper because clear patterns of change occur in almost any type of behavioral change and closely reflect the concepts in transformative, experiential and sustainable learning. Transformation implies some kind of change, often involving several stages over an extended period of time. Much like the steps of experiential education, Prochaska and DiClemente (1992, 1994) describe the five steps that most people experience when undergoing a behavioral change. At first the person is unaware or unwilling to make a change (precontemplation), and then the person will think about changing (contemplation), and next decide to make a change (preparation). Next the person must actually make the change (action) and continue to stick with the change (maintenance) or counter any setbacks (relapse prevention) (Prochaska JO, DiClemente CC, Norcross JC, 1992). These five steps give critical insight

into the stages of change and could potentially apply to almost any type of behavioral change or transformative experience.

Much like a facilitator of experiential learning, a facilitator of behavioral change must initiate the “processes of change” (i.e., ‘the experience’) to help modify the students’ thinking, feelings and behavior (Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, 1994, p. 25). Some basic techniques such as consciousness raising, emotional arousal, self-reevaluation and commitment strongly correlate to transformative learning. Bandura (1977a, 1982) states that self-efficacy is the belief that one can successfully perform the behavior necessary to produce the outcomes. He further believes that self-efficacy can be improved by “mastery experiences” that build confidence in one’s ability to succeed (Bandura, 1977b, 1986). By participating in experiential learning environments, the students could overcome obstacles never encountered in their lives and with proper guidance; these accomplishments could result in positive self-efficacy and perhaps a catalyst for transformation.

Bandura (1977), the father of social learning theory, exclaimed:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do.

Fortunately, most behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

Social learning theory relies heavily on observing and modeling other people’s behaviors, attitudes and emotional reactions in an interrelated process involving cognitive, environmental and behavioral influences. The three factors are not weighed evenly but

rather will vary depending on the individual, the actual behavior and the situation where the behavior occurs (Bandura, 1989). The social learning theory gives insights to personal and societal change and could potentially help transform societies into more sustainable communities.

There are four key components to observational learning and each step explains how learning occurs through imitation and modeling others' behaviors (Bandura, 1977a, 1978). Attention, the first component of observational learning, plays a key role because if the observer does not pay attention to the key features of the modeled behavior then the behavior will not be reproduced. If children see their parents behave in an unsustainable manner, then the children will most likely model this behavior. For example, many children in America see their parents buying thousands of dollars worth of material goods every year, often without any practical need. If children see this behavior, they may grow up with no concept of material worth or have no idea of the natural resources needed to create the products that people buy every day (Allen & Santrock, 1993).

Retention, the next phase, emphasizes the necessity to retain the information into memory in order to reproduce the modeled behavior (Allen & Santrock, 1993). In the case of unsustainable parents, the child will imitate habits that contribute to ecological destruction and feel little empathy towards their local environment. For example in Nicaragua, the children throw trash out the bus windows as if trash is part of the local fauna, however, these children grew up with parents and others modeling this behavior, resulting with trash on practically every street and highway.

Motor reproduction, the third phase of observational learning, stresses that the observer must possess the physical capabilities of the modeled behavior. If a parent grew

up riding a bike practically everywhere, the child would need the physical ability to ride a bike. Once the child sees the parent using human powered transportation, then the child must also possess the ability to use this type of transportation. In Nicaragua, people ride their bikes around every part of town, modeling a behavior that able bodied children can attain and will most likely mimic.

Motivation or reinforcement, the final phase of observational learning, explains how a modeled behavior is either positively or negatively reinforced. If a child grows up understanding the importance of recycling and reusing products and the parents positively reinforce this concept, then the child will most likely reinforce a belief in recycling and reusing products. The children of Nicaragua would never think of breaking a glass bottle because they know the bottle is worth money if they reuse the bottle. Glass bottles of beer, Cokes and Sprite all end up in neat containers ready to be reused for the next time. However, plastic bottles that are not recycled or reused end up on the streets, beaches and every place humanly possible. The children grow up knowing the plastic bottles have no value and seemingly care less about trash on the street. The children witness this type of behavior, attend to it, store it to memory, recall the information, poses the motor capabilities and perform the behavior because their parents, friends and society positively reinforce these behaviors and values (Allen & Sanrock, 1993).

The social learning theory is regularly applied to addictive behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and violence, and particularly how these behaviors are positively reinforced with young adolescents in school situations (Cohen, Brownell, & Felix, 1990; Taylor, 1999). Many unsustainable practices are portrayed by parents but also within our education and government system. According to O'Sullivan (1991), a leading professor

of applied psychology and transformative learning, the privileged citizens of the northern hemisphere are in a state of denial about their devastating impact on the earth. Like alcoholics who fail to see their life threatening addiction, people living in an unsustainable manner will “sacrifice long-term health and well-being for immediate gratification, a trade off that cannot yield a happy ending” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 131.)

Social learning theory is relevant to transformative, experiential and sustainable learning because it shows that society can have a huge influence on learning outcomes. If our educational paradigm continues to create the same social norms then we will continue down the same path. Thankfully much educational research has focused on more ecological and sustainable design. With some good modeling and positive reinforcement, then perhaps children in the United States will model more sustainable behavior.

In our modern day lives of American first world living, Americans rarely encounter a disorienting dilemma or experience that fundamentally challenges their beliefs, especially in our traditional reductionist education system. Unless a person individually experiences a death in a family, wins the lottery, goes to war, or lives through a natural disaster such as Katrina or a man made tragedy like 9/11 (and many people do experience these realities), Americans tend to go through life unscathed and fundamentally unchanged. This begs the question, how can Americans become transformed without a problem or experience that acts as a catalyst for deep-seated change? Somewhere in our educational experience we should be expected to challenge our fundamental beliefs and given the opportunity for genuine change, especially in a university or college setting. In order for true change to occur, modern day education will need to arouse the cognitive dissonance within society and force people to confront some

of the contradictory ideas such as endless growth in a finite system and buying a new product simply because it is in fashion. The contemporary education system simply perpetuates the status quo, rarely pushing the limits of personal change but rather enabling a lifestyle of disconnect, consumption and competition. If we are to live in a more sustainable manner, then our fundamental realities will require a radical shift in consciousness. We had the opportunity to transform after the events of 9/11, 2001 as a nation but our government, businesses and education system reacted with the only means they understand; divide and conquer; separate and destroy; and build fear to support the divisions that seemingly disconnect us from other life forms and societies around the globe. According to many behavioral change analyst, admitting we have a problem is the first step to transformation (Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, 1994). Perhaps with the guidance of transformative learning styles, we can embrace a more sustainable lifestyle. What we need now is a catalyst or experience that will challenge our assumption about our current lifestyle before nature gives us the ultimate reality of extinction. Perhaps the shock of being in a foreign country will give us the catalyst for personal introspection.

Culture Shock

When talking about sustainability issues we are really talking about our current unsustainable culture. A person's culture forms the foundation of belief patterns. When a person experiences a foreign culture that fails to support their particular view on life, often confusion sets in and can create personal conflict. Culture is not simply a set of customs or traditions, Gutierrez says culture:

constitutes a way fully characteristic of organizing life, of thinking and of conceiving the underlying postulates of the principal human institutions, of relating to and interacting with the universe, providing a combination of intermediate patterns which channel our feelings and thoughts, making us react in a particular way, different from those who have been submerged in different patterns. (as cited in Zapf, 1991, p. 105)

The description explains much more than simple customs and rituals, but rather a deeper core of being. When discussing sustainability issues, we are talking about needing a shock to our current unsustainable manner of organizing and interacting with the planet.

Humans by nature are social beings, growing up with social norms of behavior. When those behaviors are suddenly changed or challenged, we experience confusion and often feel threatened by the change agent (Mumford, 2000). People around the world, particularly Americans are going to need a cataclysmic shift in culture, similar to being dropped in the middle of a completely different environment. In order to fend off the worst of climate change, species extinction and resource depletion, our cultural shift will need to occur rather fast. In order to experience change we will need to create the situations that help students and citizens adapt to change. When an American student enters another culture, particularly one that is far removed from traditional western values, a significant amount of anxiety may occur or even fear that can leave a person feeling helpless. Pedersen (1995) explains that Oberg (1960) termed this feeling of disorientation as ‘culture shock’ and listed six negative characteristics:

1. strain or stress relating to psychological adaptation;

2. a sense of loss or deprivation resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions;
3. fear of rejection by or rejection of the new culture;
4. confusion in role definition;
5. unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences; and
6. feelings of helplessness, including confusion, frustration and depression. (p. 2)

Considering the negative effects of culture shock, it is not surprising that a great amount of research deals with students studying abroad and their experiences with culture shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Guthrie, 1975; Mumford, 2000; Pederson, 1995; Pyvis & Chapman, 2005; Searle & Ward, 1990; Zapf, 1991).

Despite the potential negative effects of culture shock, much of the literature suggest that the depression, fear and sense of loss are simply part of the ‘U-curve’ model that ultimately leads to adapting to another culture. The classic U-curve suggests that travelers go through stages of euphoria, disillusionment, hostility, adaptation and finally assimilation (Pedersen, 1995). According to the U-curve, the classic traveler starts off with joy, then encounters disappointment when their world reality is challenged, and finally through recovery and adaptation, the person becomes assimilated into the new cultural view. Again much of these steps resemble behavioral change and classic transformative and experiential learning styles, suggesting that culture shock could be a potential catalyst for change. Much of this research could be useful not only for helping students deal with culture shock but rather any kind of cultural shift, including a shift to a more sustainable way of thinking. For this reason overseas adventures that expose

students to a radical way of being can facilitate the change process. If one becomes more adaptable then perhaps a sustainable shift is not so far out of reach.

In a study measuring the effects of culture shock on Singaporean students' learning at an Australian university in their home country, Pyvis and Chapman (2005) concluded that one does not have to actually travel outside their own country in order to experience culture shock. In other words culture shock does not require travel abroad:

Culture shock applies to any new situation, job, relationship, or perspective requiring a role adjustment and a new identity. In a broader more general sense, culture shock applies to any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social setting where previous learning no longer applies. (Pederson, 1995, p. 1)

The above definition of culture shock closely resembles transformative learning theory and behavioral change. Marx (2001) also expressed that a person experiences culture shock when one abruptly confronts an unknown way of life and has anxiety from a sudden loss of the familiar. The analogy between 'culture shock' and 'transformative learning' cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, they are both processes that can lead to critical self reflection if facilitated properly.

One of the key conclusions of the Pyvis and Chapman (2005) study stated that culture shock was the result of a particular model of education. Singaporean students, not familiar with westernized Australian teaching methods often felt uncomfortable. For example they could not understand why professors emphasized difference as opposed to likeness or stressed western culture over Asian and Middle East culture, considering Europe was in the dark ages when Asian and Middle Eastern societies were flourishing.

One author suggests that maybe the term ‘culture shock’ is outdated and would conclude that these Singapore students are simply culturally confused (Hottola, 2004).

Hottola has challenged the idea of culture shock by saying that culture shock is but one possibility when encountering a foreign culture and probably not the norm. He presents a more dynamic model of “cultural confusion” (p. 449). Hottola’s research suggests that shock may never occur for a traveler but rather a process of learning is more accurate. In many learning situations, students experience stress and confusion when faced with new situations. In light of the new cultural adaptation model, travel does not have to entail shock but rather involves intense learning that can lead to a transformational process. Cultural confusion is probably a much better term than shock and fits into the realm of education better than the term shock. No educator wants to send their students into a state of fear, indeed very little learning can occur in this situation. However, every educator should push their students outside their comfort zone. Hottola’s new adaptive model suggests that shock and depression are not the norm, rather the students are simply learning to adapt much like transformative and experiential learning.

Culture shock and cultural confusion are analogous to Selye’s (1956, 1975) ideas of “distress” and “eustress.” Selye (1975), a leading scholar on the theory of stress, made the distinction between bad stress and good stress. Selye believed some stressors could lead to positive outcomes while others stressors resulted in negative effects. Selye further concluded that the same stressor could have a different affect on people, depending on that person’s ability to adapt or overcome the stressor. The same can happen while traveling abroad; some travelers will experience a negative shock while others may perceive the same situation as positive. Culture shock can sometimes appear negative,

however, as Hottala (2004) points out, the shock can sometimes lead to positive changes, in effect the shock is good shock. Perhaps a better term could be “travel eushock.” A travel educator should strive to guide their students towards ‘eushock’ and perhaps create the catalyst for transformational learning.

Bearing in mind the paradigm shift necessary for sustainable education, it is reasonable to assume that many students will probably experience some kind of culture shock or cultural confusion experience when teachers start to stress interconnectedness rather than isolation, third order learning rather than first order learning and interdisciplinary classes rather than alienated subjects. In the very near future we will need teachers and educators trained on how to deal with culture shock and transformation, especially during the transition to a more sustainable lifestyle and culture. For now, the surest way to learn about a rapid cultural shift is to experience it firsthand. An international study abroad experience can help with cultural and paradigm shifts.

International Education and Short-Term Study Abroad

International education is a highly debated term; nevertheless, a frequently used definition is “integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of ...education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). An important aspect of sustainable education is the idea of interconnectedness especially at the global level. Imbedded in the ideas of sustainable education must be the reality that every person on the planet is dependent on the same natural resources for survival. Most domestic economies are connected to the global market in some fashion, either through trade, resource exploitation or waste disposal. If the principles of sustainability are to be realized, they will need to include the entire world. Perhaps one of the greatest

opportunities for an authentic international experience in today's education system is through an international study abroad program. Grounded in the idea that intercultural exchanges could lead to a more empathetic and culturally aware citizen, study abroad programs have the potential to create authentic intercultural experiences that could lead to transformative, experiential and sustainable learning. President Obama, on April 7, 2009, praised the power of international education and exchange to a gathering of Turkish students in Istanbul:

As President, I'd like to find new ways to connect young Americans to young people all around the world, by supporting opportunities to learn new languages, and serve and study, welcoming students from other countries to our shores.

That's always been a critical part of how America engages the world. Simple exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed. We are reminded that we're joined together by our pursuit of a life that's productive and purposeful, and when that happens mistrust begins to fade and our smaller differences no longer overshadow the things that we share.

And that's where progress begins. (Obama, 2009)

The idea of traveling to a foreign land for educational purposes is not new. The Grand Tour during the 19th century rounded out the education of any young man of good social standing. Indeed studying and living in a foreign country was essential for development especially within the upper-class society (Hoffa, 2007). The idea of study abroad in the United States did not take shape until the 1920's when colleges and universities designed junior year abroad programs (Bowman, 1989). However, the

biggest jump in international education occurred after World War II with the introduction of the G.I. Bill. College students could now start to travel abroad and study during times of peace instead of conflict. In an effort to avoid the atrocities of war, many national leaders, including the United States, implemented international exchange programs to increase cultural sensitivity and understanding (Speakman, 1966). International education does lead to a more empathetic and global minded citizens, which could increase the sustainability concepts of cultural, economic and environmental consciousness (Comp, 2000; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Gmelch, 1997; Laubscher, 1994; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995; Sell, 1983). Perhaps the most outspoken leader on establishing exchange programs to increase international education and cultural awareness was Senator J.W. Fulbright. At the 1976 national convocation on international exchange in Washington, D.C. Senator Fulbright expressed his belief that:

International educational exchange is the most significant current project designed to continue the process of humanizing mankind to the point, we would hope, that men can learn to live in peace – eventually even to cooperate in constructive activities rather than compete in a mindless contest of mutual destruction We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy, and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education. We surely cannot hope to expand the boundaries of human wisdom by force and violence. Education is a slow-moving but powerful force. It may not be fast enough or strong enough to save us from catastrophe, but it is the strongest force available for that

purpose, and its proper place, therefore, is not at the periphery but at the center of international relations. (Cited in Armbruster, 1976, pp. 27-29)

Senator Fulbright thought international education could start us down the road to peace and a more sustainable existence through critical reflection of one's own beliefs and values, possibly leading to a more empathetic and understanding citizenry.

Colleges and universities across the United States have answered the call of increased intercultural exchange and students are participating in record numbers.

According to the *Open Doors* report, published by the Institute of International Education (2008), in the last decade study abroad by U.S. students increased over 5% annually and 8% annually between 2004 and 2006. The 2006/07 academic year showed 241,791 students studying abroad compared with under 100,000 in 1996/97, nearly a 150% increase. The *Open Doors* report also found that more students are choosing non-traditional study abroad locations, particularly in developing nations such as China, Argentina, South Africa, Ecuador and India, a 20% increase over the previous year. The increase in numbers is spurred on by a host of new programs and opportunities that are meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse and culturally aware student study abroad population.

In conjunction with traditional study abroad programs, many colleges and universities are creating specialized short-term study abroad programs that allow for greater flexibility and increased intercultural and environmental understanding. The traditional short-term travel experience lasts between two weeks and 3 months (January term and any program two to eight weeks during the academic year), combining academics and travel sequentially or simultaneously and usually involves faculty taking

students and other faculty, teachers, alumni and community members for an “educational tour” (Long, Akarde, Purdy & Nakano, 2008). Faculty led study tours have been around since the 1940’s and 1950’s, usually catering to the more affluent and were referred to as “vacation study programs” (Institute of International Education, 2007). Today, the numbers suggest an entirely new demographic. Many students cannot afford to take a semester or year to study abroad due to demanding degree programs and economic resources and now seek out the short-term option. In 1993/94, less than 2% of study abroad students participated in a short-term study abroad program, by 2004 the percentage quadrupled to 8% and by 2006/07 55% of U.S. students chose short-term programs. In other words short-term programs now serve the largest number of Americans studying abroad. Jackson (2008) expresses that due to the increasingly interconnected and globalized world, students in the new millennium are demanding educational opportunities outside their home country.

The short-term programs obviously cannot deliver the same degree of cultural immersion as the traditional semester or yearlong study abroad program; however, they do give students a chance to get out of the traditional classroom and interact with other cultures and environments. The Institute of International Education (2007) asserts that, “shorter programs, if well planned, can offer a more intensive and focused experience” (p. xxxiii). One study suggested that the length of stay does not necessarily influence the level of global engagement (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009). Studies show that indeed a short-term study abroad program can have a significant effect on the sojourner, introducing life-changing experiences and promoting greater cultural understanding (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen & Hubbard, 2006; Bond & Jones, 1994; Donnelly-Smith,

2009; Harf, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Rubin, 1995; Orndorff, 1998; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova & DeJaeghere, 2003). Due to the dramatic shift and demand for short-term programs, much research and development needs to focus on creating quality short-term programs that focus on the new study abroad demographics. Institutions of higher learning are reassessing programs and curriculum to better prepare students for today's diverse world.

Some universities and colleges such as Colorado State University, Lesley University, Kalamazoo College, Princeton University and Warren Wilson College have created unique programs to build international awareness and integrate sustainable development principles. Colorado State University offers students alternative spring breaks through the Student Leadership Involvement and Community Engagement (SLICE) program, designed to immerse students into different cultural, environmental and socioeconomic communities across America and international destinations. One SLICE program in 2006 sponsored a trip to Panama, constructing a village bird watching deck to bring sustainable ecotourism to a remote jungle community two hours from the capitol city. The students immersed themselves in the culture, traveling by local buses, visiting villages and practicing their Spanish. CSU students "gained not only valuable construction skills, but were exposed to a new culture and created global connections by taking a little bit of CSU to a remote group of grateful citizens of Panama" (Panama Spring Break Trip Makes Global Connections, 2006). Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts specializes in education and art and has developed short-term educational travel programs to Bali, Mexico, Cuba, England, Ecuador and Tibet that incorporate sustainable development principles. Brown and Smith (2005) describe events of the

January 2002 trip to Cuba and sought to understand the power of place in transformative learning. They concluded that travel is indeed valuable for transformation in adult education, giving students an opportunity to earn credits in a unique learning environment; building “connections and community in its broadest sense”; and becoming critically aware of “multiple perspectives in this increasingly volatile global village” (Brown & Smith, 2005 p. 10).

Kalamazoo University takes international education to a whole new level, with over 80% of their graduates studying abroad. Kalamazoo’s Center for International Programs initiated the International Sustainable Development Studies Institute (ISDSI), a unique study abroad program that is academically challenging and intensely experiential. Based in Thailand, ISDSI students travel and live with local people, studying about the cultural, environmental and sustainable development issues through month-long expedition field courses (Ritchie, 2003). The ISDSI mission is to develop committed leaders for a sustainable future. ISDSI believes the best way to achieve this goal is by combining real life cross-cultural experiences with leadership development, instilling the confidence and commitment to be change agents in their future careers. Princeton University created a unique “bridge year” program encouraging students to spend a year of public service abroad before beginning their freshman year (Cliatt, 2008). The main goal of the program is to give students an opportunity to pursue a tuition-free, pre-collegiate enrichment year outside of their home country with support of the University to build intercultural awareness. In essence students have the opportunity to gain a valuable international perspective without the pressures of academic recognition. The Princeton program is not a short-term program but still emphasized making it easier for

students to study abroad with institutional and economic support. Warren Wilson College offers short-term study abroad courses that integrate travel with classes taught by Warren Wilson faculty to instill cross-cultural awareness and focus on environment and sustainability issues (The Story behind Making Study Abroad Sustainable, 2008). The classes incorporate sustainable travel values by using public transportation, incorporating bike travel and low-impact camping and places an emphasis on using locally produced products and services, as well as offsetting carbon costs of their plane travel. These are just a few examples of how universities and colleges are providing amazing opportunities for transformation and cultural understanding.

Other programs that understand the need for short-term cultural immersions are private international educational organization such as Carpe Diem International Education, based in Portland, Oregon. According to the Carpe Diem web site, the organization runs guided three-month-long programs in Central and South America, India, Africa, Austria and South America. The program emphasizes small groups and integrates home stays to maximize cultural immersion. The curriculum gives student travelers a broad-based, intense instruction to a particular region with the comfort and security of a group of fellow sojourners and two experienced leaders, integrating service work, foreign language study, community and environmental work, outdoor adventure, and optional college credit from Portland State University.

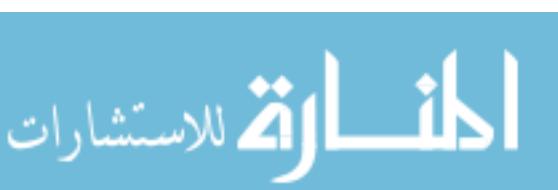
Living Routes, based out of Amherst, MA, offers semester, January, summer and year-long programs that are both academic and experiential based. The web site states that, “Living Routes creates academic and experiential programs based in sustainable communities around the world that help students gain the knowledge, skills and

inspiration to build lifestyles for themselves, their communities and the planet.” Each program is taught by faculty with international experience in locations such as India, Scotland, Senegal and Mexico. The unique aspect of Living Routes is they take place in ecovillages, so students and faculty learn to live in a sustainable manner within a community that strives towards sustainable living. These kinds of learning environments no doubt provide the perfect experience for sustainable and transformative learning. Students can earn credit through the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Pacific Discovery, operating out of New Zealand and accredited through Seattle Central Community College and the University of Oregon, offers student programs that combine sustainable education adventure travel with cultural immersion, experiential education, volunteer and community service and optional study-abroad college classes. Their program destinations include Nepal, Tibet, New Zealand, Peru and Southeast Asia and last from a summer to an entire year. These are just a few of the programs building unique international education experiences. The examples above are starting to integrate the concept of sustainable and ethical travel into the scope of international education. However, the majority of study abroad programs seem to never have considered the ecological and social footprint of their students. Due to the increasing demand of students wanting to study abroad, colleges and universities will need to incorporate the values of sustainable travel into their programs. The remainder of the literature will focus on responsible and ethical travel that promotes sustainability.

Sustainable International Travel

Just as the concepts of sustainability can be applied to education and development, it can also pertain to international travel. Often to comprehend an idea such



as sustainability, one should get a different perspective. Traveling to foreign countries, particularly third world countries with vastly different beliefs, will most often present the traveler with a different perspective. For this reason, international travel can present the perfect learning circumstances for acquiring a new concept such as sustainability and applying them to a new and unique situation.

In *The Innocents Abroad* Mark Twain (1966) asserts that “travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness...” (p.489). There are many ways to travel abroad; some of the most common methods involve the tourism industry, independent travel and university study abroad programs. These methods create opportunities for overseas experience, possibly introducing the sojourners to alternative realities, building connections and a greater appreciation towards other cultures and the environment. The literature suggest the tourism industry, independent travel and study abroad experiences have profound impacts on personal perceptions; however, there is also literature on the negative effects of these types of travel especially when it comes to sustainability. After a brief introduction to travel, the first section describes current sustainable trends in the tourism industry, while the second section outlines the modern movements in study abroad and the third section summarizes independent backpacker travel.

International travel has been a part of humanity’s educational and transformative processes for hundreds of years. It is hard to escape the life-changing power of epic journeys, especially within religious context. Practically every great religion in the world has some kind of pilgrimage, a journey that leads to some kind of personal transformation. The Catholics have the Camino de Santiago; the Muslims travel to Mecca; the Tibetan Buddhist travel to Mt. Kalish; Hindus travel to the source of the

Ganges. The bible talks of Jesus and his journeys through the deserts where he cleansed himself of material comforts, reexamining his personal beliefs and becoming transformed in the process. According to Kersten (1994), Jesus traveled to India, studying under gurus and eventually became “the Christ” as a result of his travels and what he learned in the East. Likewise, Siddhartha traveled outside his father’s kingdom, where he left behind his childhood and preconceived notions about the world and became the Buddha. Confucius traveled for 13 years throughout China, no doubt, influencing his popular beliefs on “ren” or the ideals of benevolence and kindness towards humanity. Homer’s classic epic the *Odyssey* takes place during a 10 year journey. Darwin came up with his ideas about natural selection while exploring other lands. America was founded on the ideals of manifest destiny, traveling west to explore and overcome unknown territory. These same ideals lead us to the moon. There is little doubt that travel to the far flung corners of the world can lead to profound change within individuals and have lasting effects on society.

For many Englishman’s education the final phase included the Grand Tour of Europe. The 18th century English gentleman travel writer Thomas Nugent described the Grand Tour as “a custom so visibly tending to enrich the mind with knowledge, to rectify the judgment, to remove the prejudices of education, to compose the outward manners, and in a word form the complete gentleman” (Buzard, 1993, p.98). The travel phenomenon played an important part in completing the educational and transformational process and continues to do so today. From the very beginning, traveling was about “religious pilgrimages, scientific investigation and geographic exploration” but somehow it became something different (Honey, 1999, p. 7). After the aristocratic Grand Tour of the 18th century, the industrial age ushered in a new era of middle-class travel which

ultimately created the mass tourism industry of the post-industrial age (Crick, 1989). The literature paints a pretty negative picture on the ecological and social effects of the tourism industry. MacCannell (1976) explains that, “The term ‘tourist’ is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences” (p. 94). In fact, just the word *tourism* conjures up some pretty negative images. Many scholars believe the word “tourism” contradicts the fundamental concepts of sustainability and therefore should be used to describe traditional leisure activities and not ecologically and socially conscientious travel (Crick, 1989). For example some authors explain how prepaid, packaged holidays concentrate most the money directly to the multi-national owners of hotels with little money trickling into the local economy (Brohman, 1996; Hampton, 1998; Honey, 1999; Scheyvens, 2002). Usually only a fraction of tourist dollars trickle into the local community, such as buying souvenirs or braiding your hair (Turner, 1975). The World Bank estimates that “55 percent of tourism dollars leak out” of developing countries via foreign-owned tour operators, airlines, and hotels and by locally owned operators paying for imported food, drinks, and other supplies (Honey, 1999, p. 88). Some other studies suggest 80 to 90 % is a more accurate estimate of actual “leakage” (McLaren, 2003; Vivanco, 2006; Brohman, 1996). In the United Kingdom, through company mergers, now four companies control 90 % of the outbound packaged tours, and own the hotels, airlines, cruise ships and retail stores as well (O’Conner, 2000). If sustainability is about spreading economic wealth and enhancing local economic, social and environmental situations then clearly traditional “tourism” contributes little to the values of sustainability.

Some of the literature even focuses on the contradicting terms of ‘tourism’ and ‘travel.’ The word travel, derived from the word *travail* meaning to work, is in fact the antithesis of tourism, where sun, sex, sea, sand and inactivity are the norm (Boorstin, 1972; Matthews, 1977). Mowforth and Hunt (2003) give a list of descriptive words used in travel literature to show the chasm that exists between tourisms and traveling. “Invasion, rape, poisoning, tidal wave, pollution, and swarms” describe tourisms while “discovery, exploration, understanding and peaceful contact” depict traveling (p. 129). Tourism takes place in mega resort locations such as “Benidorm, Torremolinos, and Kos” while classic travel destinations include “Tikal, Phnom Penh, and Zanzibar.” “Sun, sand, sea and sex” equal tourism; “sensible, sensitive, sophisticated and sustainable” identify travel (Mowforth & Munt, 2003, p. 129). The basic difference between a traveler and a tourist is that a traveler conscientiously sees their connection to the environment while a tourist is almost completely ignorant. The tourist does not see their relation to the environment and social structure and how their actions could negatively impact the local surroundings. Theroux (1992) makes the distinction between tourist and traveler by saying, “tourist don’t know where they’ve been and travelers don’t know where they’re going” (p. 18). Clearly the literature suggests a distinction between the average tourist and the hearty traveler.

Cooper (2003) says, “we have moved from travel, to tourism, to mass tourism” and now many sojourners are advocating a “back to travel” mentality (p. 230). Travel transformed into tourism and now the goal of tourism should be to return to a more ecologically and socially sensitive enterprise. This suggests returning to the essence of going abroad or back to a ‘traveler’ mentality. To answer this calling, a new kind of

traveler has emerged onto the scene, a traveler that considers their impact on the social, environmental and economical issues.

The new moral and ethical tourist industry falls under the guise of ecotourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, alternative tourism, responsible tourism, pro-poor tourism, community tourism, ethical tourism, cultural tourism, geotourism, nature-based tourism and a host of other names (Weaver, 2001). Although the term ecotourism is credited to Ceballos-Lucurain (1987) the origins of the term are described by Hetzer (1965) as the principles of responsible tourism: minimizing environmental impact; respecting host cultures and maximizing the benefits to local people. Since 1990, the International Ecotourism Society (2008) has defined ecotourism as, "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (What is Ecotourism section, para. 1) The Nature Conservancy (2008) and the World Conservation Union adopted the following definition of ecotourism: "Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples" (What is Ecotourism section, para. 4). Both definitions closely resemble and encompass the ideals of sustainability, in other words the ideas of approaching travel with the environment, society and economy in mind. Ecotourism can be distinguished from other types of tourism because it emphasizes conservation, education, traveler responsibility and active community participation. Specifically, according to the Nature Conservancy (2008) ecotourism possesses the following characteristics:

- Conscientious, low-impact visitor behavior
- Sensitivity towards, and appreciation of, local cultures and biodiversity
- Support for local conservation efforts
- Sustainable benefits to local communities
- Local participation in decision-making
- Educational components for both the traveler and local communities (What is Ecotourism section, para. 6)

The attributes of ecotourism help ensure the environment is conserved and the welfare of local peoples is promoted (Scheyvens, 1999). Other definitions similar to ecotourism include geotourism which sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place including its environment, heritage, aesthetics and culture (Dowling & Newsome, 2006). Responsible tourism is any tourism that maximizes benefits for local communities and minimizes negative impacts on the environment or local culture (Russell & Wallace, 2004). Sustainable tourism meets the needs of present travelers and host countries while protecting and enhancing opportunities for future tourism experiences (Ryan, 2002). Nature-based tourism relies on promoting a location's natural environment (McCool, 2009; Valentine, 1992). Pro-poor tourism concentrates on experiences that produce net benefits for poor people in the host site (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001). The literature suggests that each form of ethical travel contains their own unique meanings; however, they all resonate the ideas of sustainability.

The World Tourism Organization (as cited in Liu, 2003) defines sustainable tourism as:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. (p. 465)

This definition does a great job of melding the classical Brundtland definition of SD with the needs of the tourism industry and goes a step farther to include resource management and cultural awareness, a much need clarification to the definition.

Honey (1999) explains that, “the ultimate goal of ecotourism should be to infuse the entire travel industry with the principles and practices of ecotourism and thereby transform tourism into an environmentally and culturally sensitive activity that contributes to sustainable growth in developing countries” (p. 25). Honey describes ecotourism as “travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights” (p. 25).

After careful review of the literature, I believe sustainable tourism is any “travel” experience that fully engages the traveler in their surroundings, building intricate connections to promote an understanding of environmental issues, minimize impact, contribute positively to the host community, support conscious and responsible behavior and empower travelers to take action, ultimately bringing back this awareness to their

own communities. Sustainable travel ethics should never stop once a travel experience ends because ultimately we are all just visitors on this planet we call earth, taking one long journey, traveling through many delicate environments, living in communities, and using natural resources to support our daily lives. After a traveler becomes aware of their intricate connections to their foreign surroundings then perhaps they will bring these same concepts back to more familiar environments, promoting the same beneficial actions towards their own neighbors, communities and the natural systems that support them.

Backpacker Travel

Despite the many arguments about the negative effects of the tourism industry, some authors point out that “travel is individual enough to be a sustainable alternative to the juggernaut of mass tourism” (Mowforth & Munt, 2003, p. 129). Small scale travel can better approach sustainable practices. One group of travelers who have always set themselves apart from the average tourist is the backpacker traveler. Cohen (1972) first made the distinction between non-institutionalized and institutionalized tourism, the latter representing conventional mass tourist and the former as drifters; nomads; and wanderers and more recently as ‘backpackers’. The non-institutional tourist usually has no rigid plan, travels for longer durations, has a smaller budget, eats in low-priced and locally owned restaurants, uses public transportation and sleeps in budget accommodations (Cohen ,1972, 1973, 1982; Hannam & Ateljevic, 2008; Riley, 1988; Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002; Vogt, 1976). Whereas, the institutionalized tourist is largely sheltered from the local population in ‘manufactured bubbles’; the backpacker comes in direct contact with the host culture, since they are not using exclusive tourist transportation or



staying in isolated mega resorts (Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002). Another area of distinction is the idea of adventure, self-change, and the authentic experience. The backpacker is in constant search for authenticity, seeking out the “fateful moment” that often leads to self discovery and self-change (Giddens, 1991). Quite often the backpacker embarks on the journey for the purpose of self-discovery, describing their transformations as more wise, socially empathetic, and knowledgeable. The literature suggests a theme of mass-tourist at the most mundane end of the spectrum and the backpacker seeking out the more adventuresome, off the beaten track experience (Lower-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Clearly the literature suggests that backpackers are motivated to seek out more authentic experiences, possibly leading to greater self awareness and greater cultural sensitivity.

The analogy could be drawn between mass-tourism and perhaps mass-study abroad. Although no direct studies of similarities exist, the popular study and travel magazine *Transitions Abroad* dedicated two articles on the issue in their 2006 *Transitions Abroad Student Guide to Studying, Volunteering and Working Overseas*. One article titled *The Impact of Study Abroad: Educational Travel as a Model for Responsible Tourism* (Sumka, 2006) and another titled *Sustainable Travel and Study Abroad* (Jirka, 2006) both suggest that study abroad and the tourism industry are similar in many ways and as such share comparable negative impacts. The articles drew strong connections between the two forms of travel. For example both are synonymous with package programs, where most everything is arranged before hand and during the excursion. While some study abroad students may learn to dive deeper into the culture, many students simply become immersed in their studies, spending time in between a classroom and their host family, seldom venturing “off the beaten path” and indeed often

encouraged to experience the “other” from behind the glass of a tour bus. Although the host family stay provides a unique cultural experience, it could be argued that many study abroad students never really learn how to travel but simply stick to the familiar surroundings of their host family and college environment. This kind of situation could alienate a student from a more authentic experience.

If study abroad is about immersion into an authentic experience then perhaps study abroad should be based on a form of travel that seeks out the “authentic experience” (Cohen, 1982, p. 221). Backpacker travel has been described by many researchers as a more authentic form of travel, bringing the sojourner closer to other cultures through choice of non-touristy exotic destinations, use of local accommodations, eating at local restaurants, traveling on local transportation and a willingness to adapt to local behaviors (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2008; MacCannell, 1999; Noy, 2004; Noy & Cohen, 2005; Urry, 2002). Some researchers consider the entire backpacking phenomenon to be a continuous educational learning experience (Avrahami, 2001; Pearce & Foster, 2007; Tomaszewski, 2003). Studies also saw unexpected forms of education, in addition to learning about other places and cultures, much of the personal development benefits of backpacker travel come from simply making decisions and dealing with the daily demands of life in an unusual setting (Gmetch, 1997). Unlike the mass tourist, the backpacker sojourner desires to “deeply soak themselves in the very essence of the native culture” or to be “at one with the locals” rather than gawking through the glass window of ubiquitous tourist buses (Muzaini, 2006; Urry, 1990). Riley (1998) suggested that backpackers even engage in the mundane aspects of “localized” culture, constantly seeking out situations for “meeting the people” (p. 325). Backpacker style of travel is in

stark contrast to mass tourism for many reasons but perhaps the main difference is the positive effects it has on local populations as opposed to the numerous negative effects of mass tourism. One could say that the backpacker method of travel encompasses a more sustainable form of travel. Backpackers most often give back to local communities through meaningful cultural experiences, patronizing local businesses, restaurants, sleeping in family own hostels and small hotels and lessening their impact on local natural resources.

A study conducted in Bolivia, found the economic impact from backpackers and unorganized “rucksack” travelers was more than “three times that of organized or packaged group tourists” (Honey, 1999, p. 88). The study acknowledged that backpackers usually spend less money per day, however, they normally stay longer, and generally patronize locally owned hotels, hostels, restaurants and other facilities. A similar study conducted in Australia by the government concluded that backpackers spend twice the amount as the average tourists and perhaps more importantly, backpackers purchased three times as much locally produced goods (Hampton, 1998). Particularly in developing nations, large hotels often import food and beverages, effectively bypassing the local retailers and food suppliers for more westernized foods. On the other hand small scale tourism usually adapts to the available supply (Rodenburg, 1980). Clearly the latter recognizes the need to exist within the carrying capacity of the local environment and contributes to the local economy. Local ownership also plays a role with smaller scale tourism, where as large resorts require huge sums of capital, smaller scale projects allow for more local involvement. Cohen states, “Local ownership implies that economic success for the entrepreneur results in benefits to the local

economy" (1982, p. 190). In some developing countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, foreign entrepreneurs bought up acres of beach front property for literally pennies. Many locals saw the land as unproductive, especially agriculturally. However, as tourism developed and the land's value increased, most of the beach front property was in the hands of foreigners, alienating the local populations from the emerging tourism industry. However, in some areas such as Thailand's Ko Samui, local people retained control of the beaches and as a result a thriving backpacker haven exists alongside traditional fishing and farming villages (Cohen, 1982). Instead of bulldozing down villages, displacing locals and creating refugees for large scale resorts, small scale tourism could instead complement local traditional lifestyles (McCarthy, 1994). Hampton (1988) brings up the important question, is it possible to simply stop at backpacker style travel instead of large scale development. If the tourism industry is supposed to improve social conditions in the name of development, then limiting tourism development to small scale projects would make sense.

As stated earlier, international backpacking experiences can be transformative to the sojourner, evidence also suggests that the same can happen for local communities. In some areas such as Yogyakarta, Indonesia, backpackers have revived poverty-stricken communities once ridden with prostitution and crime into thriving communities with well-kept houses, small businesses and restaurants. "The local kampung (urban village) residents are in no doubt at all that the arrival of the backpackers has transformed their place for the better" (Hampton, 1999). Further findings found that backpackers were the foreign tourist least likely to partake or be drawn to the sex tourism industry. In fact Bangkok's backpacker ghetto of Khao San Road, is one of the only areas in the city not

associated with sex tourism (Scheyvens, 2002). Perhaps the greatest aspect of backpackers is the simple fact that they spend less, thus generally needing and consuming fewer local resources. These kinds of studies could help enhance backpacker style travel as a more economical opportunity for local host communities.

Just as third world study abroad destinations are increasing, tourism destinations to developing countries are on the rise as well. If local peoples are to mitigate the unfair practices of foreign ownership, they will need to gain real control of their destiny. The alternatives "...between being a cleaner in a large international hotel" or "being the owner of a small losmen (homestay), cooking and serving at tables in their own place" is simply the ability to control one's fate (Hampton, 1998, p. 650). The literature suggests that backpacker style travel puts control in the hands of locals, keeping communities thriving and sustainable.

For many cultures, overseas travel is a rite of passage, not a two week packaged tour, but an all out adventure of other cultures, environments and perspectives (Bell, 2002; Graburn, 1989; Noy, 2003; Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002). With less than 20% of US citizens possessing a passport, one could conclude that four fifths of the U.S. population has not even stepped outside its borders. Although the U.S. is substantially bigger than most countries in the world with a wide range of culture, environments and socio economic levels, there is no substitute for actual travel in a foreign country with completely different values and ideologies. If graduates from U.S. colleges and universities are to compete in a global economy and help create a more sustainable way of living, they will need to understand the diversity that embodies our small planet. Richards and Wilson (2004) state that backpacker travel often presents uncertainties that

help transform the traveler's view of themselves, their own society and other cultures. This valuable knowledge can be used for understanding connections, but more importantly it can help a person deal with the uncertainties and changes that are inevitable if we are to have a more sustainable planet. Indeed the authors say that "if you can survive as a backpacker, you can deal with any problems that life may throw at you later" (Richards & Wilson, 2004, p. 6). Perhaps by introducing sustainable backpacker style travel into college and university study abroad programs, students will gain the knowledge and experiences to understand and embody how truly connected we are to the world's environment, economy and social systems and that each individual action effects everything on this planet. Only then will we realize a sustainable existence.

Summary

The purpose of chapter two was to familiarize the reader with the literature and theoretical framework that supports this study. Within the scope of an ILA experience several areas emerged as significant and relevant to the study. First, I introduced the idea of sustainable development and how sustainable education plays a part in this endeavor. Then I discussed how sustainable education embodies experiential and transformative learning. I also included behavioral change to complement the idea of transformation. Next, I gave a brief overview of study abroad programs within the scope of university, college, and international education organizations. Then I included the concept of sustainability within the tourism industry and finally in the last section, I presented backpacker style travel, a type of travel that encompasses sustainability concepts and introduces sojourners to authentic experiences but plays a minor role within the modern movement of short-term study abroad programs.

Chapter 3. Method

The methodology section includes an overview of qualitative research and its implications for sustainable learning. Literature on phenomenological inquiry and photo elicitation interviews are presented to help clarify particular aspects of these research methods and how they influence the data and analysis. The research design section includes the research question, explanation of human subject protection, selection criteria, collection of data and the analysis method. Limitations of qualitative research are presented, particularly restrictions related to phenomenological research and photo elicitation interviews.

Qualitative Research and Sustainable Learning

If academic research is going to succeed in teaching sustainable concepts then qualitative methods must become an accepted mode of transferring knowledge, at least equal to quantitative research. Creswell (2003) describes the quantitative approach as knowledge derived from cause and effect thinking, reductionism and the use of measurement and observation to yield statistical data from predetermined instruments and isolated variables. During the modern era, quantitative methods created easy-to-grasp generalizations but now during the postmodern era the qualitative methods must help scholars dive deeper into the details and variety of the complex world that surrounds us (Hottola, 2004). Becoming conscientious of quantitative methods that stress reductionist and isolated reasoning can begin to teach us about how we view the world. One of the very reasons that humans are so detached from sustainable concepts is because we were taught to isolate things from one another and to mostly value that which can be measured and observed (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008). In order for sustainable thought to prosper,

we must place greater value on qualitative relationships that build on the experimental method of causal investigation (Maxwell, 2004). Relationships are the foundation to creating sustainable ideals. Once a person sees the connectedness between all processes, objects, people, animals and the environment, then we can begin to move forward in a more sustainable manner.

Embedded in the philosophy of realism, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to experiment in natural settings, use multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, and allow knowledge to emerge rather than be prefigured (Baert, 1998; Layder, 1990; Sayer, 1992). The qualitative research method supports sustainable thought by deriving knowledge from multiple meanings based on individual and collective experiences set in an historical and cultural milieu. Qualitative research is often aimed at changing the status quo with theories and patterns developed from open-ended data. It places greater meaning and value on collaboration, participation and research methods that foster relationships rather than the measurement of isolated objects (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research embodies the ideals of education *as* sustainability by viewing social phenomena holistically, acknowledging that all data is interpreted through a personal lens, and that good research uses complex reasoning that is interactive, encompassing, multifaceted and simultaneous (Salmon, 1984, 1989, 1998). In other words it allows for the complexities of interrelated systems to be expressed within the research. We do not live in a vacuum, void of outside variables; qualitative research recognizes this fact and in so doing, advances the ideals of sustainable thought. With this being said, we must not forget our foundation in quantitative research, this way of viewing the world has yielded much practical data on sustainability issues. Some great examples include the quantitative

research supporting climate change, energy consumption, waste production, recycling and species extinction. The raw data of quantitative research has painted a broad picture of facts and numbers showing an unsustainable path. We needed and will still need the snapshot of scientific thought to focus us in a particular direction. However, we need to recognize the limitation of quantitative data and advance in a more sustainable direction, one that reconnects the fragmented pieces of data into a holistic perspective.

Quantitative research can fall short when examining the intricacies of social phenomena (Kittel, 2006). For this reason, qualitative research, by exploring and bringing forth themes of the phenomenon, is designed to probe deeper into the experience and hopefully provide useful information about a particular phenomenon (Cassell & Symon, 1998). As stated earlier, Americans will need some kind of catalyst to help transform from our current unsustainable way of thinking about the world. Backpacker travel can often put people outside their comfort zone and act as a catalyst to change. Perhaps by exploring and building themes around backpacker travel experiences, we can find a possible catalyst that could help transform our ethnocentric views on over consumption, resource depletion, and social inequality. Transformation is complex; however, there is plenty of research suggesting that transformation can occur if we are challenged to step outside our borders and personal comfort zones (Sandgren, Elig Hovde, Krejci, Rice, 1999; Sikes, 2006). If we can find meaning and understanding in a transformative moment, then perhaps we can find a means to help transform our society. International backpacker travel that is conducted in a responsible and sustainable manner has the potential to reconnect participants to our natural environments and cultures around the world. The question remains, does an ILA experience as perceived by the traveler

provide a catalyst for change or does the experience simply reinforce old views? What kinds of themes emerge from an ILA phenomenon and how do these ideas contribute to transformational, experiential and sustainable learning? What does a participant on an ILA trip experience? Do the participants start to see the vital connection between all things and processes on this planet? These questions will serve as the guiding framework for this research paper.

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative analysis on the ILA study abroad trips in order to analyze and write a description of the participants' experiences. I described the travel experiences as perceived by the travelers through a phenomenological approach to research. I conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis, using photo elicitation interviews with students who have participated on a Mesa State College Outdoor Program international learning adventure expedition. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and discover the essence of an ILA phenomenon and possible transformations that may occur on an international backpacker adventure trip where students travel in a sustainable manner in a foreign country with different cultural values, languages, food and general ways of living. At this stage in the research, the transformational experience will be generally defined as an experience that fundamentally challenges the way the student thinks about the world and ultimately changes their previous conception.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research, grounded in the philosophy of Husserl (1931,1973) and Heidegger (1962), is a qualitative analysis that examines the lived experiences of humans, trying to understand the essential "truths" or "essences" of the lived experience

(Creswell et al., 2007; Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Hunington, 1999). Husserl, after living through the horrors of World War One, “sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lead absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). The slogan “Back to the things themselves” expresses the very essence of phenomenology, to return to the concrete, to begin with the realities of personal consciousness and the context and interpretive framework that surrounded the experience (Seifert, 1997). Husserl acknowledged that the scientific method played an important role in empirical human sciences but sought to make a more meaningful interpretation that included the descriptive approach within the context of the lived experience (McIntosh, 1997).

Phenomenology provides the perfect format for understanding the experiences of individual travelers because it allows for themes and ideas to emerge during the research in order to gain insights into possible transformative experiences. The main goal of a phenomenologist is to describe what all the participants have in common, working with specific statements and experiences and reducing the phenomenon of the group to a description that will “grasp the very nature of the thing” (Van Manen, 1990, p.177). Significant moments occur while traveling in foreign lands; I gained more information about why the moments were so important and drew out greater and deeper meaning about the experience. With this data, I developed a combined description of the essence of the experience for all the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (1990) explains that the researcher explores the phenomenon that captures their attention (transformation during backpacker travel), then reflects on the essential themes and crafts a description of the experience, maintaining a strong connection to the topic. In essence, the researcher

“mediates” amongst the different perceived experiences and interprets the meaning of the lived experiences. Phenomenology is an interpretive process that dances between the participants’ perspectives, the researcher’s perspective and the context of the phenomenon. In the end, the reader of a phenomenological study should walk away with a better sense of “what it is like for someone to experience” that phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46)

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the research paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” and helps reveal the researcher’s worldview (p. 157). Phenomenological research helped explain and discover the meaning of transformative travel experiences. The researcher’s choice of analysis lays the foundation to how the social phenomena will be interpreted. My belief regarding the study was based on: a) knowledge is contained within the perspectives of the students who participated on the ILA experience and b) that I must engage with the students to collect the data. Rather than simply read a student’s journal or conduct a survey, I wanted to probe deeper into the experience. For this reason I sought information through interviews that focused on photos taken from the experience. Based on Groenewald (2004) and Bresler (1995), I chose the phenomenological methodology as the best means for studying travel experiences because phenomenologists do not believe that the researcher can be detached from his/her beliefs and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise. As the facilitator of the ILA trips, I clearly had obvious beliefs about the themes that emerged from the interviews, particularly the transformative power of travel. Phenomenology allows the researcher to acknowledge their preconceived notions and gather the data

within this paradigm. I gathered data about the perceptions of the research participants about the phenomenon of transformation during an ILA expedition.

Photo Elicitation Interviews

The major instrument for phenomenological research is the open ended interview in which methods and strategies are intended to reflect the experience (Bresler, 1995). However, the limitations of the research interview can be problematic: “When respondents are asked to recall their actions, intentions, or understandings, their memories may be incomplete or inaccurate. They may give shortened or simplified accounts of complex events or reasoning and their reports may be influenced by their perceptions of the researchers’ expectations” (Van House, 2006, p. 1464). For this reason I used photos to catalyze interviews, to help mitigate some of the problems of research interviews. Being an avid photographer and knowing how photography plays such an important role in most travel experiences, I realized that each student on the international backpacking trips had literally hundreds of images to analyze. The interview process involved having each participant choose 10 photos of their own collection before the interview that best captured the essence of their traveling experience (Jenkins, Woodward & Winter, 2008). The foundation of the photo elicitation interview (PEI) is the idea of introducing photographs into a research interview to draw out more detailed and in-depth information during the interview process (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). Essentially the photograph is a tool to expand on questions and for the participants to use photographs to provide a unique way of communicating an aspect of their lives. The PEI, first described by Collier (1957), was used to examine how people adapted to different environments such as urban working

conditions and living with ethnically different people. Collier's study found the following:

The characteristics of the two methods of interviewing can be simply stated. The material obtained with photographs was precise and at times encyclopedic; the control interviews were less structured, rambling, and freer in association. Statements in the photo interviews were in direct response to the graphic probes and different in character as the content of the pictures differed, whereas the character of the control interviews seemed to be governed by the mood of the informants. (p. 856)

Collier's statement further addresses how photos can draw out more authentic information during the interview process.

Noland (2006) states that photos can generate more authentic data because it enables researchers to look at the participants' world through the participants' eyes. At the core of a phenomenological study, the researcher strives to understand the experience of the participant, how better to understand the experience than through visual images taken by the participant. Photography allows participants the freedom to pick and choose and record the most memorable and important moments on a trip. Images, according to Harper (2002) "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (p.13). Since phenomenology strives to dive deeper into the consciousness of the participant and include the elements that surround the moment, an image can go a long way in eliciting information that

connects the researcher to the experience of the participant. A photograph is a slice of perception in a moment in time. Berger (1972) explains:

An image is a sight, which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved—for a few moments or a few centuries.

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware of other possible sights... The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. (pp. 9-10)

Indeed, a photograph is much more than a recording devise, but rather an avenue into the consciousness and thought processes of the photographer.

Perhaps no photo expresses the togetherness of our humanity and the ecologic system more than the first ever photo snapped of the Earth from space. Now known as *Earth Rise*, photographed by astronaut Bill Anders during the Apollo 8 mission on Christmas Eve, 1968, this simple image awakened the consciousness of people around the world. Indeed the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Natural Environmental Policy Act and the first Earth Day occurred within a few years of this historic photo (Gore, 2006). The day after it was taken, the American writer, poet and Pulitzer Prize winner Archibald MacLeish wrote:

To see the Earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the Earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold, brothers who know now that they are truly brothers. (Gore, 2006, p.12)

Photos are powerful tools that can invoke emotions and arouse the mind and most importantly, connect us to a particular moment in time.

In photo elicitation research much attention is focused on what the photograph adds to the interview, although the photo does add a new dimension to the interview, the interview process is still a dynamic and collaborative accomplishment (Jenkins, Woodward & Winter, 2008). The collaborative effort of an in-depth interview is often challenged due to a lack of effective communication. The Colliers (1986) noted that photographs can bridge the gaps between strangers, facilitating conversation that may dive deeper into “unfamiliar, unforeseen environments and subjects” (p. 99). The Colliers went on to recognize that the collaborative process invoked a kind of research sharing during the questioning; where “the informants became assistants in discovering the answers to the questions in the realities of the photographs” (p. 105). Basically, both the researcher and the interviewee were exploring the photographs and making meaning together. It is important to note that a PEI is much more than simply talking about a photograph but rather a highly collaborative and active process that encourages deeper communication and ultimately derives meaning through a shared process between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Considering the power of visual research to elicit information, surprisingly PEI has played a minor role in social research. Originally used by anthropologists, Epstein (2006) points out that in recent years PEI is being used more in a variety of academic fields, including nursing (Riley & Manias, 2003), social work (Weigner, 1998), psychology (Salmon, 2001) and in a variety of age groups including children (Epstein 2006). Of particular interest to me is how PEI can be used in the area of adventure and

experiential learning. Loeffler's (2004) article is a great example of PEI in the field of experiential research. Loeffler's PEI analysis revealed three themes: spiritual connection with outdoors, connections to others, and gaining perspective. One participant of Loeffler's (2004) expressed how the "outdoor environment provided occasions to experiment with different ways of living and being as well as chances to look at life from new vantage points and vistas" (p. 7). World travel may also provide the same kind of experience as wilderness environments, one that challenges the preconceived notions of the participant and possibly transforms their perspective on life.

Research Design

In this section I explain the research design, including selection of research participants, conducting the interviews and protecting the participants. Creswell (1998) and Boyd (2001) recommend for a phenomenological study around 10 participants and suggest long and in-depth interviews in order to reach saturation. I interviewed until the topic was exhausted and no new information was introduced about the topic (Guest et al., 2006). I conducted a photo elicitation interview, having each student bring in 10 photos that helped draw out more detail about the travel experience. According to Hycner (1999), the phenomenon determines the method of research including the type of research participants. The main criterion for recruiting the participants was to select participants who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). Experience as an ILA expedition member and having photos of the trip were the main criteria for selecting participants. Participants' experiences from ILA trips from summer 2003 to winter 2009 formed the foundation of the study. This time period included the first ever ILA trip to Peru, Bolivia and Chile to the most recent trip (during

the time of the interviews) to Argentina and Chile, essentially giving the opportunity to include any participant from any ILA trips. See Table one for a list of ILA experiences. By including all ILA participants, the study allowed for a wide range of views and varying lengths of time from the experience to compare data. The selected time period included a total of 108 participants, in which 20 participants had two ILA experiences, 7 had three ILA experiences and 2 had four ILA experiences. This yielded a total of 88 possible participants for interviews.

Table 1. ILA Information

Trip Name	Date	# of Participants	Length of Trip	Countries Visited
South America	Summer 2003	11	4 weeks	Peru, Bolivia, Chile
South East Asia	Summer 2004	8	5 weeks	Thailand, Laos, Cambodia
Patagonia	Winter 2004-2005	10	5 weeks	Chile, Argentina
Northern India	Summer 2005	12	6 weeks	India
Baja California	Winter 2006	12	3 weeks	Mexico
East Africa	Summer 2006	10	6 weeks	Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania

La Ruta Maya	Winter 2006-2007	12	5 weeks	Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica
Nepal, Tibet & China	Summer 2007	13	8 weeks	Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh, Tibet, China
Jamaica	Summer 2008	10	4 weeks	Jamaica
Aconcagua	Winter 2009	11	4 weeks	Argentina, Chile

As the trip facilitator and designer of the ILA programs, I understood the indebtedness that the subjects may have had towards the researcher. To make sure participants had free consent to participate in the study, I emailed all the participants using a list serve of students who had participated on the ILA trips and let the participants self-select by emailing me back. Of the 88 emails, 32 emails returned with incorrect addresses mainly because many students had graduated or no longer had a Mesa State College email address. In order to reach these students I called 20 of these possible participants that did not have current email addresses. In total 49 potential participants replied positively. Some students could not participate in the interviews because they did not have photos from the trips, never responded to the emails or phone calls, some were traveling at the time and others were living overseas. From the list of possible participants who met the criteria, I selected a sampling of students to interview from different trips.

Sample

Since I wanted to accurately describe the ILA experience, I included in the sample of participants a range in ages, destinations and both genders. I chose from the possible participants on the basis of the research goal and my personal experience with the participants. This kind of selection process is called purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling, to determine the participants (Van Ryzin, 1995; Teddlie, 2007). Maxwell (1997) defined purposive sampling as a sampling technique used primarily in qualitative research in which, “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide” (p.87). I wanted a rich description that included the viewpoints of male and female, a range of ages, and at least one participant from each ILA study abroad trip.

A sample of the 10 ILA participants was eventually chosen from the potential participant group. The final subject group represented a wide range of participants, evenly split between males and females, a wide range of ages and included all 10 ILA study abroad experiences. Six of the members had participated on more than one ILA experience. I chose these candidates particularly for the in-depth knowledge they held about the trips and for possible themes that may or may not have occurred between the trips. For example does a trip to India have the same effect as a trip to Southern Patagonia? This kind of information could help paint a more accurate picture of the ILA phenomenon. I was also interested in what ILA trip elicited the most information through photos and the interview process. Did the student experience the same feelings on subsequent ILA trips? Did the experiences build on each other? The answer to these questions easily emerged during the interviews and are reported in the individual

descriptions. Table two gives a brief overview of the participants, including age during trip, age at the time of interview, gender, pseudonym and ILA programs they participated in.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Age during Trip	Age at interview	ILA Experience
I	Simon	Male	20	23	Baja, East Africa, Jamaica, Aconcagua
II	Jane	Female	23	24	Jamaica, Aconcagua
III	Kim	Female	22	26	Africa
IV	Sandy	Female	20	27	South America
V	Alice	Female	30	32	Ruta Maya
VI	Tim	Male	34	37	Africa, China, Jamaica
VII	Mike	Male	25	29	Ruta Maya, Baja, Thailand
VIII	Janice	Female	30	35	Southeast Asia, India
IX	Richard	Male	21	28	Patagonia, India
X	Ken	Male	20	20	Aconcagua

The setting of the interviews occurred in a comfortable location that the researcher and participant arranged to meet for at least two hours. The interviews were conducted one-to-one without interruption and recorded. In order to promote highly descriptive experiences, I asked each participant to bring 10 photos that represented their particular ILA experience. The participants were asked to describe in detail what each photo represented. I let the participants simply express what they were feeling about the photos through a free-thought process. The interviews elicited so much information that follow up questions were rarely needed. If I did ask a follow up question, it was simply for the participant to elaborate further on an idea that he or she had already brought forth. Many of my follow up questions simply added to the rich descriptions they portrayed. The interview process went amazingly smooth. There were a few recording issues that came up, mainly the need to have two recording devices simultaneously recording in case one fails. This did happen on the first interview and we had to meet a second time to finish the interview process. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and I chose a pseudonym for each participant for easy reference in the paper.

I analyzed the individual transcripts and identified statements, phrases, ideas and words that were connected to the experience. After completing the analysis of one interview I then repeated the process for all the interviews. Then I wrote an individual description of each participant's experience as expressed during the interview process. According to Moustakes (1994), it is necessary to develop an individual textural description of the participants' experiences from the verbatim transcripts in order to construct a universal description. I chose to write the individual descriptions in the first

person for ease of reading and to give the description a more personal feel. I shared the individual descriptions (Appendix C) with the participants and received feedback in order to make any necessary revisions for the final individual descriptions (Moustakes, 1994). I also included the individual transcribed interviews, including photos, in the Appendix for further verification of the participants' experiences. After writing individual descriptions and receiving feedback from each individual, I had an indication of the different themes that had emerged and how many of the participants shared a common view. I then grouped the individual statements from each original transcribed interview, not from the individual descriptions, into themes that emerged during the interviews and analysis, developing a general statement about each theme. I compiled all the themes and general statements from all the interviews in such a way as to create an overall description of the makeup, quality and essence of the phenomenon under examination. Finally, I wrote a final descriptive statement about the phenomenon under investigation utilizing the data collected.

As stated in the beginning of the chapter, it is not possible for qualitative researchers to be totally objective, because we each hold individual beliefs based on personality, culture, socioeconomic status and such (Burkitt, 1997; Colaizzi, 1978). However, we can strive to analyze data in an objective manner by attempting to suspend our pre-conceived notions or knowledge about the phenomenon under study (LeVasseur, 2003). For example, I have a strong desire for the ILA program to succeed and be successful. However, I also know that by revealing weaknesses in the program, I can strengthen particular aspects to help students thrive on ILA trips. When conducting the interviews I must become conscious of my underlying assumptions and actively set them

aside. I do not want to lead the conversation or influence the descriptions in any way.

Husserl (1931, 1973) believed that we could intuitively know the essence of an experience; a kind of intellectual “seeing” that becomes evident when comparing different experiences and then questioning what makes these experiences the same (p. 53). The technique of bracketing, characteristic of phenomenological research is the analytical process that attempts to “see” the essences of an experience while keeping the researchers assumptions and judgments separate (Powers & Knapp, 1995). This technique is designed to reduce the researcher’s bias by making it transparent and to remain open during the interview process in order to allow data to come forth in an unobstructed manner.

Of the many typologies of bracketing such as ideal, descriptive, existential, analytical and pragmatic bracketing, I used reflexive (cultural) bracketing, developed from phenomenological philosophy and qualitative research (Gearing, 2004). Since I was the expedition leader on the ILA expeditions and also the researcher, I have made apparent my own personal values. Reflexive bracketing focuses on making transparent the researcher’s cultural and personal assumptions by identifying personal feelings and ideas about the phenomenon before actually investigating the phenomenon so as to minimize the impact on the experience being studied (Andrews, Lyne, & Riley, 1996; Boyd, 1993; Cutcliffe, 2003; Mulhall et al., 1999; Padgett, 1998). Whereas internal suppositions are identified, external suppositions remain unbracketed because it is impossible to remove the culture, environment and context from the phenomenon; moreover the researcher wants to include these larger world beliefs (Gearing, 2004). During the reintegration stage of bracketing or analysis phase, the researcher unbrackets,

so as to allow their personal judgment to analyze the new data. In essence reflexive bracketing acknowledges that a phenomenon can be analyzed from multiple perspectives and that no single truth exists. Most importantly reflexive bracketing accepts the fact that no researcher can suspend their suppositions in any research endeavor but the researcher can make transparent and become consciously self-aware of their influence on the phenomenon under investigation.

In addition to the restrictions of phenomenological studies and the use of bracketing, utilizing photos during an interview process can also limit the scope of investigation. For example, participants who did not take photos during the ILA expedition could not be included in the study. These participants could have possibly given different meaning to the experience or the very act of taking a photo could have altered the experience. Perhaps the most amazing moments were not captured in a photo, but instead simply put to memory. This begs the question, what goes unphotographed during an ILA expedition? There were also limitations due to the environment, possibly eliminating photographic moments due to gear problems or the actual activity.

In order to protect our subjects and preserve the integrity of qualitative research, especially when involving human participants, I employed research ethics to the inquiry process. Ethical research on human subjects requires informed consent of the participants in the study. Based on Bailey's (2006) recommended items, an informed consent form included the following: that they are participating in research; the purpose of the research (without stating the central research question); the procedures of the research; the risk and benefits of the research, the voluntary nature of research, the subject's right to stop the research at any time and; the procedures used to protect confidentiality. All

participants received an explanation of the informed consent and signed the agreement before the interview. The consent form can be found in Appendix B.

Summary

In conclusion, I chose a research method that would best describe the lived experience of the MSC's Outdoor Program short-term ILA trips. Since I could not separate myself from the experience, phenomenology was a great research method because it allowed me to acknowledge my biases toward the experience and include this knowledge in my research. The use of PEI was a natural fit for the study since traditionally; participants take thousands of photos while on the ILA expeditions, potentially exposing much about their experiences. As far as I know, no previous phenomenological studies or PEI's attempted to describe an international backpacker travel experience in the context of short-term college study abroad programs. I plan on using this study to form a model for other colleges and universities to utilize backpacker style travel for study abroad experiences.

Chapter 4. Results

This chapter presents the data collected and information about the ILA experience, but most importantly this chapter gives an informative description about an ILA trip though the eye's of the participants. The primary data for the analysis came directly from participants on ILA trips. The information from the interviews provided primary data for rich individual descriptions. The participants' descriptions were written in the first person for easy reading and the original transcribed interviews are included in the Appendix for reference. The phenomenological process of analysis in concert with the photo elicitation interviews provided the perfect environment for an in-depth examination of the ILA experience.

The participants each brought 10 photos of their particular ILA experience and were asked to describe each photo. The photos provided the perfect catalyst for remembering their individual experiences. As the participants described their photos, certain themes would appear and at times I would ask for clarification about a particular subject or theme revealed during the interview. No set questions were used during the interview, instead I just let the interview free flow to allow a more natural conversation to unfold and allow the participants to share their perspective. At no point were the participants persuaded to follow a particular direction, but rather, they were gently encouraged to elaborate on themes that naturally emerged from the conversation.

Most of the interviews were conducted in an office without interference; one was conducted in a house and another over the phone while viewing the pictures simultaneously on the computer via the internet. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and written into individual descriptions of the ILA phenomenon, including



the most relevant points from the participant's point of view. It is important to note that constructing the individual descriptions are part of the overall phenomenological process. By constructing the individual descriptions, I can better see patterns and themes that emerged from the ILA experience. As well, the reader can gain a better understanding of the individual experiences and compare individual experiences to the general themes and overall description of the phenomenon.

Next, the transcribed interviews, not the constructed individual descriptions, were closely analyzed and coded to specify particular statements that explained, described, or gave meaning to the photos. These coded statements from the interviews formed the bases for creating categories of common themes. It is important to note that all individual descriptions and themes were derived from the actual verbatim transcriptions, so as to allow less room for error. Tables, included in each theme section, consist of actual quotes taken from the transcribed interviews. Again, the actual transcribed interviews are included as part of this document in the Appendix. I encourage you to read these original transcribed interviews, because the text and photos appear together, so as to recreate the power of the PEI. Each participant experienced the ILA in a particular manner; however, many of the same feelings and descriptions were shared by the group of participants regardless of the wide range of cultures and geographic regions experienced. As a result, common themes were easy to find with a few variations within the same general theme.

Four common themes and several sub-categories emerged after careful study. Some of the themes pertained to explanations of the ILA trip, such as what the travelers learned culturally, geographically, and environmentally. Other themes revealed interpersonal growth and the deeper significance of the trip. Most of the themes were

shared by the entire group, with easy patterns emerging from the interviews. There is a great deal of interconnectedness between the themes, each intimately entwined with the other; however, at some point an arbitrary distinction was made for analytical reasons. In many themes, sub-categories or sub-themes will overlap from one theme to the other. For example the sub-theme of transportation will be used to describe backpacking style travel as well as gaining a global perspective. Every attempt was made to truthfully reflect the experience of an ILA trip; however, the themes and meaning of the trip do reflect the researcher's interpretation of the data. To minimize researcher bias, I shared the analysis with the research participants. No objections were stated about the common themes. Others may look at particular segments of the data and come up with different conclusions, but the basic descriptions would remain relatively the same.

The common themes as described by the participants were:

1. The backpacker style of travel played a significant role in the trip resulting in an overall serendipitous feel, leading to a sense of fun, exploration and adventure.
2. Participants gained a global perspective and awareness.
3. Participants gained a greater sense of self-awareness through personal growth and reflection.
4. All participants expressed seeing “connections.”

These themes emerged from the majority of the participants, meaning at least eight out of the ten participants felt the impact from these particular themes.

The researcher analyzed the verbatim transcribed interviews and pulled key statements from the interviews to form the basis of the each theme. The participant's statements are specified by their names in a table at the end of each theme description.

Most statements came from remembering events associated with a particular photograph. The statements gave the researcher a wide variety of information for a rich description and understanding of what happens on an ILA study abroad trip and how these trips affect the participants.

Since the themes and fundamental description were derived from each participant, I will first present the individual descriptions. This way the reader can experience a similar process as the researcher, whereby, the researcher started to see possible themes as the individual descriptions were written. After reading the individual descriptions, the themes should be easier to comprehend and understand though the experience of the participant. Then I will present the different themes and finally a fundamental description of an ILA backpacker style short-term study abroad experience.

The Participants' Individual Descriptions

The individual interviews laid the foundation for the individual descriptions. Each description was written in first person and as a narrative for ease of reading. Each participant received a letter (Appendix A) and a copy of their description for validation and comments. The descriptions attempt to point out key ideas, concepts, information, and specific details as perceived by the participant. In particular, significant events that led to personal reflection, exploration, and learning were included. Some of the descriptions were centered on the significance of the experience while others explain more about the culture and location visited. In each case the researcher tried to write a description that expressed what made the trip personal and meaningful to the participant. A brief introduction of the participant explains what trip or trips they participated on, their profession, personality, gender, race, and any recent or upcoming travel plans.



Simon

Simon was 18 and a freshman in college on his first ILA experience to Baja, Mexico. He has participated on four ILA trips including Africa, Jamaica and Aconcagua. Since he has participated on four trips, he was included as a participant for his rich knowledge of the ILA experience and potential insight to various aspects of each ILA trip. He is studying environmental science, a white male and has lived most his life in Western Colorado. Simon's attitude is laid back but yet he is willing to jump into any situation. He has a yearning for the authentic experience and loves to record events with his camera. He always seems to be between trips, simply saving enough money for the next adventure. He was planning on leaving on a four month long solo journey though Southeast Asia and Nepal at the time of interview.

Simon's Individual Description

The Baja, Mexico ILA experience gave me the opportunity to get out of the country for the first time. I remember being very excited and being completely changed from this point on. The trip was incredibly affordable, sounded awesome and I looked forward to meeting new people. Before this trip, travel seemed so distant and hard to accomplish. I really had an American mentality about travel, thinking that I needed to save a bunch of money and arrange for some guided tour with a fixed itinerary.

A huge aspect of the ILA trip was learning how to travel without an itinerary and for longer than the average two weeks. Now I cannot imagine traveling for less than a month. I also learned about not harming the environment. It introduced to me a whole new way of viewing the world. I did not think about the environment being associated with travel. I thought travel was simply about sightseeing, staying in fancy hotels, and

having fun no matter what. I especially did not consider its impacts on local cultures and environments.

The Baja trip inspired me to go on the next ILA trip to East Africa. I wanted to be challenged so I left a week early. I was really nervous when I arrived; I was the only white person in the airport and could not remember my pin number for getting cash out of the ATM. Since I had no money and no place to stay I ended up taking a chance with some guy I met on the plane. He ran an orphanage and he invited me to stay with him for the night. The next morning I helped feed some baby orphans their formula and ended up staying there all day. I will never forget that experience. When I came to Africa I thought the most important moments would be things like seeing giraffes and rhinos but it turns out, the little moments, such as meeting the guy on the plane and helping out at the orphanage, these were the moments that meant the most to me. It is so hard to explain how important serendipity is while you are traveling. Without the ability to be flexible, the most important moments may never occur.

I remember feeling very lonely in Nairobi but I later learned that low points are important in travel because they give you a different perspective. I remember feeling guilty, coming from a land of so much material wealth and opportunity. I really felt like I needed to act and quit feeling sorry for myself so I learned to adapt to the new culture and new situations.

We went and visited Kaibera, a slum in Nairobi. It was an eye opening experience, the place was filthy but at the same time it was not ugly. The kids seemed to be happy and loving life, I actually got to talk with the people and understand their lifestyle. The experience made me think about my own lifestyle and that there is a lot of



stuff I should be doing to help the world. I think seeing a place like Kaibera is so important because it brings out the realities of life.

While in Zanzibar, Tanzania, we ate at a local fish market. I think food is an important part of travel and an important part of life. I will never forget this experience because it made me think about where all this food had come from and how the local community really depended on the ocean for food. Fishing was such an important part of the local economy. Before these ILA trips I never really thought about where my food came from or how it affected the local people and environment. I think a lot of this understanding came from being around the local people, if you're staying at some resort, you probably will never even meet a local and make those connections.

Zanzibar had some great examples of sustainable travel instead of the typical resort model. Most accommodations were locally owned small operations that operated according to the local surroundings. Instead of displacing the local population with a huge resort, Zanzibar's tourism industry was largely owned and operated by the locals.

I also remember the locals being very clever. For example all over the world I see people using shipping containers for housing. I really think that when you see creative people, you are more inclined to be creative. You realize that people do things differently all around the world and that there is so much variety. It is so important to learn from other cultures and preserve them for future generations to explore and learn from.

The ILA style of travel is fun and it allows you to have fun learning from another culture. You learn to open your mind and appreciate what other cultures have to offer. Now I really value uniqueness and other cultures and I see globalization as having a

negative effect on some cultures. I hope we do not see places like the Zanzibar fish market replaced with a McDonalds.

Transportation is a big part of these trips. You get to ride with local people and actually interact with them on a personal level. I would have three hour conversations with locals and only pay a dollar for the entire cultural experience. I was really surprised at how easy it was to get around in English. In some places where they don't speak English, it can really wear you down trying to communicate but it really motivated me to learn another language.

On a twelve hour bus ride I experience a low point. I was sick, crowded in, couldn't control my bowels and just plain miserable. I remember asking why I was putting myself through all this. However, you start to realize that all these locals endure these kinds of bus rides every day. It gave me yet another different perspective. Now I look back on that experience and feel amazed at what I learned to tolerate.

It is amazing to think about traveling all over Africa without a personal car. It seems there are great public transportation systems all over the world. It really makes you think about things like carbon footprints and environmental impacts, especially when you live in a place like the U.S. where everyone drives a personal vehicle. It is crazy to think that a developing country like Kenya could have a better public transportation system than the United States.

While in Jamaica, we cleaned up a local beach. We even had some locals help us with the project. We just decided to do it and help out. When you travel you realize how much trash is all over the world. Humans have such a disposable mentality; nothing is

made to stick around. As a result people just throw their trash anywhere and most of it is plastic, it is everywhere.

While traveling we stay mostly in family owned hostels. They are great places to stay and a great form of income for the locals. At one place in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, we played with the kids and told them stories about our travels. The kids loved it.

When you travel, you are always in motion. Like when you use all the different types of transportation or when you are walking around everywhere. One thing I noticed is that I don't have to work out when I travel because I am always moving around; in fact I usually lose weight when I travel from all the exercise. It made me think how odd it must be for people in developing countries to think about being obese or going to a gym to work out. After these trips I found myself walking and riding my bike a lot more. Before I just drove my car everywhere because riding my bike four miles each way seemed unrealistic but now it seems so simple.

I also realized that communities are designed a lot differently in the U.S. In most parts of the world, communities are designed for people but in the U.S. they are designed for cars. The U.S. model is very unsustainable and has huge consequences when it comes to the environment. We need to design our communities for walking but in order to do this we will need to change our current mind set.

I realized how ridiculous public safety issues are in the U.S. The idea of safety and the word 'liability' really irritate me. We are not taught to be self reliant. The U.S. system is designed for people who do not think and if something does happen to us, it is not our own fault but someone else's fault. Now I am more self aware and really annoyed

by stupid safety regulations. When I travel I feel free from all the regulations and at the same time I become less lazy and start to act more responsibly.

Group dynamics was a good thing on the trips. It could be hard at times. But getting along with people in groups is so important. You just have to learn to work with people. After an ILA experience it is so much easier to handle groups. I now have a much larger comfort zone with groups and can better understand where people are coming from.

These trips have made me more conscious about other people, the environment and problems in the world. I now understand my impacts on the world. I now have a different connection. For example since the Baja trip, I learned how to speak Spanish and communicate in a different language. I remember watching people from our group talking in Spanish at a taco stand. I know it is crazy but that little experience really opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking. I realized that you could just go out and tackle the world just like ordering a taco in a foreign language at a taco stand in the middle of nowhere.

My world has expanded hugely from these trips. Now travel is my passion in life. Travel has taught me to let go of material items. My life style has changed, after living with everything on your back; I realized I really don't need much to live. Now it seems I don't spend much money and actually have time to do the things I love, like travel. My life is so simple now and more fulfilling. Instead of filling my life with material things, I fill them with experiences because they can never be taken away. These trips have changed me forever. Now I just want to connect people to sustainable travel and help more people open their eyes to the realities outside America.



Jane

Jane was 23 and a junior in college on her first ILA trip to Jamaica. She also participated in the Aconcagua South America trip and is currently studying to be a nurse. She was 24 years old during the interview and was very enthusiastic about telling her story. She was planning her first solo backpacking trip to England, France and Spain.

Jane's Individual Description

I remember my first steps towards Aconcagua; I was in disbelief and awe that we were all there to climb this huge mountain. We had prepared as best we could and decided to see what the mountain had in store for us. I knew the important thing to remember was that it always works out. Being on the mountain was one of the most amazing feelings I had ever had, I was truly humbled. I had never really interacted with the Earth in such a way. I felt so in touch with my surroundings.

Travel focuses me on the things I need, giving me a fresh perspective and open mind. Travel is the one thing I feel I have done the most that nurtures my body and mind which helps initiate growth and development. Travel has helped me transition to adulthood and to become an independent woman. I learned to budget and adapt to new surroundings. I felt free, like I could make my own decisions. Seeing the world is priceless, there is nothing else like it.

I feel more spiritually free when traveling because I feel balanced. I am constantly learning new things and seeing the bigger picture. Travel puts me in contact with cultures and the Earth on a very basic level. I learned that people are not really different but rather the same. I now feel more connected with other people, like I can communicate non-verbally.



I remember standing at the high base camp at 19,200 feet on Aconcagua and feeling such an accomplishment. Our group had done such a great job with teamwork. When you travel with a group, you learn a lot about yourself and you learn how to read other people. I felt like I learned to adapt and be flexible. Travel has taught me to open my mind to not judge others, just observe, compare and respect.

One of the biggest days of my life was the morning I woke up to climb to the summit of Aconcagua, the tallest mountain in the Western Hemisphere. I knew it would be a tough and tiring climb, but I just focused on the moment. I have learned through travel to focus on the moment, to not worry about the past and future but only the moment at hand. When you do this, all your senses come alive, you can smell, taste, hear and see better, giving you a better perspective on the moment. Now when I am at home I feel like I can do the same thing, just focus on the moment and enjoy life. I think travel helped me be a better person. It will always be a part of my life.

I remember so many moments about Jamaica, especially the music, now when I hear reggae music, I can feel, visualize and smell Jamaica in an instant. I feel like travel has helped me enhance all my relationships and taught me to find a balance between mind, body and soul. I can now see the whole picture.

One of the aspects of backpacker travel I really enjoy is just wandering around and exploring. I like to simply find whatever there is to find and strike up a good conversation. I am so happy just exploring around. It is so simple and I feel so connected with everybody. These are the simple times, when you just get to look and see. You get to see simple things like how local people meet their needs and just observe everyday life.

When I was in Jamaica I became very aware of kids. They were always hanging out, playing in the streets and beaches, and just being kids. I got to see them because we went to one of the local beaches, a place where we saw no other travelers. I never understood why? At times, as a female traveler, I felt different from the locals and a little exposed, but for the most part Jamaica felt safe. I felt like I was able to overcome those differences and that allowed me to really be part of the culture.

One thing I appreciate about ILA trips is the style of travel. Our goal is to see the culture and meet the people. If you really want to do that, you have to get away from the resorts and dive into the real Jamaica. When you do this, you get to see the true culture and the locals get to experience us as well. On several occasions I felt like I was a part of the local's daily lives, from getting my hair done in a local salon to hanging out on the beaches with local surfers. I got to see a glimpse of the local's life. That was very cool.

We visited local market all the time in Jamaica and I was surprised to see how little food the supermarkets had. It was mostly imported canned vegetables and food. The locals said they needed to export most of their produce to make money on it, and then import cheaper canned foods. That just seemed so backwards to me. I talked with a local that worked at one of the resorts and he told us about the all-you-can-eat-buffets and how much waste they generate. I never really thought about how wasteful a buffet could be, but when you see it from a different perspective it is different. The buffet became a metaphor for American consumerism and how unsustainable we are as a culture. ILA trips have a lot of focus on sustainable travel and it made me examine my own lifestyle back home. I ended up starting my own compost. It is such a simple thing but I never did

it before. I realized that I am the only one that can make things happen in my life. I decided to not hold myself back and just make things happen.

I think a lot more about transportation now. After traveling around you really get a sense of how people get around. Most people in the world walk, ride bikes or take public transportation. Now I ride my bike and walk all the time. I figure if the rest of the world can do it why can't I. The public transportation was so easy, we never had to plan anything out, we just went to the mini bus station and took off whenever we wanted.

On our trips, we never did a lot of planning, we usually just learned to adapt and be resourceful. When you travel without a plan, you just go with the flow and it is not that hard. It is the backpacker style of travel that teaches you to rely on yourself and this gives you a lot of confidence. I now feel like I could travel anywhere now.

When you don't plan things, you get to just explore. I remember we found a waterfall that ran into the ocean. It was a local's hangout where Jamaican families would come and have fun in the afternoon. This is what I love about travel, it is full of discovery and adventure that leads to new experiences. We found another place in downtown Kingston where thousands of locals were swimming and jumping off the piers on a Sunday afternoon. The locals always looked like they were having fun and smiling. They didn't have much as far as material items but what they did have was family, friends, music, and community. This seemed to be where they derived their happiness.

We found this place called Boston Bay, a beautiful surfing location with blue water and plenty of sunshine. We found this place by just wandering around; it ended up having some great huts to stay at and a jerk chicken stand nearby. We stayed there for a

couple of days, watching old James Bond films and learning how to surf with the locals. It was such a wonderful and euphoric experience.

We went to a place called Trench Town in Kingston, Jamaica, a place where Bob Marley wrote many of his songs. We played with the local kids in the area, it was such a short encounter but very positive. I remember feeling good about people, about the connections we can have with people. We didn't say a single word; we just laughed and had fun through simple interactions.

Group dynamics are a big part of these trips. At times there could be a little stress, probably from travel shock. I didn't really feel it but I sensed that others in the group were going through some kind of culture shock. I am good at coping with stress. I usually just try and step back from the situation and get a fresh perspective. When I look back on the group dynamics, I really learned to be patient and tolerant towards the people in my group. I think patience and tolerance are the key to being flexible and on a long international group trip you are forced to learn these aspects of yourself. I now feel I am better at interacting within a group.

After these trips I feel more whole and feel more tolerant and accepting of other cultures. Travel is helping me answer the question of what is my purpose in life. Travel has been very spiritual for me. I am now planning a summer trip to Europe by myself. I would have never thought about doing this on my own if I had never done these ILA trips. These ILA trips have prepared me to go out and explore the world.

Finally I think travel is about bettering human interaction. Everything you learn on an ILA trip, should you choose to apply it; can be applied to every aspect of your life. I never thought before that travel could have such an impact. Coming from a very

individualistic society, I always thought about what travel could do for me but now I think about what I can do for traveling. I always thought travel was simply about me exploring other cultures but now I feel it is my responsibility to be an ambassador for my culture and let other cultures interact with my culture. Before travel was all about the individual, but now I understand it is about creating a connection with the world. I now have a deep concern, deep love and profound respect for other people and our planet.

Kim

Kim was 22 at the time of her first trip overseas with the ILA trip to East Africa. At the time of interview she was 26 and had graduated from Mesa State College and was pursuing a Master's Degree in teaching. Kim is very outgoing and personable, always seeking out new opportunities and was not afraid of new experiences.

Kim's Individual Description

One of the biggest parts of the ILA trip was my solo journey into a Masai tribe. While I was living with the Masai I noticed the powerful Christian influence on the Masai and how many traditional beliefs were taken away and replaced with western ideologies. It made me question Christian motives and whether or not it is right to push your beliefs onto another culture, especially one steeped in traditional values.

The western influence is everywhere. When you go out to see the Masai tribes, you expect to see people dressed in elaborate jewelry and dress but you don't. What you do see is a lot of western clothing. Some Masai may wear traditional dress for tourist or at special ceremonies but in general western dress prevailed. I did run across one woman dressed in traditional dress, she was so beautiful and exotic. She was not wearing it for

tourist because I was one of the first white people she had met. It was great to see that some of the people still wore traditional dress.

I was saddened at how technology had overcome traditional values. I really wanted to see the diversity and experience what it was like a hundred years ago but the reality was very different. Technology had introduced western values and traditions.

I had decided to do my solo journey after a long bus ride from Kampala, Uganda. I wanted to live with a Masai family and experience their culture. I remember really wanting to explore on my own and see what kind of adventures I could find. I also wanted to spend some time alone and away from the group. I ended up meeting a Masai girl named Nima, she was my age and invited me to visit with her family. I remember meeting her mom because she gave me a big hug when I was introduced to her. She had never engaged with a white person before and seemed genuinely interested in me. She spoke no English so Nima translated.

I wanted to tell the mother that, “I like your family” but I quickly learned the Masai have no possessives in the Masai language so I learned how to say, “I like our family” instead. I thought it was strange they had no word for ‘your’ and it made me think about how materialistic and possessive my culture seemed compared to the Masai. The Masai derived happiness from a different source, mainly from family and not from material possessions. I thought how nice it would be to live in a world where everybody shared and everybody was equal. I just thought it was so cool that they couldn’t translate ‘yours.’

As a student I had studied environmental politics and world politics and while traveling I really wanted to research these ideas. One area that I got a lot of hands on

experience was sustainable development and farming and how the Masai used the surrounding natural resources in very ingenious ways. The Masai showed me their traditional houses made from local resources, but what stuck out was how they built natural fences out of poisonous plants and thistles. These barriers kept out lions, keeping the crops and family safe from attack.

The family structure was also interesting. A man could have several wives as long as he could support them and it would elevate the man's status. The man lived in a center hut that was surrounded by his wives' huts. The idea of multiple wives was hard for me to grasp. I told the Masai male how in the U.S. the men and women were considered equal, sharing common household chores such as cleaning dishes and washing clothes. He just laughed at me. For the Masai man, it wasn't even a concept.

On the trip we went on a four day safari in the Serengeti. It was so open and beautiful, you could see for miles. I learned more about zoology than I ever did in any text book. I learned about animal hunting techniques by watching a Cheetah hunt down a gazelle. I learned that the lionesses hunt for the food. I learned that leopards pull their prey up into the trees and that zebras always stand together in pairs to watch each other's back. You just don't learn these things in a text book and the best part is that I will never forget this information because it is a visual in my head that can't be erased.

The Africa trip inspired me to learn more and explore the world. I am now getting my masters in teaching. Since the Africa trip I spent a summer in Costa Rica, backpacked all over Europe, surfed in Mexico for a month and volunteered for seven weeks at a Bolivian wildlife refuge. The Africa trip made me see that there is a whole another world out there and that Americans are extremely sheltered and naïve. Americans need to open

their eye and see how the world works. Americans try and go out there and tell the world how to think and act but how can we do this when we don't have a clue about other cultures.

Americans are not the most respected people on the planet. I learned this from people I met on the Africa trip. When you travel backpacker style, you meet people from all over the world in hostels and you have the opportunity to engage in conversation about politics, the environment and whatever you want to talk about. Backpacker travel is essentially traveling with everything on your back, staying in one place for a few days and then moving on to the next place. An important aspect is not having a fixed itinerary or plan. The best way to travel is to not have a plan, that way you can learn from the locals and other travelers about the best area to visit and activities to do. Backpacker travel is also the cheapest and allows you the most exposure to the local culture. I never knew about backpacker travel before the Africa trip, as an American I thought the only way to travel was to book it though a travel agency or go on a guided tour and pay thousands and thousands of dollars. Now I am planning on backpacking around Australia and New Zealand this summer.

While on Zanzibar, we met this guy who invited us to visit a local school. So I went and visited with the students. I got to sit in their classes and tell them about my life. It was great because they all spoke English. I noticed the kids in the schools were expected to do physical labor. I witnessed the kids actually building part of their school. We have such different morals about child labor in the U.S. and at first I was really shocked to see the kids doing manual labor but after being there it doesn't seem like it is a big deal. The children were not being abused and they seemed happy. They were doing

manual labor for the greater good. It would probably do us some good if American kids contributed to building their own schools.

While I was in the classrooms, the students were so happy to hear my stories, I felt like a queen. They were just really interested in me and I was equally interested in them. The kids were mostly Muslim and it was the first time I had ever hung out with Muslim people. I didn't even know there were Muslims in Africa. At the time there was a lot of American resentment towards Muslims, a lot of stereotypes, however, when you actually meet Muslims you realize they are just like us in many ways. The students studied the same subjects such as math, reading, writing and science. I gained a new perspective on Muslims, they are real open minded and just want to live in peace. Travel is just so mind opening and gives you a great new perspective.

I felt like Zanzibar was more progressed than other parts of Tanzania. There seemed to be a lot of wealth from the tourism. Tourism has its pros and cons. It's bad if the tourist come in and disrespect the local cultures, beliefs and environment but there is a thing called sustainable tourism or eco tourism which teaches you how to respect the local cultures and environments. This is something I learned on the Africa trip.

I went on the ILA trip because I wanted to experience another culture and have an adventure. I felt like the ILA trip was accessible and cheap. It just felt like anybody could do this trip so I did it. I felt like I really learned how to travel on this trip. The biggest question I get from people is how can I just travel all over the world? I had the same questions before and now that I know how to travel all I want to do is teach others how to see the world.

I really felt like I learned how to go off on my own and really get a lot of cultural interaction. I felt like I had the freedom to meet people from the culture. Some days I would just sit on the local beaches and hang out with the locals and we would have a good ole time. I learned that you don't need to know what to expect all the time, you just go and see what happens.

I liked traveling with the group as well because there was a sense of security, that someone always had your back. You could go out on your own but I always knew the group was never far away. I always felt secure while traveling with the group and now I feel like I have gone to another level. I now don't feel like I need a group to be secure. It was great to gain the skills I need to travel on my own. Another great thing about the group is the bargaining power. You could really get great group rates on safaris and hostels. Also as a group you can have great experiences volunteering.

While in Jinja, Uganda, the group volunteered at a local preschool for orphans. The kids were so happy to spend time with us. I realized how important it is for a child to be loved. It inspired me to do more volunteer work. One of the reasons I am getting my masters degree is so I can work with an NGO in Africa and give back to a place that gave me so much.

This trip was a life changing experience. It was inspirational, educational; it made me a better person. I came back knowing so much more about the world than I could have ever imagined. It was a wonderful trip and I would do it all again in a heartbeat. I really want to go back to Africa. Everyone I meet I encourage to travel to a third world country or actually any country, it doesn't have to be third world. Just go somewhere, I encourage everyone I meet to take a month off and backpack somewhere in the world.

Sandy

Sandy was 27 at the time of interview and 20 during the trip. She participated on the first ever ILA trip to Peru, Bolivia and Chile. She described herself as a grumpy, not outgoing, and at times an angry and insecure person before and during this trip. More often she was simply a quiet person who at times was socially awkward but in reality she was always willing to help others and try new experiences. She is now doing consultant work as an environmental specialist. She works for a company specializing in international greenhouse gas emission reduction projects. She is planning a trip to China with her work in the next few weeks after the interview.

Sandy's Individual Description

My first time in a foreign country was on the Peru, Bolivia and Chile OP trip. I remember being extremely happy to be there, full of energy and ready to explore. One area I explored was trying out all the different foods. An average backpacker thing to do is to simply walk around till you find someplace that looks like a good place to eat. Sometimes you don't know what you're getting because everything is so foreign so you end up eating things familiar like French Fries, rice, bread and chicken. We had to avoid most fruits and vegetables because of the bacteria on them. We had to eat food that was cooked. I found the cuisine to be very plain and not too exotic.

However, one restaurant we found in Cuzco, Peru had a variety of exotic dishes including a plate of cuy. Cuy is roasted guinea pig and it is a delicacy in Peru. Some of the people in the group tried the cuy and it tasted like dark turkey meat. It was the first time I had eaten a rodent. One aspect of the meal that really stuck out was how the cooks presented the cuy. The cuy was not cut up into little pieces but rather served whole with

little teeth that looked like fangs and tiny claws. This meal made me realize that the average American would not like to eat something like this especially the way the cuy was served. We don't like to be grossed out. In fact I think there is a real disconnect in U.S. culture between knowing where our food comes from and what is actually served on our plate. We like things so clean and cut, for example the cuy's head would for sure be cut off in America. We don't like to see what we are really eating. I think people in Peru have to work a lot harder for their food and are probably closer to its source and would not be grossed out by a cooked cuy head because they actually know where their food comes from.

We went rafting in Peru. I never thought about doing outdoor activities in a foreign country. I used think travel was about seeing ruins, cities and going to old churches, it never occurred to me that you could also play in the outdoors. It just wasn't a concept to me. Before this trip I had gotten involved with the Outdoor Program. During that time I started exploring myself and especially on the international trip.

At the start of the international trip I was very insecure about myself, socially awkward and uncertain about a lot of things. I didn't have a lot of friends and didn't know how to interact with people. This trip challenged me in a lot of ways to open up; it challenged me to learn how to interact with a group and how to face myself, my insecurities. I saw a lot of what I didn't want to be and what I wanted to be. The group interaction was actually the biggest challenge for me when traveling because I never really had to put myself out there before and I did on this trip.

When you are traveling with a group of people for a month, they will eventually see your true personality. I was an angry and grumpy person at the time with a lot of

insecurities but while on the trip I was inspired by the people in my group. They were positive, mellow and seemed to transition through situations without getting stressed out. I saw this and started to explore myself in a more positive fashion and it was really good. I kept going through cycles and hitting new challenges. Seven years later I have had a huge personality growth. I think my growth started with the Outdoor Program and I think this international trip really triggered a sort of self exploration that I never had to face before. I think that traveling pushed me to see what opportunities were out there. Learning how to be with the group and interacting with the group in a positive fashion was a huge turning point in my life.

Since the South America trip I have traveled by myself. I went to Europe in 2005 and visited Spain and Europe and now my job is sending me to China. The solo trip to Europe was another huge turning point in my life. I just felt like I needed to explore on my own and see how things turned out. I ended up meeting a whole bunch of great people and I didn't get robbed. I felt like the Peru, Chile and Bolivia trip really prepared me to travel. While in Bolivia I was robbed by a bunch of Aymara women. I was being a stupid tourist and not paying attention. I felt violated and angry but I was never hurt. It all happened so fast. So I learned a valuable lesson, don't be a target. This is all part of travel. I used my skills to travel safely on my own and I hope they will come in handy in China. I can't wait to find some hole in the wall restaurant where I can eat some dog.

Travel is about changing directions and exploring your options, you learn, you decide and then you move on. When I came back from Peru I decided I wanted to be happy in life. So I changed my major to Environmental Science, even thought it meant three more years of college. Now I have a great job working in my field of study.



Although I am not sure if this is the line of work I want to do forever. The important thing is that I now know I can change directions if I need to. It started with the international trip.

We visited Machu Picchu while in Peru and it was amazing. It was one of the reasons I wanted to go on the trip. Unfortunately I got sick and couldn't hike the whole Inca trail. Instead I did a day hike and met up with the group for a great reunion. Just before the Inca trail trek I got some kind of stomach ailment along with one other person on the trip. The group was very supportive while they were there but then the group left and there was only two of us. We both felt very lonely but after awhile I felt better and I decided to go out by myself and explore the market which I hadn't done before. It was a real challenge for me because it was the first time exploring by myself without the group. It was a little scary and a bit intimidating because I had to converse with people and haggle and bargain but I did it. I learned that if you don't fight the culture, things tend to go very well.

To this date I have never really had a threatening experience in my travels, except getting robbed in Bolivia, but that was really just a learning experience. I never really felt threatened. Well actually I did feel threatened once while traveling in Spain because some guy would not leave me alone and I had to fight him off. I learned to be assertive and to not put myself in vulnerable positions. You don't have to be afraid of places, you just have to be a smart traveler and be aware.

We also went to Las Pampas in Bolivia. This is where I saw my first monkey in the wild. It was totally different than anything I had ever been exposed to. I remember we took a boat down a river; it was tropical and full of exotic wildlife. Our guide was

hilarious, I remember he washed his underwear in the river and then put them on his head to dry out. When we first went into the tropical area, we were all paranoid about the bugs. We were wearing long sleeve shirts and pants and it was really hot and humid. By the time we left we were in swim suits and shorts. This taught me that we can often be over paranoid about doing things. I think before I always expected something bad to happen but now I feel more relaxed about handling new things.

While in Las Pampas we went tromping through the swamp looking for snakes with some of the local guides. It seemed crazy to be looking for snakes but it also seemed crazy that in America you wouldn't do something like this because the guides would be afraid of getting sued if something happened. Here in Las Pampas you take liability for yourself. In Bolivia, there are no regulations or rules to keep you from hurting yourself. If something happens to you it is because you were not responsible and did not take ownership of the situation. I think it was cool to be responsible. I think Americans are just too fat and pampered. We are experts at pushing blame on to others. In Bolivia you can't push blame, you learn to be responsible and make sensible decisions. I chose to go out and look for snakes and it felt good making that decision.

The group split up and I and a two other girls in the group took off to Chile while the others went and climbed Huayna Potosi in Bolivia. I didn't want to climb because my stomach still was not a hundred percent. One thing that happened on the trip was that the further we got in the trip, the less we felt we needed to stay in a group all the time. So it gave us the chance to explore even more. If you wanted to do something, you just did it. This worked well but at times I missed the others in the group. However, with all the various interest within a group it was a great way to keep exploring. For me it was

something totally different. For the first time in my life I was traveling alone with just a couple of friends. This was a big deal for us because we did not have the more experienced travelers doing all the transactions. We would just head in a direction we wanted to go and see what happened. It was really cool because we started to feel more confident in ourselves, like we could really travel on our own.

At some point when we were traveling away from the group in Chile, I felt really alone and kind of at odds in the moment. I can't explain the feeling, I think I was sad because the trip was about to end and I didn't know how to feel about that. The group reunited and we went sand boarding in the Atacama Desert. Once again we were having fun as a group, doing things we had never done before. I remember being really happy with the group. We had really bonded with each other.

I really think the importance of travel is to have fun and explore like Indiana Jones. It is so important to travel. Kids coming out of high school should take a year and see the world instead of going straight to college. Most kids are not prepared for it. I know I needed a break. I hadn't really taken time to develop and know myself. I think that is what travel does, it challenges your personality and you learn about yourself and the rest of the world. You get to see how others live and it is such a huge eye opening experience. I think Americans need more worldly awareness. All I can say is that travel is so important.

Alice

Alice was 31 years old when she participated on the Ruta Maya trip through Central America and was a mother of two. The trip was her first time out of the country. She describes herself as a person who does not like a lot of attention, timid and shy.



Alice's Individual Description

On the Central America trip I experienced my first jungle on a beach outside Tulum. I had never experienced this before and I was so excited to experience all this new stuff. On the solstice a bunch of girls from the group went swimming on the beach under the stars that night. It was just amazing. The experience was kind of scary because it was just a bunch of girls on a beach by ourselves. We were just going to explore. We really didn't have a plan and the night turned out great. I remember becoming very aware of my surroundings and realizing that I didn't need to be afraid. The experience was very empowering. It was nice to tackle my fears.

I was afraid to go on this trip because I had never done anything like this before. I had never been out of the country. I had babies really young and just got accustomed to staying at home and having that lifestyle. To leave the country was very different for me but something I knew I needed to do in order to grow as a person. The Central America experience has affected every area of my life in a positive way. It was scary to step outside my comfort zone especially with all the negative stuff in the press about other countries. Everyone focuses on the negative and not the positive. Once you are actually traveling in the country, you get awareness about the place and this keeps you safe. When I look back on the experience I think what the heck was I ever afraid of?

When we were in Tulum, a group of men dressed in costumes and playing guitars serenaded us in the streets. It was amazing; they are so proud of their culture and not embarrassed. I think they were celebrating because it was really close to Christmas. Everyone was so happy, laughing and feeling great.

We spent the New Year's in Panajachel, Guatemala. I remember we were walking down the street and one of the girls in our group started helping a little boy push his taco cart down the street. That moment really affected me. She just didn't hold back, she just went for it. It didn't matter that she could speak the language or that the boy probably does this same thing every day. She just decided to help anyway. She made me think about how shy I am in situations like this. It was just so cool to be in a group of people who are just outgoing and not afraid to embrace new experiences. I would have hesitated and then the moment would simply disappear.

When I got back after this trip, it just affected everything in my life. I thought to myself this is it, I need to quit being complacent and unsure, just do it and trust yourself. If you make a mistake, who cares. I learned a lot of this from the trip by watching others on the trip. It made me reflect about my reactions to situations. These experiences taught me to not just admire other people but instead actually get out there and do it myself and admire myself for doing it.

These international trips create unique experiences for people to be outgoing and get outside their comfort zone. The trips allow students to experiment with getting comfortable in strange environments where everything is different: the languages, customs, food, everything. There are just so many opportunities to experience new things and I got to see how everyone in our group adjusted to these new experiences and I learned from them. I learned to be freer.

I now realize from the experience that people are basically the same everywhere you go. People just want a good life and they are good hearted. I had such a profound experience. It gave me insight and knowledge of a bigger world. I no longer feel like I am

stuck in a small box of a town, I am not confined anymore. I realize there is another world out there and I feel like I can go where ever I want and do whatever I want. I think this is why the international experience was so freeing for me.

While we were in Panajachel, I went off by myself to visit a wildlife preserve. I was really scared because I was in a strange town, in a strange country. I had a little map and just started walking and tried to figure it out. I remember thinking that I was actually doing this by myself. I was so proud of myself. It was one of the happiest times in my whole life, I can't even explain it. I had been relying on people to do most things for me but at this moment I had no one to relay on but myself. It was such a little thing but it was huge to me.

This trip was something I always wanted to do but never knew how to make it happen. There seemed to be so many obstacles but when I saw this trip posted in the Outdoor Program, all the doors seem to open up. The Outdoor Program guided me though it all. I learned how to travel on the trip and now I feel like I could do it on my own. I learned that you don't have to get bogged down with so much planning. You just go and take it as it comes, one day at a time and then it's not so stressful.

Most people when they travel book everything in advance; transportation, hotels, everything. I thought everyone traveled like this but on the ILA trip I learned a whole new way of travel. I learned to just go with the flow and it worked out really well. If we got to a place and we wanted to stay, we simply stayed. We ended up staying a few extra days in Panajachel and it led to my great solo experience in the rain forest. I think free flow travel is the way to do it, have a general plan but to not set it in stone. I like this

because you just don't know what life will throw at you, so you shouldn't lock yourself into something and be disappointed when things change.

I now approach situation at home like I am traveling. I am so much more relaxed. I took my kids to Ouray, Colorado the other day. We simply jumped in the car and took off. We were just flying by the seat of our pants. It was so much more fun than sticking to a strict schedule. One thing that was really hard on the Central America trip was missing my kids. I wanted to share everything with them. But to tell you the truth I didn't really miss them that much till the end of the trip. I was able to email them and stay in contact. It was so great to see them when I came home. My daughter was so excited for me and thought it was so cool that I had traveled though Central America. Now my daughter wants to know when we are going to travel together. We are now planning a trip somewhere, probably Argentina. My younger son is still stuck on video games but after we travel, I bet he will get the travel bug after all.

We visited Roatan, a small ILAnd of the coast of Honduras. It was one of my favorite places on the whole trip. It was a very rural small town we were staying in. The locals were so friendly and low key, it was tropical with palm trees. It was a place I had always wanted to see. It was like a dream come true. I remember thinking this is the way life should be.

From this trip I realized there is so much to experience and that we were just seeing a small slice of the pie. I saw this kind of connecting thread throughout the human race, that most people are good hearted. Most people do not want to cause other people harm; they just want to live their life in a good way. I was never really conscious about

this before the ILA trip. I think before I would just focus on myself and family and now I often wonder how people are doing back in places like Panajachel and Roatan.

Roatan was the first place I learned how to put on a scuba mask. I never thought in my whole life I would learn how to scuba dive. Diving was amazing and scary at the same time. I was really nervous when I first went out but then I looked underwater and discovered a whole new world, a world I had only seen in magazines. It was one of the most memorable things I did on the trip.

When we arrived in Nicaragua, we stayed at a small surfing town on the Pacific side. The place looked like a ghost town because the cruise ships stopped coming to port. The beaches were not all that great but it was still so cool to be there. One night a bunch of us girls went out by ourselves onto the beach. I remember thinking that this wasn't knew anymore, it was now a way of life for me. After traveling for a month, I was now comfortable with these kinds of situations and could just soak it all in. When I look back at my photos, I could see that I was different toward the end of the trip. I looked more relaxed and confident.

Going traveling for a month is the perfect amount of time. So many people from America travel for a week or ten days. I don't think this gives you enough time to really explore your surroundings. A month gives you time to get accustomed to your new environment. In truth I never really wanted to go home. Instead I wanted everyone to come to me. I wanted my friends and family to get out of their comfort zones and experience new things like I was doing.

In Nicaragua, around Granada, I tackled another fear of mine, a great fear of heights. We went on a canopy tour through the jungle. We zip lined from one tree to the

next. It was so cool. I had become really good at facing fear, a fear of not knowing. All my life fear had stopped me from experiencing so many things, like travel. Now I don't think travel is impossible. I really think I can travel anywhere now.

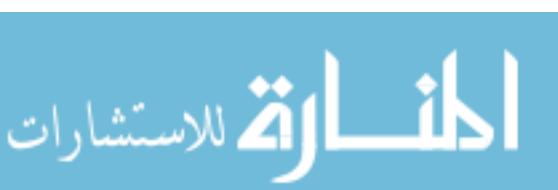
We did so many amazing things on this trip, so many experiences that had never even crossed my mind. It was a really good and empowering trip and I would do it again in a heartbeat. This trip really opened my eyes to the world. I really feel like world travel is possible and now I want my kids to experience travel. I want to take my kids with me next time. It is so important. In the end the trip gave me a sense of peace. That is what I felt from this trip.

Tim

Tim is a 37 year old white male who teaches alternative high school. Tim has participated on the Africa, Jamaica and China/Nepal ILA trips. Tim is certainly outgoing and positive. He is a go with the flow kind of guy but also is meticulous with his planning and preparation on trips. Tim has also traveled on his own and plans on going to the Middle East with the Outdoor Program in the summer of 2009.

Tim's Individual Description

With three ILA trips under my belt it is hard to start some place. On our China trip I remember taking an overnight bus that you could actually sleep on. The bus had actual beds. It made me think about transportation. This is a huge issue on these trips. Most of the time we take public transportation and at times it can be scary. I remember having a few close calls but for the most part I am amazed at how traffic just flows. There are no traffic lights, few stop signs, traffic just moves and you get into a flow and it just kind of works out. Even though people drive aggressive, they let you in. I come back



home and I have a hard time adjusting. I don't want to stop at the stop sign or stop light. I look and no one is coming, I just want to keep on going. More like it is everywhere else around the world.

We went to the Caribbean on one trip. The colors were so vibrant and the culture so different. In Jamaica I remember seeing a bushel of bananas leaning against a wall. That was the first time I had ever seen bananas outside a supermarket. I never knew that bananas grew in such huge bushels. Travel makes you think about food. It seems that food is much fresher when traveling and it seems to taste better. One time we were trekking in Nepal and the cook went out in the field to pick fresh potatoes for our French fries. In the states, the potatoes are picked, flash frozen, sit in a freezer for months, then trucked around and finally they are cooked up. In Nepal it was just so simple. It was from field to mouth right away. I noticed the same thing when I was traveling in Mexico with all the local markets. Same thing in Europe, people tend to shop every day and the food is much fresher. Other countries seem to have more organic food and use less pesticides and herbicides.

I never really thought about food like this before I traveled. Actually I never thought about food at all, especially where it came from. I never had an outside experience, so I thought the way we did food was the same all over the world. When you go away and have that different experience, you understand that is not the case. There are other ways to do things. I think it is really good to get out because if you don't have a different perspective, you think everything is like the U.S. In reality you would be gravely mistaken.

In Jamaica I saw four boys in school uniforms. Since I am a teacher I thought it was interesting how education is perceived in other cultures. I believe everywhere I have been so far, with the exception of the United States, all the kids wear uniforms. Uniforms tend to make students more equal so we can focus more on education instead of how different we all are. There is more of a sense of community and commonality.

I don't think uniforms would work in the U.S. because we are too independent. It is part of our psyche to just stand on your own two feet. You're the commander of your own ship. In most places in the world it is much more communal with the idea of working together. Here in the States you are much more your own person, you don't need to rely on anybody else. It is just kind of woven into who we are as Americans. The uniform can symbolize community and the lack of one seems to symbolize individuality.

When we went to Tibet I remember standing outside the Potala Palace and being the only westerns around. We were like a novelty item to the locals. They saw us as exotic. It was funny because we were in Tibet to see an exotic culture and then the experience was flipped back onto us. What it says to me is that even though we have all these differences we are still so similar to everyone else. Deep down we are a lot more similar than different. Travel tends to point out the fact that we are so similar.

In Jamaica we talked to the locals about the economy. The Jamaicans face the same kinds of problems as people in the United States, like jobs being outsourced to cheaper labor in China. They are losing jobs just like we are in the States. You see how interwoven we are and when we have an economic crisis in one place it effects the whole interwoven globe. They all want the same thing, they want to work, have food, have a place to live, and they have dreams, goals and aspirations.



I also noticed that they may want the same things as Americans but on a much smaller scale. It seems people around the world are happy to do with less. They really just want the basic necessities. Of course the idea of basic necessity is different for each culture. For most cultures it is about having food, water and your family. In America, we are much more materialistic. Just walk around or drive down your street and you will see the wealth of material goods.

In Kampala, Uganda I remember the kids running up and down the streets. They lived in dirt floor shacks and they all seemed happy and go lucky. They had a roof over their head, had their family close by and plenty of food. The Ugandans seem to have a much slower pace of life. While in America we need immediate gratification. We are all about me, me, me. We think we are entitled to certain things, especially material things. After traveling around, I think Americans are just plain lazy.

Americans tend to equate happiness with having stuff. In other cultures they define happiness as community, family, relationships and connections. In America we like to be individuals and we like our individual stuff. We might have family and friends but to be truly content you need to have a lot of stuff.

When we came back from the Africa trip I remember feeling very connected to the world. This was a feeling I had never had before. It was a pure sense of euphoric satisfaction. As we traveled around the world I feel more connected, like the world isn't really that big of place. We may have different cultural traits but on a fundamental level all cultures have more things in common than different. When you travel you feel interwoven and connected together.

Another example of interconnectedness is religion. We were trekking in Nepal and visited a Buddhist monastery. It was the first time I had ever been in a place of worship besides a Christian church. The Buddhists believe in a higher being or higher entities and so do we. Even though the religions are different with their different gods and operational standpoints, there are these fundamental core pieces that are the same. Again we are the same, we believe in a higher power, we have our customs and practices, we have things that connect us to a higher spirit and they do to.

I like seeing the all the connections. I especially like to teach about the connections with my students. I develop specific lesson plans around my traveling experiences to help the students understand our connections to the planet and other cultures. Some of the students are really interested in the places I have gone because they are connected to someone who has gone and seen other cultures.

The ILA study abroad experience is very different than most other traveling. We do an independent style of travel where we just land in the country, read some things in the Lonely Planet and take off. We simply jump on local buses, get off and find a place to stay. It is so rewarding to travel like this. I feel really confident, like I can go anywhere and do anything. Stuff will just flow, decisions will happen and things will just go. I think it is good for all these students and especially myself to be reacquainted with overcoming fear and being able to figure things out.

When you travel independently you really don't have a plan. In this way you are not locked into anything and you don't miss out on opportunities. For example when we were in Nepal, we just decided one night to trek to Mt. Everest. We just took advantage

of the late monsoons. It is important to realize that no matter what, everything always works out. On ILA trips everything just seems to flow.

I also feel like I am part of a larger community of travelers because many people in the world travel independently. You meet so many people who are looking for the same thing; to have adventures, to have authentic experiences, to be connected, to broaden your horizons and to look at life and live life in a different fashion. When you travel independently you get to interact with other cultures. You talk with the locals on the bus, interact with locals in markets, and order food in local restaurants. You get close and personal with the culture.

I have also developed an experienced gut feeling that helps guide me while traveling. When I travel it seems like I feel safer in foreign countries, especially when it comes to big cities. I have learned to rely on my own decisions and become more self reliant. Through these ILA international trips you really learn how to travel independently.

Back home I now tend to be a little more free flow. I have become more relaxed about things and more cognizant about how I can stress about things I can't do anything about. I think about all this stuff in my head but it really doesn't matter because what matters is this moment and this point right now. Things are all good.

Group dynamics are another big part of the ILA trips. For some people it can be hard to travel with a group. Most people have to have a plan or they get frustrated. On ILA trips there is no plan and the people in the group realize this. So it seem like the group dynamics are really good on ILA trips. When I try and explain an ILA trip to

people they just don't understand. Most people are used to having an exact itinerary but we do not.

For me travel is like your life path. You do not know how it is going to turn out and you don't know where it is going to end. Just like a prayer wheel, your life will spin in certain directions; some will be good and some bad. It is all about learning, emotions, and trust and trusting your instincts and knowing your own truths. When you travel you have time to reflect on your life path. You contemplate your purpose in life. Travel helps your life come into focus.

After traveling around the world I feel much more confident. I feel like I can go anywhere and do anything. Travel gives you a new perspective, a basis for comparison. If I were to sum up travel it would be about interconnectedness. I feel more connected, I feel more satisfied and I feel like the world is a smaller place. You remove some of the fear because you remove the unknown because you have been there. We are all afraid of the unknown and if I can make it be known then I have nothing to be afraid of.

Mike

Mike participated on the South-East Asia, Baja and Central America trips. He was 24 years old when on his first ILA trip. Mike is extremely laid back but always ready for an adventure. He is now 27 years old. Mike graduated with a history degree and is currently seeking a second degree in Environmental Science. He spent his last summer working in the backcountry of Colorado.

Mike's Individual Description

After spending all day on a bus, we arrived in Flores, Guatemala on Christmas day. On the international trips we spend a lot of time on public transportation. It is always



available and inexpensive so we use it to get around everywhere. We use anything that is available; trains, buses, taxis, boats. Public transportation works out great because there is always a bus going somewhere and with our style of travel this works out great.

We went to the very exotic Lago De Atitlan, a lake in the middle of Guatemala surrounded by high volcanoes. We spent New Year's Eve there and watched the fireworks till 6:00am. We stayed in the quaint and laid back town of Panajachel. There was not one resort in this area, only small hostels and hotels. This is just one of those off the beaten places you would never find with an organized tour.

With our style of backpacker travel you get to go to places like Panajachel. If we see some place we want to go, we just do it. We are not constrained by an itinerary. We kind of hop around and don't know what to expect. Most people when they travel like to have a set itinerary but I think that takes away from the adventure of travel. It is much better to have the freedom to move around and do what you want. I think a lot of people don't know how to travel without an itinerary, but once you learn, it makes total sense.

I have done the all inclusive resort thing and it's not nearly as fun. I did it at Playa del Carmen for about five days. It was very confining and short lived. When you travel without an itinerary you need time to explore and we usually take a month or more on an ILA trip. With more time, this allows you more freedom to explore backpacker style. In fact, most people I have met, other than Americans, tend to travel backpacker style. In America we tend to only have two weeks to travel while in other developed countries, people take more time to travel, usually a month or more. Sometimes you run into people traveling for a whole year. After traveling with the OP I think you should travel for at least a month.

When I was at the resort for five days we barely saw the culture; in fact the resort discouraged the guest form leaving the resort or going out on their own because it was dangerous. The resort people say it is for our safety but it is more about making more money from their guests. They want to keep the money within the resort and not let any go to the local community.

We travel mainly in developing countries where they rely on tourism dollars. Many developing countries encourage resort development with unlimited growth. They build, build, build so they can sell, sell, sell. These resorts are very devastating to the local people. Cancun and Playa del Carmen were once full of mangrove forests and swamps and lush ecological habitats. Now there are only resorts. The locals can't go out and fish anymore; the locals have lost their old ways and are forced to work at the resorts. They are displaced many times. It is kind of like servitude.

As a backpacker my money goes more towards the local economy. It is easier to make choices about where your money goes to because you get to interact with the locals that own the shops. A lot of people don't realize where there money goes, as a backpacker you are more conscious about this. We went to a local indigenous market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. We were able to buy directly from the locals. There were no American corporations here, it was really cool. The market was so colorful and full of life. Everyone knows each other, much different than a Wal-Mart. These market people don't get paid by the hour, the market is just part of their lively hood, not some 9 to 5 job.

The markets are very community oriented. I think we have lost the concept of community in America. We don't really rely on other people. The markets seem like how America used to be with thriving downtowns, where everyone helped each other out. The

markets seemed to be thriving and usually the person selling the goods actually helped produce it. You could ask question about where the product came from unlike in America where the employee is several steps removed from the product.

One thing I noticed in developing countries is the amount of trash everywhere. It is in the canals and the trash will eventually get drained into the sea. There are unfiltered liquids, sewage, plastic bags and Coke bottles. We have the same kinds of trash but we have learned how to move it around and hide it easier. The trash represents what our Western culture has pushed on other people, convincing them they need plastic Coke bottles even though it does no good once you are done with it. There seems to be plastic trash everywhere and there is a mentality that it is ok to throw the trash anywhere.

These trips make me realize how disconnected we are from our trash. We simply put our trash into a bin and somehow it disappears. We have an infrastructure that has created an out of sight, out of mind mentality. That is not a good thing. Traveling makes you aware of what we produce and consume because we see the packaging laying in the streets and canals. It is important to remember that all these products we buy are consumer driven. If people start to demand less packaging, we can make a difference as individuals.

It seems these days we are on a greener path. In the States, we can so easily choose to keep things out of the landfills but so many Americans are not ready for change. We don't like to change unless we are forced to. If supermarkets would just stop providing plastic bags then we would all have to remember to bring our own bags.

One thing you notice about other countries is the overwhelming display of religion, history and tradition. Buddhism is practiced everywhere, not just in temples. The



people still practice the same religions and tradition from thousands of years ago. When compared with America, you realize that we have such a young nation with many different races, ethnicities, and religions. We really don't have a clear sense of where we came from or who we are as a society. I think all the differences can really divide us. One thing to do is focus on is the similarities. For example the principles of Buddhism and Christianity are similar in many ways. Christians have their ten commandments, the Buddhists have their precepts, all religions seem to have the golden rule of 'do unto others as you would like done unto you.' Religions are not so different; some may worship a few more gods but most have the same principles.

The architecture is also very old and traditional. The buildings seem like they have been around forever and will last forever. In America we have a kind of tear down society. I think the only thing that we will have standing in a thousand years will be buildings that show our dominance over nature like dams. Places like Tulum and Angkor Wat seem more in harmony with their surroundings. It seems other cultures build with nature rather than against it, using natural features of the Earth and locally found materials. That is something Americans don't really have is a locally produced house that utilized the natural features of the environment. Our houses tend to be the same all across America.

When you travel you realize that even though different cultures do different things, the basic principles of cultures are similar. The people and ideas are similar; they just have a different way of doing the same thing. The scary thing is that other cultures may start to live like us. They often look towards the U.S. as an example of prosperity.

Just imagine what the earth will be like when people in India start buying cars. The problem is that there are not enough resources for a billion more drivers on the planet.

What Americans need to do is learn from other cultures, we need a change in mindset. Instead of trying to be happy by keeping up with our neighbors we should learn to be happy in other ways. Travel taught me to really appreciate the things I do have and that you really don't need a lot of things. However, bringing ideas back to the States is hard. The American bubble is large and hard to pop. I can say it worked for me; I now put less than 1200 miles a year on my car because I bike most places.

When I travel I like trying all the different foods. Trying foods is such a great way to understand the culture. They have their own style of cooking and it is usually very good, fresh, convenient and inexpensive. You find a lot of great food in the streets and at markets. They have such a community feel. It would be hard to have street carts because everyone in the States likes to drive to a restaurant plus I don't think people here would trust street food. They would be scared the food was unsanitary when in reality the locals that eat there every day kind of give the street stalls a quality insurance. Just eat at the street stall with the most people. No one would eat at a street stall that made them sick.

You learn a lot when you travel, like learning how to get around a country. You learn skills that teach you how to deal with stress. Travel teaches you how to deal with situations as they come along without totally breaking down. When you are traveling in a foreign country with different people and customs it can get pretty stressful and scary. However, the skills you learn on an ILA travel experience teach you how to deal with stressful situation all the time. You learn how to find your calm and use it to your advantage. Now if I have a problem I feel like I can always find my way out.



It seems that when you travel on an ILA trip, it is easier to build relationships. Everyone is together and out of their element. You have to learn to rely on the people in your group. You make meaningful connections. When you travel you tend to push your limits and when you are in a group, you must deal with your comfort zone within the group. The group can give you multiple viewpoints that can help you reflect on your own perspectives. In the end travel is a way to grow personally and it can really help you with your own relationships where ever you are. You learn how to deal with people a lot better; you start to look for the similarities with people rather than focusing on the differences. Everyone learns how to use the strengths in the group to live more symbiotically and happily.

Another skill that you pick up when you travel is bartering within the group. You learn limits, you learn how to push and receive which is a very valuable skill. Sometimes the group can push you past your limits and you realize that your comfort zones can really expand within a group. The group allows you to explore sides about yourself that you never knew you had.

Traveling really helps you in your own life. It helps your inner relationships and outer relationships. It helps you seek out what you want to do in life. You get to see how the rest of the world lives and you can base your life on this new knowledge. Travel makes you more aware. You have a good time and learn a lot without actually opening a book, you simply go out and learn through trial and error. People can really get stuck in their daily lives. These ILA trips are so affordable and accessible, I don't see why you don't have more because people need to go out and explore their world. Ultimately you

never know what is going to happen in life, these trips simulate that reality and help you embrace it.

Janice

Janice participated on the India and South-East Asia Trips. She was 30 years old on her first trip and 35 at the time of interview. She is studying interior design with an emphasis on sustainable concepts. Janice has an outgoing personality and is practically always positive.

Janice's Individual Description

I remember getting on the plane for my first international trip ever; I was so excited and full of joy and happiness. The trip was about the unknown and all the possibilities of what may come. Our first stop was Thailand. In my head I had a picture of everything being traditional and small. The reality was much different. Thailand resembled America in so many ways. Bangkok sprawled out like many American cities.

Regardless of the similarities, these trips are about capturing unique experiences that you can't have in America. For example in Bangkok you can ride around in tuk tuks. I never knew what a tuk tuk was before this trip. These little three wheeled open aired vehicles represented freedom for me. The drivers seemed to just flow in and out of traffic and never seemed confined by any rules. It made me think about all the rules we follow while driving in the States, I never really thought about this before taking a tuk tuk ride.

Transportation was a huge part of the trip. I had never been on so much public transportation. We took trains, buses, planes and of course the tuk tuks. It was the first time in my life that I totally relied on public transportation. The transportation was so reliable, comfortable and instilled a sense of adventure, especially the tuk tuks. Using



public transportation made me realize how limited we are in the States in certain areas.

For the first time in my life I felt like I could just go where I wanted without some cop waiting to pull me over and give me a ticket. I was very impressed with transportation and it was way better than anything in the U.S.

We visited the red light district in Bangkok. I was expecting a nasty and seedy place but the reality was much different. It seemed more like a Saturday market that accommodated almost anyone. We danced and listened to reggae music all night. It was one of the most fun moments of my life, just dancing and being in Thailand. We don't have anything like this in the U.S. It is a unique experience. One thing that struck me was the cross dressing. I could never tell if a woman was actually a woman or a man. They all looked really pretty. Cross dressing seemed to be very casual, just a part of the Thai culture. After awhile I didn't think it was a big deal either.

In Chang Mai we drove mopeds though the jungles and national parks. We never planned the day, we just went touring around the country side, exploring where ever we wanted. We came across an elephant refuge where elephants were trained to paint pictures. It was my first time to drive a moped. It was really scary, fun and frustrating. Everything was so new and at times very frustrating. I had to negotiate Thai traffic and at one point I pulled off into to a ditch and started crying and thought that this really sucks. But when I got through the experience I was so proud of myself. I felt like I had really lived and did it on my own.

I really wanted to push myself and be part of the group. There is always this inner competition to challenge yourself on an ILA trip, same as in India when we trekked

through the Himalayas. I didn't want to be the last one to show up somewhere. There was a drive to see how good you could be at doing new things.

On this trip I really learned how to budget and evaluate where my money went. I became really good at bargaining, which is a huge part of the culture in Thailand and other parts of the world. It was my first experience really watching where my money went. I became very conscious of what I was buying and how much I was spending. I really learned how to stretch my dollar. Most importantly I became very aware of where my money was going. For example I didn't give money to street kids knowing it only perpetuates kids working on the streets for other adults.

Bargaining at the local markets really gave me the opportunity to dive into the culture. This is when I really found out how nice the Thai people were towards us. The Thais seemed to be happy all the time and less stressful. I really think that Thais do not worry all the time about superficial things that Americans worry about. I don't think the Thai people spend their days thinking about how they can accumulate more stuff, like how can we get a new car or motorcycle. They don't spend their day stressing over material things. Other things are important to them like hanging out with their family and friends and having fun, relaxing and being part of a community.

I observed how the Thais do business. Their seemed to be a lot of family owned stores and restaurants and everyone in the family contributed, even the kids. It is not like child labor; they are just part of the family and want to help out. In America you do not see children working in a restaurant or store even if they are family owned.

The Thai religion seemed very alive, with thousands of Buddha statues and temples on every street. The Buddha was part of everyday life. The Thais were very

spiritual and appeared to respect and practice Buddhism daily. They even had a football length golden Buddha statue.

We finally made it to a tropical beach in Thailand and relaxed after some hard traveling. There was a sense of accomplishment after traveling though Northern Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. I think most Americans could relate to hanging out on a tropical beach. When I got back home people would wish they could go on a similar trip. It is so sad because most Americans think they could never travel overseas and travel like I did. I used to feel the same way till I did this ILA trip. If I could do it then I really think most people could do it if they really believed it was possible. I never knew how easy it could be before I went on this trip with the OP. I now think I could go anywhere and live on a budget and make travel a reality. Just get a plane ticket, save up a thousand dollars and go. It will all work out. It always does.

We scuba dove at the ILAnd of Ko Phi Phi. I had never been scuba diving and I ended up getting certified. On our first day of class we simply walked right into the ocean and got to dive our first time out. It was amazing. Diving was one of my favorite things on the trip. This is something I would have never done in the U.S. because it is so expensive. We saw all kinds of tropical fish. It was so incredible. I had a big fear of diving and being under water but I was able to face that fear and experience a whole another world.

I tackled a lot of fears on the ILA trips. By facing all these fears, my confidence level just boosted into the air. When I came back home, I had this repertoire of amazing experiences, things that I had overcome. I had a sense of accomplishment. After the

Thailand experience I went to India with the OP and had similar experiences. Now I have all these experiences under my belt and feel so confident that I can do anything.

While we were on Ko Phi Phi you could walk everywhere. There were no cars on the ILAnd. I loved being able to walk everywhere. I met so many people from all parts of the world. However, I hardly saw any Americans on the ILAnd or on any parts of the trip. It is just not part of the American culture to travel. To Europeans, Australians, Israelis and many other cultures travel is a rite of passage. It is expected for you to travel, to help you realize who you want to be, to gain a global mindset and to become an adult. In America these values are just not that important. This is sad because travel is such a huge eye opener. Americans need to realize that the American way is not the only way to live. You will never know about other cultures until you experience them.

It is so important to gain a different perspective and immerse yourself into other cultures. These ILA experiences gave me that opportunity. I now think of freedom from a different perspective. I used to think freedom was about making money and buying stuff. Now after traveling I realize that freedom is feeling like you can do and accomplish whatever you want. I also gained a new perspective of travel. You don't have to stay in some fancy resort. Many Americans are so interested in accommodations. Now I realize this is just a place to sleep. An ILA trip is not about staying in fancy hotels but rather experiencing incredible places and people. I never knew this could be the goal of a travel experience.

When you travel you see American influence everywhere, especially American music. A little girl in Cambodia wearing a Brittany Spears t-shirt spoke perfect English and was able to connect with Western travelers. Many people seemed to speak good



English in India and South-East Asia. Language is a huge part of a culture and English seems to be diffusing all over the world, obviously showing how western influence is spreading. However, we ate at a McDonalds and I didn't recognize some of the items on the menu. The Thai people had transformed McDonalds to fit their own culture.

The main thing I learned from the ILA experiences is that there are so many different ways to live and that you don't have to live in a repressive state. I learned that we have too many rules in the US and that we are very restrictive. We really are not that free. I feel we are free to make money but I don't feel we are free to explore. This kind of thinking keeps Americans from exploring and thinking that you have to be wealthy to travel. The reality that I have learned is that you don't have to be wealthy to explore. I broke past the repressive thinking of the typical American and now I know that you don't have to be confined by all our imaginary limitations.

I now want to go out and explore the world. This is what the ILA experience has taught me, to get out and explore and let all my senses come alive, to become alive. Most importantly I have learned to bring that knowledge back home and explore every day of my life. On the trips I intentionally tried new things every day and now back home I do the same thing. I have expanded my interest and what I am capable of doing.

Richard

Richard is a white male who participated on the Patagonia and Northern India ILA trips. He was 21 years old on his first trip and 28 years old during the interview. Richard is somewhat shy but willing to try anything. He graduated with a physics degree and now owns his own climbing gym. Richard spends much of his time traveling around the Southwest United States rock climbing and exploring.



Richard's Individual Description

My first trip outside the U.S. was on the ILA trip to Chile and Argentina. I had never been away from home or my family for this long. However, I never even thought about my parents that much on the trip. I remember hiking in Torres Del Paine in Southern Chile with the mountains all around. I knew from that point on that I was hooked on travel.

I remember trekking and being able to drink the water directly from the streams, you didn't need a filter at all. I thought that was really crazy. In America you are always supposed to filter your water but now I don't when I am in the backcountry and I have not had a problem yet. While trekking in Patagonia I had never been anyplace so pristine. I saw my first glacier, experienced my first summer solstice in the southern hemisphere, saw the southern stars and witnessed ice bergs calving into a river. I couldn't believe this trip was real. When I finally saw the Southern Cross over the ocean nothing else mattered. I was just being.

I was not looking to outside sources to complete me or to make me happy. I was not looking to the future to make me happy. I was just happy with what I had at that moment. When you travel it forces you to be in the moment. I remember hiking in to see Fitzroy, an amazing set of spires deep in Argentina Patagonia. We waited for three hours and finally Fitzroy emerged from the clouds. It was the most beautiful, awe inspiring, perfect twenty minutes of my life, ever. I just stared and wandered at it. I did not say a single thing. I just can't explain the moment to anyone. It was perfect. This was the image of life for me.

The South America trip inspired me travel to Northern India with the OP. I remember getting dropped off at a hostel at 12:30 am after a twenty hour flight in one hundred degree temperatures. I was completely in shock. I thought oh my god what did I get myself into. All I saw was cows in the streets, people laying around and trash everywhere. It was so dirty. It was completely different than the Patagonia trip. The India trip ended up being way harder but way more rewarding.

India is a much harder place to travel. You always have to be on top of it. At the end of the day you are completely emotionally and physically exhausted. I had decided to stay in India for four months, doing the first six weeks with the ILA group and then the rest of the trip alone. When I was by myself, I experienced the hardest moments of my life. I wanted to be out there and see what traveling alone was all about.

When I first landed in Delhi I didn't have a lot of things because the airline had lost my luggage. So at one point in the trip I had to travel back to Delhi to retrieve my luggage. It was the first time I had traveled on my own. I remember buying some lychee fruit on the bus ride back from Delhi. To this day it is the most favorite food I have ever had and I haven't had it since that bus ride. The bus ride was so weird. I remember seeing a little Indian kid wearing a John Elway football jersey. The kid probably didn't even know who John Elway was. This event showed me how small the world is and how connected everything is. Sometimes you see things like this when you are traveling and it really makes you think.

On another bus ride to Shimla, India, we rode past some untouchables. They just sat next to the road and watched the buses go by. I was just so amazed. This was their life, just sitting around and watching life go by. I remember seeing the kids, they were so

beautiful. They looked dirty but still their smile revealed the life in them, the passion. I could see that they were the same as us; they just lived a different life.

We are the same in the sense that we are all humans but also in other areas. Many people spoke English and we could find things to talk about with strangers that live on the other side or the planet with completely different beliefs. I found that we have a common love for food, a love for the mountains, and a love of having self pride. The people were so different but yet I still felt a connection with them. I would play hacky sack with the street kids. They would smile and laugh. Those kids knew what fun was. They knew what love was, they knew what enjoying was and you see that.

McLeod Ganj was my most favorite place that we visited in India. The first night we got there the clouds rolled in from the monsoons. We were sleeping on the balcony of our hotel and I woke up to the sound of thunder. I watched lightening light up the sky all night. It was just an incredible moment for me. I wrote in my journal that night about the lightening storm and how it represented for me people finding themselves. You have to put yourself in a position to see things differently, once you do, you become really open to these types of moments and really see them. While in Delhi I had a similar moment when I was missing people back home and I looked up and saw Orion's Belt and I realized people back home see the same constellation. These kinds of moments really made the connections for me. It's all the same. It's the same sun, same moon, and same stars that we all see. These moments connected everything for me.

The day after the lightening show I went to see where the Dalai Lama lived. It was amazing because someone had mentioned that the Dalai Lama was doing some teachings while we were in town. I was supposed to have some kind of pass to see him

but I just went without the pass. I was able to get in and I was sitting there, surrounded by chanting monks. You could hear the deep base in there chants all around you. Then everyone started chanting together and bowing and I looked over and the Dalai Lama was walking right by me. I got on my knees. I didn't know what I was doing so I put my hands together like I was praying because that was what the monks were doing. I bowed to him and he stopped in front of me and bowed back and smiled at me. When that moment happened, it was like an out of body experience. There was absolutely nothing going on inside of me. I was completely happy.

I haven't always been so open to just going into situations blind. Being there in that moment, with the lightening storm the night before showed me that you have to put yourself in position for things to happen and if you don't try, then things will not happen for you. After this experience I just thought to myself, what is there to lose? The worst thing that would happen to me is that I wouldn't get in and I would have to go and drink tea. At that point I felt like I was ready to be on my own.

We took a bus ride on the infamous road between Manali and Leh, across the Himalayas for two days. It was the scariest road I had ever been on. It was terrifying and beautiful at the same time. The road went over three high passes including one at 17,800 feet, the second highest road in the world. This was the first time I had seen the Himalayas. At this point in the trip we are in a completely different world. We are leaving behind the lush southern side of the Himalayas and heading into the desolate reaches of Ladakh, where nothing lived.

Riding over those passes made me think about how different it is than driving over a snowy pass in Colorado. For one you don't have control. It is just some guy

driving the bus but you soon realize that the bus drivers are highly skilled and don't want to die either. Riding around also makes you realize how much we took public transportation. On the ILA trips we are always taking buses, trains, rickshaws and walking around a lot. At first it is a little hard to get used to but then it is really easy. It is much harder to adapt to no public transportation once you get back to America. In South America and India you can get around anywhere you want by public transportation and it is really cheap. In Grand Junction public transportation is not that practical because everything is so spread out.

When I was traveling alone I visited Srinagar. This is not somewhere tourists usually visit. I didn't see a single foreigner there, not even a white person. I stayed in a house boat left over from the British. The surrounding countryside was beautiful but the whole Kashmir area was really different. There was tons of military presence and I always felt on guard. I was never able to be alone and just be with myself. It was cool to be in a place like this when I look back on it but while I was there it was really hard. However, this place was nothing compared to Haridwar.

The hardest place I have ever traveled is Haridwar, where the Ganges River comes out of the mountains and one of the holiest places on earth for Hindus. There are so many people on pilgrimage. At times there are lines of people stretching for twenty miles. The people are all dressed up and throwing offerings into the river. Again I didn't see another white person around. I started to become very overwhelmed with everything and needed to escape and be alone.

I was going through some kind of shock. I hated India at this point. I didn't want to be there anymore. I just wanted to be home so I bought tickets to go home early. I was

scared and sad and alone. I was deep in culture shock. By this point I had figured so many things out and I wanted to share these experiences with someone else. I learned that being in a group there is comfort and that being alone challenged me to a whole another level. I had finally reached my breaking point in Haridwar.

I felt completely alone. I remember praying even though I really wasn't a Christian. I started talking to myself, crying and feeling scared and alone. That was the most alone I could ever imagine being. I remember reading the book *Holy Cow* and the author talked about going through the same kind of experiences. Now she lived in India and loved it. I thought to myself that I know this is how I will be one day but right now I really hate it. So the next day I left for a place that was more comforting, McLeod Ganj.

Now I think back on my travels and realize how lucky I am and so privileged to have a loving family. I remember in Haridwar seeing kids playing naked on the streets, picking through trash with flies all over their faces. They looked miserable. In Srinagar I walked past a lady just laying on the ground with her arm outreached, like she needed help. You see this a lot in India. I walked by once and then walked by again and she was dead. I think about that lady and those kids a lot. These are the kinds of experiences that change your life forever. I now have a different perspective on life. I realize that most people, especially in the U.S. have nothing to complain about.

Everyone needs to go out and find their own paths. I can't tell anybody how to do things. I can give some advice but until you go out and experience a different perspective, that advice will not mean much. I think it is necessary to have a different perspective. You don't have to get it the same way I received it though travel but somehow Americans

need to see a different side to things. Americans need to experience the rest of the world to know how to treat the rest of the world.

If you do travel you should go for a month and get immersed and be open to new experiences. Travel may seem too scary or too expensive however, travel is assessable. After taking an ILA trip, I felt like world travel was very assessable for me. The backpacker style of travel is what makes these ILA trips so meaningful. The backpacker style is unplanned and this allows you to just explore without an itinerary. You are not constricted and this allows meaningful experiences to simply emerge rather than be planned in an artificial manner. It is nice to have a framework but you have to be willing to work outside it. Just like training wheels, at some point you need to leave them behind and go a different direction.

I received so many things from my travels, especially from India. India gave me gifts. I even got sick when I came home, because I got typhoid. But even then when I was sick I slowed down and learned to throw pottery. I started to live more and not worry so much about what the future holds but just being in the now. These trips helped shape who I am today. I now want to start taking people on climbing trips to Southeast Asia and Spain and Argentina. I would do it the same way as the ILA trips, to climb and to teach people to explore the world. As soon as you experience those other cultures, experience traveling with other people, experience seeing the world, you start to view the world through a similar lens. There becomes a commonality in how you see the world. You begin to see that we are all connected.

Ken

Ken participated on the Aconcagua trip to Argentina and Chile. He was 20 at the time of the trip and interview. He was planning on going to Peru during the interview to learn Spanish and explore Latin American culture. Ken comes from the mid-west and has transformed from a ‘frat boy’ into a outdoor enthusiast. Ken is very confident and outgoing and easily makes friends.

Ken's Individual Description

One of the things I remember most from the Argentina, Chile and Aconcagua trip was Iguazú Falls. It was the most beautiful and largest scale waterfall I had ever seen. This was also my first time to experience the jungle and my first trip to South America. I had visited Europe before with my parents but this was the first time to explore without my parents and backpacker style. I basically lived out of a 47 liter pack and learned how to travel light and cheaply. There were no fancy hotels, just a few pair of clothes, my friends and new experiences to come.

I remember packing for trips in the past. I would bring a set of clothes for every single day, now I just wear the same clothes for four days at a time. I also learned how to live really cheaply and more sustainably. I realized I didn't need things like bottle water or having to drive my truck everywhere. Now I just drink tap water, ride my bike everywhere and live within my means.

After doing these trips everything else has taken a back seat. Traveling is the ultimate sport. You never know what is going to happen, who you will meet or what challenges you will come across. Now I just want to get out of there and go where the

people don't speak English. I really want to learn some Spanish so I can talk with my Cuban relatives.

Before climbing Aconcagua, we visited many places. One place was Punta del Diablo in Uruguay, a beautiful beach town with only a small supermarket, a hostel and a fantastic house we rented out for a few days. I remember traveling there from Buenos Aires all on public transportation. At times it was a game to see how many types of public transportation we could take. The U.S. has no clue how to do public transportation. In South America the public transportation is so easy, relaxing and clean. The buses were amazing, they had movies, meals, coffee and you could even sleep on them with chairs that made into beds. They also had direct buses between all the major destinations. I have taken Greyhound in the U.S. and it is a totally different experience. You would think that a developed country like American could have the same kind of public transportation.

Another form of transportation we took was the ferry from Buenos Aires to Monte Video. We met some people on the ferry from Uruguay. We ended up hanging out with these people, going roller blading, walking in the parks and just having fun. Public transportation is great because you get to meet the locals.

I remember talking about going to Argentina to climb Aconcagua during a ski trip. I ended up moving to Jackson Hole, Wyoming and almost didn't make the trip. I was reading *Forget Me Not*, a book about the life of alpinist Alex Lowe. At some point I just shut the book and decided to go. The next thing I knew I was headed for South America. So many things happened on this trip. We didn't just climb Aconcagua, we learned how to travel, see other cultures and made lifelong friendships.

While climbing Aconcagua I became really good friends with my tent mates. They supported me and encouraged me to keep climbing even when my asthma kicked in. They would stay with me and make sure I made it to camp. I would have never been able to get to 20,000 feet without these guys. The group dynamics were just awesome. We had a ton of fun. In fact I could easily spend another two weeks in a tent with those guys.

At the high camp on Aconcagua at Cholera, 19,600 feet, I felt really strong and ready to climb this mountain. I had pushed past camp Canada, 16,200 feet and camp Nido de Condores at 18,000 feet. Only nine of us made it to Cholera and the ones who made it were beat. At that altitude it is hard to even put up a tent. You could really feel the altitude. I remember not sleeping much the night before the summit climb. There was just too much anticipation and it is hard to sleep at altitude. I slept in a negative 25 degree down sleeping bag, down pants, hat, gloves, poly pro pants and top and a capilene fleece.

When 5:30 AM rolled around I was ready to go. I boiled some drinking water, put on my boots; help out my fellow team mates with gear and off we went. At about 20,000 feet my hands started to hurt. I could not feel them from my wrist to my finger tips. I didn't want to lose any fingers to frostbite so I decided to turn around and head down. I had been in this situation before on Denali, where I had to turn around after two weeks of hard work. However, for me I just really enjoy being in the mountains. Getting to the summit is an awesome accomplishment but at the same time I can do without it. I ended up heading back down to camp and reading *Into the Wild*. It was awesome. I am really glad that I made the right decision instead of getting frostbite.

I lot of what I learned on this trip and being in the Outdoor Program is to just assess things. I figured I could always climb Aconcagua another day. When I climbed Denali I had to learn how to assess things as well. I have asthma and sometimes I just can't continue to climb. Sometimes it can be so frustrating but I have learned to not get mad about things I cannot control. Instead I learned to focus on being on the mountain, being part of a group and simply being in the moment instead of just making the summit.

At Nido do Condores I saw the most beautiful sunset I had ever seen. I had never seen anything like it. The alpine glow was simply amazing. I remember getting to this camp and feeling really tired from my asthma. My tent mates were so great. They just told me to lay down while they set up the tent and cooked food. I realized that my tent mates were my life and blood, my support system. I couldn't believe I had made it to 18,000 feet; it was a new altitude record for me. At this point in the climb it was pretty tough to keep going. We had heard about search and rescue looking for some lost climbers. This kind of stuff can really mess with your head. At this point I realized there was a real possibility of getting hurt while climbing this mountain.

Another thing I realized while climbing was the problem with human waste. It seemed no matter where I went there would be a pile of human excrement frozen solid. I liked the fact that we had brought up Rest Stop bags, a bag that you poop in and then carry out so as not to leave your waste on the mountain. It is the idea of leaving no trace. We brought about 250 Rest Stop bags to the park and gave them out to the park rangers. They were very happy about this.

On the way down from base camp we ran across a mountain stream that had red sediment running into a clear stream of water. I had never seen such contrast like this in a

stream. The water stayed two separate colors for a long ways and then it merged further downstream. The stream kind of represented my path since I moved to Colorado. I am the clear running stream and all the sediment is flowing into my life and I am learning how to bond with it. I know everything will eventually mix and the stream will be my life and who I am. The stream is like traveling; all your experiences eventually mix with you and make you who you are today.

We ended up going to Valparaiso in Chile. I loved this place. The city is nestled in the hills on the Pacific Ocean just outside of Santiago. The town had the most beautiful murals on the walls. All the houses were painted bright colors such as green, blue, pink and orange. I also noticed that the houses were really compact. I realized that in the U.S. we have huge houses with huge lawns. I just don't know why we need all that. The Chileans seem to have just what they need and nothing more. Life is just simpler. They have a roof over their head; they can walk most places or take the amazing public transportation system. I guess the main thing I am trying to say is that they are happy and don't need extravagant things and that is kind of how I am now.

I remember just walking around this town, eating really good street food and getting lost in the back alleys. At one point we were told to head back towards the center of town because it could get dangerous if we were by ourselves. I think they thought we were just typical tourists who were lost. I can't blame the locals for getting us out of there because a typical American tourist is someone who travels overseas, stays in nice hotels and only ventures out with a guide. Most tourists wouldn't wonder around the back alleys out of fear because that is what rules most of their lives. The way we travel is totally different. We get to mingle with the locals, try and speak the language and be part of the

culture. When we travel it is much more than taking a tour. It is about getting outside your comfort zone and tackling your fears. This travel experience is one of many steps that I have to take to become who I am going to be. This was a big step and I have many more to come. I am now on my path.

Theme Descriptions

The themes and sub-themes were developed from the individual transcribed interviews. Statements, phrases, and ideas were tagged and categorized into themes. The selected statements are located in the tables at the end of each theme and indicated by the participants' pseudo name.

Theme One: The backpacker style of travel played a significant role

The backpacker framework influenced every aspect of the study abroad trip and laid the foundation for the overall experience. All the participants talked extensively about backpacker style travel, citing it as a major component that lead to a sense of exploration, adventure, fun, and serendipity.

The idea of exploration and adventure during the trip played a key role. Most of the participants expressed a desire to explore other cultures, the world, and one student said she wanted to “explore like Indiana Jones.” Obviously the idea of an International Learning Adventure would draw in the more adventuresome crowd; however, many of the participants were shy and nervous about joining the group adventure but yearned to push their limits. The ILA trips created the environment for adventure and exploration to happen. One participant compared an ILA study abroad experience to climbing a mountain or doing a first river ascent: “you just never know what is going to happen or who you are going to meet or what challenges you are going to come across.” Simply put,

most participants liked the idea of seeing what was going to happen, instead of having prearranged events. This simple concept suggests the idea of exploration.

Participants expressed that they felt free to explore and one of the key components to this was the idea of not being constrained by a schedule or itinerary. The majority of participants liked the idea of being able to go with the flow and planning on the go. One participant explained that not having an itinerary allowed her to be less stressed about the trip and to concentrate more on the moment instead of having to worry about sticking to a schedule all the time. The concept of unplanned moments, a key component to backpacker style travel and ILA, became a focal point for many of the students, sighting the fact that most great moments on a trip are often not planned events. One student from the Africa trip explained how meeting a total stranger led to helping out orphans. He always thought that “the most important thing would be seeing giraffes and rhinos” but it end up being “helping out at an orphanage without even knowing I was going to do that.” Another participant was amazed by the fact that the group just decided to trek to Mt. Everest on a whim.

Backpacker style travel allowed the students to simply go and explore the areas that most appealed to the group and individual. Students didn’t feel stuck in one place. They had the freedom to move around and explore where ever they wanted. Some students talked about the idea of having a rough idea or plan but not setting it in stone because you cannot possibly know what you want to see until you get there. Once you meet other people and start to explore the culture and geography, your interest will change and you must allow room for chance encounters. In other words, students expressed a deep desire for serendipity during the experience.



One student described the ILA trip as “so serendipitous” and that it was “so hard to explain how important serendipity is while you are traveling.” Another student explained how the group found a refreshing waterfall where Jamaican families were just hanging out and enjoying life just by walking around and talking with the locals. Having the opportunity to talk with locals and fellow travelers allowed for more authentic moments to occur, often leading to the most memorable events for the participants. There was a sense that you could just go and figure it all out when you got there because it always worked out. The students explained that traveling without a plan gives you a different perspective. Usually, a major way you get annoyed or angry on a trip is when you fall behind schedule. This can’t happen on an ILA trip because getting lost and finding your way is part of the experience.

The importance of an unplanned schedule or a flexible itinerary cannot be understated. All but two interviewees left out this important component and the idea of flexibility in the schedule repeatedly entered the conversation. The idea came out from statements such as “free flow travel” and “freedom of movement” and “not constrained by an itinerary” but perhaps most importantly backpacker travel added to the idea of adventure, having fun, and simply exploring. One student explained that a huge part of travel is “having fun exploring the different cultures around the world.” He further said that ILA style of travel allowed “you to see everyone else having fun also” such as the locals and what they considered to be fun. Another participant said that a “huge part of adventure is playing and having fun.” It would appear that adventure, fun, exploration, and going with the flow describe backpacker style travel and an ILA study abroad experience. The students explained other aspects of backpacker style travel as well.



One participant on the Africa trip talked about backpacker style travel as “the best way to travel because it is the cheapest and it allows you the most exposure to culture.”

One of the greatest aspects of backpacker travel is that it allows the individual travelers to spend money on the go instead of simply paying a lump sum fee. Backpacker travel by nature is more affordable because the individual participants get to choose their own accommodations, food and transportation. The majority of students stay together as a group; usually the entire group acts as a single unit and chooses the accommodations, transportation, and food according to the group’s desires and budget. As the individual student travels and becomes more accustomed to the prices and more comfortable with the host country, the student can learn what a fair price for local accommodations and food is. This kind of knowledge leads to more affordable and accessible study abroad opportunities. Several students expressed that ILA trips were “really cheap, very accessible, attainable and that anyone could do it.” A student from the Southeast Asia trip explained that she “learned how to budget and evaluate where her money went.” She became conscious of what she was buying and how much she was spending. She also became “really good at bargaining” which is a huge part of cultures around the world. She further discussed how “bargaining and shopping allowed me to dive into their culture.”

One of the main reasons for studying abroad is for authentic cultural experiences. The students talked extensively about their ability to interact with the local culture and diving into their surroundings. As a backpacker you gain valuable cultural interactions such as talking to locals, buying from local merchants, interacting on public transportation and staying at locally owned hostels. One student from the Aconcagua trip

explained that he felt like he “bonded” with some local girls in Uruguay on a ferry ride. The serendipitous nature of the trip allowed further interaction with the Uruguay girls because they were not constrained by a schedule, but could rather stay and build relationships with the locals. One great example is illustrated from one of the girls on the Africa trip, where she befriended a local Masai and was able to spend a week in a Masai village where many of the villagers had “never engaged with a white person.”

When travelling as a backpacking group, often the collective bargaining power of the group leads to very affordable accommodations, excursions, and activities such as group rates for scuba diving courses or collaborative volunteer projects. Many students sighted how the group often received a discounted rate for accommodation and that group rates allowed for accessible excursions such as African safaris. The collaborative bargaining power of the group played a key role in creating unique learning experiences that were affordable and accessible.

One participant described the style of travel as independent travel that teaches the student to make personal decisions and to become self reliant rather than constantly relying on a tour guide to make most of the decisions. This independence allowed him to develop an experienced gut feeling about situations. Instead of letting fear keep him from exploring other cultures, which he explains often happens to tourist reading guide books that warn of the dangers of leaving the resort; instead he was able to get close and personal with the culture.

Backpacker style travel also allowed the travelers to give back to the communities they visited. Instead of giving money to an all inclusive resort, their money tended to penetrate immediately into the local economy. One student said he became very

conscious where his money went and that he wanted his money to go to the local economy. You get to see your money go directly to the local people so they can meet their needs. The idea of supporting local economies through travel was a huge part of the ILA purpose and experience. Students expressed this concept particularly when describing food, accommodations, and transportation, among other ideas.

One of the participants said backpacker travel encompassed exploring different foods and restaurants. She described one restaurant where several travelers tried cuy, which is roasted guinea pig. This experience led to other insights such as the disconnect within U.S. culture with its food supply. The students realized that most Americans do not have a clue where food comes from and how sheltered we are by how our food is presented. Another student talked about visiting markets and seeing all the different types of food. He also alluded to the idea of Americans being disconnected from their food source. Backpacker style travel allowed him to seek out local markets and experience food distribution first hand. On the Everest Base Camp trek in Nepal one participant was amazed at having French fries that had been picked, cut and cooked within eyesight, literally going from “field to mouth” in a single sitting.

Many of the students expressed that “transportation” was a big part of ILA trips. For many it was the first time to use public transportation to get around for an entire month or more. One student said, “It was amazing to travel all over Africa without a car and on top of it; you get that experience with the locals.” On any given ILA trip, a participant will travel by bus, boat, camel, bike, motorcycle, ferry, train or any other type of local transportation such as a tuk tuk or rickshaw. One student went a little further by saying the tuk tuk represented freedom as she described how tuk tuk drivers sped around,

ignoring all the traffic laws and simply going with the flow. Another obvious form of transportation not often experienced in America is walking. One participant said he liked to walk because you get to see much more and get to meet the people; in addition you lose a lot of weight even though you eat a lot of food.

A few students talked about accommodations. On an ILA trip, accommodations are not really a big part of the trip other than simply being a place to rest for the night. One participant said that many Americans want to stay in nice or fancy hotels; however, hostels or small locally owned hotels are the norm on an ILA trip. Hostels are like hotels for backpackers and are for travelers on a budget. One student described one night's accommodations as "a small cabana that had a bed and simple bathroom for about five dollars a night." For sure ILA trip participants do not stay in resorts which can often alienate travelers from their surroundings. The concept of contrasting backpacker style travel to conventional mass tourism surfaced during many of the interviews.

Many of the students contrasted backpacker style travel with mass tourism and resort travel. One student who had recently gone to a resort in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico and then turned around and participated on an ILA trip in the same region had this to say. "On our five day resort stay we barely even saw the culture; in fact the resort discouraged the guest from leaving the resort or going out on their own." He further stated that the resort probably didn't want people to leave the resort because they didn't want any tourist dollars leaking into the local economy. One participant explained that she never even knew about backpacker style travel. She thought the only way to travel was though a pre-arranged packaged tour that usually cost thousands of dollars. Another student made the connection to fear in our country and how fear lead to traveling "safely" with tour

operators and cruise ships. While talking to a local Jamaican about resorts, one student discovered that food for the buffet mainly came from abroad, meaning that money from the resort usually did not go into the local economy for buying food but instead back to the country of operation. Some students expressed the fact that most locations we visited did not have a resort but only small hotels and hostels. The students told of backpacker style tourism leading to more sustainable development such as cabanas and huts located on Zanzibar and Jamaica, two islands known for mass tourism but establishing more sustainable accommodations that support the local economy. The distinction was also made about length of time, while conventional tourist can only spend a week or possibly two weeks at a resort, an ILA trip requires a bit more time.

Length of time played a major component. Although these trips are considered short-term, they are considerably longer than most two week travel experiences for most Americans. Many of the students had never considered leaving for more than two weeks on a trip; however, after the trip the majority of the students suggested that a month of travel was a minimal amount of time needed to be immersed in the environment and culture. They also liked a month of travel because it was “doable” and allowed for the flexibility in their school schedule. The ILA study abroad trips take place between the traditional semesters, allowing students to not interrupt their studies, but rather meld with their school schedule.

The participants on the ILA study abroad program deeply expressed the importance of backpacker style travel. This style of travel, particularly with its lack of a clear and defined itinerary, lead to more authentic experiences, adventure, exploration, cultural immersion, serendipitous moments, accessibility, fun and giving back to local

communities. Further attention was given to the concept of giving back to local communities through utilizing local transportation, accommodations and eating local foods. A four to six week long adventure also seemed to be the “perfect about of time” for an ILA trip. Considerable contrasts were made between backpacker style travel and traditional mass tourism.

Table 3**Interview Statements Related to the Backpacker Theme****Adventure/Explore**

This picture represents the adventure of travel and discovery. (Jane)

Adventure is about pushing your limits and striving for new experiences. (Jane)

I wanted to experience culture and adventure. (Kim)

I was just ready to explore and ready to see what was going to happen. (Sandy)

I never expected I would do outdoor activities in a foreign country. (Sandy)

You get to meet new people, you explore like Indiana Jones. (Sandy)

It was about the unknowing and the possibilities of what may come. (Janice)

I now want to go out and explore the world. (Janice)

I like to just explore without a plan. (Richard)

But now everything has taken a back seat to traveling because that is the ultimate sport. You can't beat it because you never know what is going to happen next. (Ken)

I guess you can compare it to a first ascent route, you just never know what is going to happen or who you are going to meet or what challenges you are going to come across. (Ken)

No Itinerary

With our style of backpacker travel if you see something you want to do, you simple go do it; we are not constrained by an itinerary. (Mike)

Not knowing what to expect is exciting, it really adds to the sense of adventure and that you are traveling somewhere. (Mike)

I think free flow travel is the way to do it, have a general plan but do not set it in stone. (Alice)

When we traveled, we brought a lonely planet book and just took off. (Tim)

Stuff will just flow, decisions will happen and things will just go. (Tim)

The amazing thing about this trek is that we hadn't even planned it. (Tim)

We have a rough idea of what we want to see and the rest of it will just present itself along the way. (Tim)

The evening didn't turn out how we had planned, it was even better. It was just us exploring this beach. (Alice)

I realized you don't have to plan out a whole month of travel all at once. You just take it as it comes, one day at a time and it's not as stressful. (Alice)

Introduced me to a whole new way of travel, allowing me to go with the flow and it worked out really great. (Alice)

Free flow travel. (Alice)

Before this trip, travel just seemed so distant and hard to accomplish. I think I had that American mentality that it cost a lot of money first of all, second of all that travel was a totally different type of thing than what we did, normally very scheduled with an itinerary seeing things and not really meeting the people. (Simon)

I just had a blast doing that, learning to travel without an itinerary for the first time. (Simon)

I learned that you don't need to plan it all out; you can just go do it anytime. (Simon)

We did not have to plan at all to get around. We just went to the local mini bus station and just went. No planning at all. (Jane)

The best way to travel is to not have a plan because where you go next is often reflected upon the people you meet, hearing other people's stories, and your experiences kind of dictate where you are going to go next. (Kim)

There is some planning but not much with our style of travel. (Mike)

With our style of backpacker travel if you see something you want to do, you simple go do it; we are not constrained by an itinerary. (Mike)

You're not stuck in one place, you have freedom of movement and to do what you want. (Mike)

We never planned the day, we just went touring around the country side, exploring where ever we wanted. (Janice)

The style of travel we do at the OP is unplanned; you don't have an itinerary (Richard)

Serendipity

It was so serendipitous; it is so hard to explain how important serendipity is while you are traveling. (Simon)

Just doing that wonderful thing that you do when you travel, just wandering around and seeing the sights and finding whatever you find. (Jane)

This was just one of those traveling moments. What we found there was so delightful, it was shady, a refreshing waterfall, we were surrounded by Jamaican families enjoying each other and life. (Jane)

We found this place just by wandering around after visiting the Blue Lagoon. (Jane)

We met this guy and he said he would take us to the schools, you can come visit for a day. (Kim)

Just go and you will figure it all out when you get there. (Janice)

It always just works out. (Janice)

It surprised me and I just decided to go. I didn't have the money so I put it all on my credit card, but it was fine. (Richard)

We hung out in Monte Video for a few days and were talking to a few other backpackers; we had no idea about this place. (Ken)

Fun

I think the ILA style of travel is fun because you get to see everyone else having fun also. (Simon)

You're having fun learning from that culture, not impressing on that culture but just taking in that culture and what they have developed. (Simon)

A huge part of adventure is playing and having fun. (Jane)

It is the classic picture of the whole group doing something fun, doing something that we had never done before. (Sandy)

After going through all these pictures I can say the importance of travel is having fun. (Sandy)

I really just enjoy being in the mountains now. (Ken)

Style of Travel

One thing I appreciate about ILA trips is the style of travel. (Jane)

You meet the Brits, the Australians, the Israelis, the Japanese, you meet people that are traveling in the same manner from all over the world. (Kim)

Backpacker travel is where you go to a country and you don't stay in one place too long because you want to experience the culture and see what it has to offer. (Kim)

You just develop this experienced gut. (Tim)

I think it takes travel to get that gut instinct about places and you get that much more when you travel independent because you are making your own decisions and becoming self reliant, relying on your own decisions, whereas if you travel with a travel company, somebody else is always making the decisions for you. (Tim)

I think backpacker style is the only way to travel because if you are too constricted you are not going to experience things in a meaningful way. (Richard)

You have to have the framework but be willing to work outside it. (Richard)

By the end of the trip, the training wheels are off. Like in Chile we ended up splitting up and going in different directions. The training wheels were off and then they were gone. We had them for teaching and then they were gone. (Richard)

In backpacker style travel, I just lived out of my 47 liter pack that I brought with me for traveling before the climb. I just had a few pairs of clothes and that was about it. I had never really experienced that before. (Ken)

To have adventures, to have authentic experiences, to be connected, to broaden your horizons and to look at life and live life in a different fashion. (Tim)

I don't care how many movies you watch or magazines you read, you will never really know what another culture is about until you go there and experience it. (Janice)

It was something so simple and so easy to enjoy together. (Jane)



Some of my favorite times of travel are the simple times. This is the time when you get to look and see. These are the times you can get a good feel of local life. (Jane)

One of the things I love about travel is that you have everything you need on your back and there are just a couple of things you need to figure out each day. (Jane)

Affordable/Accessible

The trip was incredibly affordable. (Simon)

It was real easy. It was really cheap to go through the OP. I thought it was so attainable. Anybody can do that. (Kim)

I think these Outdoor Program trips are very accessible and help get people interested in other cultures. (Mike)

This kind of travel is accessible but people don't realize it. (Richard)

After taking an OP ILA trip, then for sure you feel like world travel is accessible to do on your own. (Richard)

Cultural Contact

It allowed more opportunity to talk with the locals and become immersed in their culture. (Tim)

You get to interact with the culture, for example when we were sitting on the bus in China, going to Dali from Lijiang, we took out our phrase books and the local would teach us how to count in Chinese on the bus. (Tim)

You definitely get close and personal with the culture. (Tim)

You get to actually talk with the people that live there. (Simon)

A big reason I went on this trip in the first place was to meet the locals, public transportation gave the perfect opportunity to do this. (Simon)

You get a three hour conversation with a local out of a dollar bus ride. (Simon)

We had a little bit of involvement from the locals, at the very least the locals saw us cleaning up their beach without any external incentive. (Simon)

Travel puts you in contact with other cultures and the earth on a very basic level. (Jane)

Our goal is to go and see the culture and meet the people and if you are really going to do that, you need to be where the people are living and doing their everyday activities. (Jane)

The real locals are not at resorts. I felt like I was really able to experience Jamaica and I also felt like the locals were able to experience us. (Jane)

Another time hanging out with some of the local surfers guys, I felt like I got a glimpse of the local's lives. (Jane)

I told her I wanted to go live with a Masai tribe and she said that she was of Masai blood. My relatives live in the tribes. I will take you there. (Kim)

Backpacker style travel is the best way to travel because it is the cheapest and it allows you the most exposure to culture. (Kim)

I became really good at bargaining, which is a huge part of the culture in Thailand and other parts of the world. (Janice)

Bargaining and shopping allowed me to dive into their culture. (Janice)

I met so many different people from all parts of the world. (Janice)

I felt like I kind of bonded with these girls. They were from Uruguay, they lived in Monte Video. (Ken)

Local economy

It is a great form of income for the locals, completely sustainable. (Simon)

My money will go a lot further for the local people. I think this is something to be very conscious of. Most people don't even think about where their money goes, they just think if they spend the money in the foreign country that it will stay in the country. (Mike)

This kind of ties in with buying from the locals. (Mike)

You can see how the local people meet their needs, what time of the day they do it and who they are with. (Jane)

Food

An average backpacker thing to do was to go explore and eat and try some different foods. (Sandy)

I think there is a disconnect in US culture between where our food comes from and what is served on our plate. (Sandy)

Americans are so disconnected from their food and what we buy. (Mike)

I don't think they used near the same amount of pesticides and herbicides. (Tim)

I had never seen bananas outside the store. (Tim)

The food is much fresher when traveling; it tastes better. (Tim)

It was from field to mouth. (Tim)

I think food is an important part of travel and it is an important part of our life. (Simon)

We had just gone to a pastry shop and everyone was so happy to be eating these pastries. (Jane)

This is a local market in Port Antonio in Jamaica. I picked a local market scene because this is what people here did every day to get food and earn a living. (Jane)

A lot of exploration in travel is trying new foods. (Sandy)

One thing when you travel you always have to try the local food. It is usually really good and fresh. (Mike)

On the bus ride I bought some lychee fruit and it was the first time I had ever had lychee fruit. Still to this day it is the most favorite food I have ever had and I haven't had since that bus ride. (Richard)

Hostels/Accommodations

Hostels are like hotels for backpackers, a low budget hotel for backpackers. (Kim)

We stayed in a small cabana that had a bed and simple bathroom for about five dollars a night. (Janice)

For Americans the hotel where you stay is a huge part of the vacation. A big question for Americans is where are we going to stay and what is the room like. On an ILA trip we don't really care because we hardly spend any time in the room. (Janice)

Transportation

Transportation is a huge issue on these trips. (Tim)

Transportation is a big part of these trips. (Simon)

It was amazing to travel all over Africa without a car and on top of it; you get that experience with the locals. (Simon)

I think a lot more about transportation now. I really take notice how people get around. (Jane)

We use public transportation to get around everywhere; it is always available and inexpensive. (Mike)

Tuk tuks for me represented freedom. (Janice)

Transportation was a huge part of this trip. I had used a bus when I was younger but I had never been on so much public transportation. (Janice)

We took all public transportation. (Richard)

We also took trains and bus rides, but lots of rickshaws when you are in town in India. (Richard)

I just like to walk. You see so much more and you get to meet people. You also lose a lot of weight even though you eat a lot. (Richard)

In South America, you can find direct buses to every place and just go. (Ken)

In Contrast to Mass Tourism/Resorts

It is much different than working 50 weeks of the year and then flying to some resort and having no other connection with anybody outside the resort. (Tim)

I remember being in Jamaica and seeing a resort where they had a buffet but instead of the money going to local fishermen, that money went out of the country to the base of the operations for the resort. (Simon)

Every hotel there and every little beach place is not a resort style at all. (Simon)

Great Huts was such a unique place to stay because it was so different than the resorts that we saw along the coast. They were outside but still had all the amenities of a restaurant, nice beds, and were comfortable and clean. It was very relaxed. There were local Jamaicans working there, they were not fake. (Jane)

I never knew about backpacker travel before the Africa trip, as an American I thought the only way to travel was to book it through a travel agency or go on a guided tour and pay thousands and thousands of dollars. (Kim)

Panajachel has not one resort, only small hostels and hotels. (Mike)

On our five day resort stay we barely even saw the culture; in fact the resort discouraged the guest from leaving the resort or going out on their own. (Mike)

It was more about spending money with them and doing their tours as opposed to letting money go to the local economy. (Mike)

There is the whole thing of fear in our country. That is what we are based on. That is why no one wants to go outside of the tour company and stuff. They would rather take a cruise down to Cancun or Key West. (Ken)

Length of Time

Going traveling for a month is the perfect amount of time. (Alice)

Now I can't imagine traveling for less than a month. (Simon)

A big difference in the ILA trips in that we travel for at least a month. When you have more time, you have more freedom to move around and explore other places. (Mike)

I think you need a minimal of three weeks to just feel getting immersed and open to all the new experiences. (Richard)

A month is a good length of time and it is totally doable. (Richard)

Theme Two: Global Perspective and Awareness

The students increased their global perspective and awareness. Most students, having never visited another country, gained a different perspective. They realized that not everyone lives like Americans and there are many ways of doing the same thing and indeed, the American way is not the only way. In fact, many students expressed uncertainty in our way of life especially in areas such as transportation, food, sustainable development, mass tourism, happiness, individualism, community and materialism. The students became critics of the American way of life as they reflected on their own culture through the lens of another culture.

Travel helps people gain a different perspective. Many of the ILA participants expressed the need for gaining a different perspective because so many people think the majority of world lives like Americans. In reality very few people live like Americans.

One participant explained that all over the world school kids wear uniforms, that would never happen in the U.S. because Americans are way to individualistic. Gaining a different perspective is so crucial because it gave the students insights and knowledge of a bigger world. One student summed it with this sentence, “We only see the world through our own culture but it is so important to immerse yourself in other cultures to gain a different perspective.”

The students told of different ways in which perspective entered their study abroad experience. One student talked about a slum tour in Nairobi and he said it was “eye opening.” Another student also used the words “eye opening” and said on an ILA trip you get to see the rest of the world and how people live. You get to compare and “see what it is like here and what it is like in other parts of the world.” A student from the India trip talked about a conversation he had with an Indian clerk about Tibetan refugees. He said the refugees expect India to just do everything for them and the clerk did not like just giving Tibetans everything they needed while other Indians suffered. This conversation showed a different perspective about a people so revered in the U.S. and in the popular media.

The participants not only gained a fresh perspective and a more open mind, they also gained valuable insights into particular aspects of the cultures they visited. One student put it simply, “One thing that I have learned from travel is that people do things differently all around the world.” For example people dress differently, they shop in open air markets, use public transportation, don’t follow traffic rules and walk down the streets singing and being loud. A student who went on the ILA trip to East Africa discovered that Masai men can have multiple wives, a concept not easily understood by the students.

Even more eye opening was the fact that the Masai people have no concept of the word “yours.” The Masai see everything as everybody’s so what is mine is yours or to better state it, it is “ours.” So when the student wanted to say, “I like your family,” she had to say, “I like our family.” To an American who lives in a world so driven by individualism and possessions, it is no wonder this kind of experience resonates so profoundly.

Children also made a large impact on the individual participants. The subject of kids and particularly child labor kept reappearing during the interviews. Perhaps because all cultures have children in common, the students seemed to make a deep connection with the children from other countries. The interesting thing about the interviewees is that only one participant had children but yet many of the students commented about the fun they had watching and playing with the children. On an ILA trip there is ample time to hang out with kids, from playing cricket and soccer in the streets to volunteering and teaching in local orphanages and schools. Simple truths came out, such as realizing how important it is for a child to be loved. The students witnessed street children on several trips, introducing them to the reality of poverty and inequality. In spite of the often destitute appearance of many of the street children, the students still saw the children as beautiful and full of love and joy. Children have a way of leveling the playing field and connecting with people on a fundamental level.

Several students mentioned the idea of child labor. Most of the students had thought of child labor as negative, especially when considering street children begging for their parents. However, after spending time in the host countries, some of the students began to realize that the children were simply learning to be part of a family or community. One student watched school children build their own school, something that

would never happen in the U.S. The participant went on to say that perhaps it would be good for American children to learn the value of building their own school. In the end the students realized that most cultures have very different morals and values when it comes to raising children, but overall kids are just kids anywhere you go. They know how to have fun, hang out and love to interact.

The students recognized the deep historical and religious beliefs that shaped particular cultures. One student noticed in Cambodia and Thailand an overwhelming display of religion. From the same trip, another student said that, "In Thailand it felt like Buddha was alive and there to stay and be a part of everyday life." Another student from the East Africa trip spent time with some Muslim school children and expressed her new perspective about Muslims by saying, "They are not all bad, just like Americans are not all bad." The religious influence obviously touched a few of the student. One student also commented on how the Christian religion had influences many native Africans, and in many ways negatively averted traditional African beliefs that had shaped their culture for hundreds of years.

In addition to religion, the students also mentioned the significance of historical buildings and how they seemed to last forever. One student said that "Tulum and Angkor Wat seemed to meld with the natural surroundings in a kind of permanent way, in a positive way. It seems other cultures build with nature rather than against it, using natural features of the Earth and locally found materials." The students are usually introduced to different historical perspectives while traveling on an ILA trip. The comments suggest this is true, particularly to one student who said that foreign countries are steeped in

history and tradition, and he made the contrast to America's young culture that does not share the same historical breadth.

Many participants felt and saw the effects of globalization. Examples included western style clothing, McDonalds, American music and the fact that English is spoken so widely. One student spoke about a child wearing a Brittany Spears t-shirt and she spoke perfect English. The little girl seemed to be western as opposed to Cambodian. She had grown up selling postcards and trinkets to tourist and easily made a connection with westerners. Other obvious signs of globalization were the use of computers and cell phones. Now, the internet is simply a worldwide phenomenon that in many ways has pressed the western view upon the world. One student thought she would see and experience Africa the way it was a hundred years ago. She realized that Africa, despite being the poorest continent on the planet, is quickly being assimilated into the world of internet and digital communication. Despite the many advantages of the internet and cellular communication, one student saw globalization as a bad thing and many made the connection between globalization and the material world.

In stark contrast to America's material ideology, many countries around the world seem to share a much lesser connection to material wealth. It appeared that other cultures were happy to do with less and didn't spend their days stressing over material things. Some participants expressed feeling badly because of the extravagant lifestyles they led in contrast to the many other people in the world who have a humbling existence. One student simply said materialism is "what we are about in this country" meaning the United States. Sometimes when a person lives in such wealth, they need to step outside their bubble and get a different perspective. One student talked about seeing trash all over



the streets and realized that the packages and containers were connected to the products that we consume and buy on the daily basis. A deeper connection developed for some students, stating that products are simply a result of demand by consumers. If we become more conscious about our materialistic manners, then perhaps we can make a difference in the world. Perhaps we could learn from other cultures. Most people seem to just get buy on what they need and nothing more. In fact some don't even care about materialism, but rather focus on the importance of family and community.

The idea of happiness emerged in several of the interviews. It appeared to a few of the participants that happiness in American culture tended to be connected with "having stuff." While in other cultures happiness seemed to stem from community, family and relationships. In fact in most of the countries that had relatively small material wealth, the people seemed happy, often waving and talking. One student in Jamaica said the quality of life seemed pretty good, the Jamaicans smiled a lot and appeared happy. Another student suggested that Americans could learn from other cultures and find happiness in other ways instead of trying to keep up with their neighbor's possessions. Connected to the idea of happiness was the concept of community. Some students reflected on the sense of community and commonality they felt while traveling. One student explained that, "their communities are designed a lot differently than in the U.S., they are for people and not cars." For example the markets are very community oriented, designed for people to mingle and gather, rather than just buy stuff. Another student described how all of downtown Kingston, Jamaica was shut down and instead of working, the people had gathered at the docks and piers for a huge Sunday afternoon

gathering. Most students felt the spirit of community but one student doubted the same kind of community feeling could exist in the U.S. because we are “too independent.”

As explained in the backpacker description, food made a large impact on the participants. One student went a little farther and talked to local resort workers and mini-bus drivers about the food situation in Jamaica. She was told by one resort worker about the food waste produced by the huge buffet style meals for resort guests. She also found out that a lot of Jamaican food was exported as cash crops, forcing local grocery stores to import cheaper packaged food items. The distinction was made that people in less industrialized nations simply must work harder to get food on the table, and that people in developed countries are too far removed from their food source.

Along with food, the backpacker style of travel introduced students to public transportation. Here are a few insights from the students. It seems that there are great public transportation systems all over the world and that the ILA experience made them reflect on something so simple as transportation. One student expressed delight when she found out there were no automobiles on Ko Phi Phi Island in Thailand. When you don’t have a car and use public transportation the students discovered another form of transportation not often used in the United States, walking and riding bikes. One student from the Jamaica trip said, “We walk so much when we travel and we see locals walking and riding bikes so I think this is how everyone else around the world does it.” The students noticed that the cities were designed for walking and that buses could “take you everywhere.”

Many participants talked about the negative and positive effect of tourism. One student said tourism could be bad if the tourist disrespected the local culture, beliefs, and

environment. Another student simply stated that “resorts are very devastating to the local people.” A few made the distinction between conventional mass tourism and sustainable tourism. They felt that sustainable tourism could have many positive impacts, including contributing to local economies and promoting environmental stewardship. One student from the Africa ILA trip thought Zanzibar was a great example of how sustainable travel could positively impact the local communities. In the areas we stayed on the island, we only used local accommodations and ate at local restaurants. The students understood that tourism has a major impact on the world and that many nations around the world rely on tourism dollars for survival. In the end the participants realized that tourism could have a negative impact or positive impact. Most expressed that backpacker style travel was a much more sustainable form of travel rather than the traditional resort model.

In gaining a more global perspective the majority of the ILA participants reflected on their own culture. Their comments shed light on an American culture that is young and often oblivious of its impact on the world and its connections to the environment, cultures and resources of the planet. One of the girls from the East Africa trip said the ILA trip made her see “that a whole another world is out there and that America is extremely sheltered and we are naïve and we haven’t a clue.” Her comment is supported from a slew of other comments made from other participants from entirely different trips. It is important to note again that these reflections are based on 10 individual participants talking about 10 ILA experiences. After writing the initial description about U.S. reflection, I realized that not one participant gave any distinction about the good that may come out of the United States. Instead it would appear that in the eyes of these 10 participants that the U.S. is indeed in need of some cultural enlightenment.



The students said that the American bubble is large and hard to pop. Americans need a change in mindset. However, when most Americans travel abroad they do it in a manner that is negative to the local environments and communities and they don't actually interact with the locals. In fact the students said they rarely encountered any Americans while traveling abroad. They would come in contact with many other people from developed nations such as Europeans, Australians, and Israelis but hardly ever any Americans. In many parts of the world travel is a rite of passage, not so in the United States. One student said it is sad because most Americans have no clue how easy it is to travel overseas and explore exotic lands. Instead we are just "too fat, happy and pampered" to get out and experience the world. Americans simply need more worldly awareness. Without this awareness, Americans don't even know what questions to ask. Such as how can we improve our transportation system or is there a different way of shopping and indeed, do we really need all this stuff. Americans are so disconnected they do not even know where their food comes from or why pesticides and herbicides may be harmful for the environment.

The funny thing is that Americans try to tell the world how to think and act and they don't have a clue what they are trying to fix or influence. For example one student talked about all the trash they saw on the streets. Things like plastic Coke bottles and plastic bags. How is it that our culture convinced people they need plastic bags and plastic Coke bottles even though they do not have the resources to deal with the waste. In many countries Cokes used to come in glass bottles but now plastic bottles are used with very few recycling efforts to be found. Americans have a kind of disposable mentality and now we are introducing this same system to people abroad. The idea of consumerism



is also spreading abroad and much of our waste is spurred from consumerism. Americans are simply disconnected, just like we are disconnected from where our food comes from, we don't know where our trash ends up. Americans have an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality. Americans just don't seem to care about their actions.

A big distinction was made about how Americans are taught to not be responsible for their actions. One student talked about feeling good for being responsible for her own actions and becoming self reliant while on the ILA trip. She said in Bolivia "there is not someone or some regulation watching out for you." Instead you have to actually take responsibility for your own actions. This is one of the things that you learn on an ILA trip, to take responsibility for your life and make your own rules. Be ready for failure and learn how to get back up. In America we are taught that "liability" can be pushed on to others and that you don't need to be responsible for your actions. Instead of being responsible, Americans just make rules for everything. One student expressed that. "In the States I always feel so confined by rules." Americans don't have any real freedom because we have so many rules that keep us confined. Another student said that she felt free to make money but didn't feel free to explore.

To these individual participants it is obvious that Americans need to get out and explore and learn from other cultures. However, as one student put it, Americans don't use opportunities like this to learn, in fact, Americans have a hard time learning because we don't like to make mistakes. You can't learn unless you make mistakes. Americans tend to be reactive as opposed to proactive and in general Americans just are not ready for change. A great example is our current transportation system. We have created the ultimate transportation system for cars and we know it is unsustainable and bad for the

environment however, we don't invest in high speed rails or affordable and efficient public transportation. One student said it bluntly, "The United States has no clue how to do public transportation." The students talked about Americans needing a fundamental mind shift. One possible way for this to happen is to get out and learn from other cultures.

Table 4**Interview Statements Related to the Global Perspective and Awareness**

Different Perspective

I think it is really good to get out because if you don't have a different perspective, you think everything is like the US. (Tim)

Uniforms tend to make students more equal so we can focus more on education instead that we are all different. (Tim)

I just thought it was like the flip side of culture, we are in their country to see exotic cultures and then they see us as exotic. (Tim)

They didn't know anything about us; they just invited us into their home. (Tim)

I had such a profound experience, giving me insight and knowledge of a bigger world. (Alice)

It introduced me to a whole new way of viewing the world. (Simon)

Low points are important in travel because it gives you a different perspective. (Simon)

We got a little tour from this guy named Cartoon and he showed us around this place and it was pretty eye opening. (Simon)

It gives you a sharp mind, an open mind and a fresh perspective. (Jane)

You get to know the whole picture, not just what you grew up with but what life is really like for other people. (Jane)

Travel is just mind opening in all aspects. (Kim)

I came back knowing so much more about the world than I could have ever imagined.
(Kim)

You get to see the rest of the world, how people live. It is a huge eye opening perspective to see what it is like here and what it is like in other parts of the world. (Sandy)

We only see the world through our own culture but it is so important to emerge yourself in other cultures to gain a different perspective. (Janice)

On the bus ride to Shimla, we rode past the untouchables. (Richard)

But this Indian guy gave a different perspective of the Tibetan people. (Richard)

It is hard to explain, I just didn't have any perspective to look at these women and judge them. (Richard)

Now I have a different perspective. I feel like I have gone out now and started to see other perspectives so that it helps me make more informed decisions. (Richard)

Customs

They are all singing and being loud, they are proud and not embarrassed. (Alice)

The locals were so friendly and low key, easy going and relaxed. (Alice)

One thing I have learned from travel is that people do things differently all around the world. (Simon)

He said there is no word for 'your' in the Masai language. Because in the Masai, everything is everybody's, we all share. So what's mine is yours. They can't say 'yours' because you have to say 'ours.' (Kim)

When I thought about the multiple wives from a Western perspective, at first I felt bad because I wanted to tell them in the Western world there is so much more. (Kim)

Their dress is so different. (Kim)

The market is part of their lively hood. (Mike)

I love that it is such an old place and many of the same traditions are going on today. (Mike)

The tuk tuk drivers are so friendly, in fact it seems like all the Thai people were friendly. (Janice)

Kids /Child Labor



Kids just love hearing about our stories and they love telling their stories to us. (Simon)

When I was in Jamaica I was very aware of kids. There were lots of kids around. I have never seen so many kids just hanging out, playing in the streets, and just being kids. (Jane)

It was just fun to play with the kids. (Jane)

It was fun to just interact with these kids, very shortly but very positively. (Jane)

They have different morals and values, it's ok for the children to work, there are no child labor laws. You see a lot of child labor in Africa, tons of kids begging on the streets, working anywhere, in the mines. (Kim)

It was a good experience because it makes you realize how important it is for a child to be loved and these children are orphans and they don't have that. (Kim)

The family is together a lot more with relatives and everyone contributing, even the kids. It is not like child labor, they are just part of the family wanting to help out. (Janice)

I really thought about how much kids have to work in developing countries in order to help their families. Sometimes it seemed ok but at other times it seems bad. (Janice)

These happen to be kids that are begging in Agra. This girl is probably forced to do this by her parents. She is making money for her parents, she doesn't keep this money. (Richard)

They are beautiful children, their eyes and their hair. (Richard)

We saw a lot of these kids, I remember playing hacky sack one time, and they stopped begging and just watched us. They would smile and laugh, those kids know what fun is, they know what love is, they know what enjoying is and you see that. (Richard)

Tons a naked kids picking through trash, just like what you would see on TV, kids with trash and flies all over them. (Richard)

Religion/History

I remember we were on the balcony of the tree houses looking down at a church service, listening to them sing in a foreign language; they were so into their religion. (Alice)

You realize that there is tons of Christian influence in Africa. (Kim)

Christians come in and they totally take away from traditional African beliefs, what these people have believed for hundreds and hundreds of years. (Kim)

Being around the Muslim culture was really cool because it was at a time of a lot of Muslim resentment in America. (Kim)

They are just real open-minded. It was really cool being around Muslims and it gave me a new perspective about them. (Kim)

My new perspective on Muslims is that they are not all bad. Just like Americans are not all bad. (Kim)

One thing you notice about other countries is the overwhelming display of religion. (Mike)

These foreign countries are also steeped in history and tradition, something our country doesn't really have because it is so young. (Mike)

The architecture seems to stick around in these places and these old buildings seem to last forever. (Mike)

Tulum and Angkor Wat seemed to meld with the natural surroundings in a kind of permanent way, in a positive way. It seems other cultures build with nature rather than against it, using natural features of the Earth, locally found materials. (Mike)

I like this photo because it represents the history in the places we traveled. (Mike)

I also observed their religion, especially by visiting Buddhist temples. (Janice)

In Thailand it felt like Buddha was alive and there to stay and be a part of everyday life. (Janice)

I realized how spiritual everyone appeared and that their religion was respected and practiced widely by most people. (Janice)

Globalization

I look at the globalization of cultures as a bad thing. (Simon)

A big influence from the west is the style of clothing. (Kim)

It makes me sad in a way because you want that diversity and you want to experience what it was like a hundred years ago but unfortunately, with the rise of the internet, and communications, it is not like that anymore. These people have the same internet access as we do. Every person has a cell phone. (Kim)

America does have an influence on developing countries. (Janice)

There was so much American music everywhere. (Janice)



I think she was able to connect with westerners because she was around them all the time; she even had a Brittany Spears t-shirt on. She spoke such good English, like many people in the cities and in India, it is amazing how you can get around just know English.
(Janice)

In school they learn all the basic subjects, reading, math, writing, and science. (Kim)

I was surprised at how easy it was to get around with English in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania but Rwanda was harder. (Simon)

They can all speak English. That was really good for me. (Kim)

Trash

I was amazed at all the trash. (Simon)

This is a trash canal somewhere near Rivas, Nicaragua. (Mike)

Most of this trash will get drained into some lake or river and eventually into the ocean. (Mike)

All I saw was cows walking around and trash. (Richard)

There was just dirt, trash, people lying in the middle of the street. Everywhere there were people sleeping, unclothed, just dirtiness. (Richard)

Materialism

Happy to do with less. (Tim)

They really just want basic necessities and there idea of it is different than mine. (Tim)

That is what we are about in this country, materialism. (Tim)

When you first arrive in these developing countries, a part of you feels bad because we live such an extravagant lifestyle compared to their humble existence. (Simon)

They are not materialistic, they don't care about materialism; the biggest importance is family. (Kim)

Traveling makes you aware of what we produce and consume because we can see the packaging laying in the streets and canals. (Mike)

It is important to remember that all these products are consumer driver, if people don't buy them then companies want make them. If people start making conscious decisions about what they buy, we can make a difference as individuals. (Mike)

They don't spend their day stressing over material things. (Janice)

These people just have what they need. They don't have anything more. (Ken)

Happiness

We have become much more in need of immediate gratification than other cultures and people. (Tim)

Happiness and fulfillment in the American culture tends to be equated with having stuff. (Tim)

Happiness to them is community, family, even if there is no money, they will have that piece of fulfillment because they have these relationships, and they have these connections. (Tim)

Everyone abroad is always waving, talking and seem happy but here in America everyone seems grumbly, saying what are you looking at. (Tim)

It seemed to me that the quality of life for Jamaicans was pretty good, most of the people seemed happy and smiled a lot. (Jane)

Nima said she was so happy because she had never engaged with a white person before and she couldn't believe I was taking so much interest in her culture and it made her so happy. (Kim)

It doesn't matter what you have, as long as you are with your family; that is all that matters. (Kim)

Instead of trying to be happy by keeping up with our neighbors we should learn to be happy in other ways. (Mike)

There seemed to be no stress going on in Thailand. (Janice)

I really feel like it is an integral part of their culture to not worry all the time about these superficial things that Americans worry about. (Janice)

Other things are important to them like hanging out with their family and friends and having fun, relaxing and being part of a community. (Janice)

Community Oriented

There is also a sense of community and commonality. (Tim)

I don't think it would work in the U.S. because we are too independent. (Tim)

Their communities are designed a lot differently than in the U.S., they are for people and not cars. (Simon)

Like in Kingston on a Sunday afternoon there were thousands of people jumping off the piers, having a ton of fun. (Jane)

The markets are very community oriented. (Mike)

Food

We found out that they export a lot of their food to make money on it, forcing them to import cheaper and less nutritious food from the US and other places. (Jane)

We learned from one of our mini bus drivers that had eight kids and he worked at a resort where they had a huge international buffet. (Jane)

I think a lot of people in less industrialized nations have to work a lot harder for their food and are probably closer to the source than here. (Sandy)

Transportation

Great public transportation systems are all over the world. (Simon)

This experience gave a totally different perspective on something as simple as transportation. (Simon)

We walk so much when we travel and we see locals walking and riding their bikes so I think this is how everyone else around the world does it. (Jane)

There were no automobiles on the ILAnd which is one of the things that made it so awesome. (Janice)

They are within walking distance of anything they need. Valparaiso has an amazing public transportation system; they have the small micro buses that can take you everywhere. (Ken)

Traditional Tourism versus Sustainable Tourism

The funny thing is that the place was almost like a natural disaster because the cruise ships had stopped coming to this port. (Alice)

I defiantly did not think about the environment being associated with travel because travel to me did not have anything to do with the environment. (Simon)

Tourism has its pros and cons, it's bad if the tourist come in and disrespect the local cultures, beliefs and environment but there is a thing called sustainable tourism, eco tourism. (Kim)

Eco tourism is when you travel and want to sustain your environment. (Kim)

We travel to mainly developing nations and they rely a lot on tourism dollars. (Mike)

I see a lot of people from developing nations throwing their money at resort that encourage unlimited growth. (Mike)

These resorts are very devastating to the local people. (Mike)

I think Zanzibar is a great example of how sustainable travel should be or how it can be. (Simon)

If you look at the environmental impact of transportation, especially in the U.S. it is a huge part of our carbon footprint. (Simon)

It is made to stay around. (Simon)

Now I want to focus on sustainable travel and how to connect people with these kinds of experiences that I have had. (Simon)

The water was ice cold, crystal clear blue water and you can drink right out of the stream. (Richard)

U.S. Reflection

I realized that we have such a disposable mentality. (Simon)

Our communities are not designed for walking. (Simon)

The idea of safety and the word ‘liability’ really irritate me. We are not taught to be self reliant. (Simon)

I think it is so important for people to open their eyes to the realities outside of America. (Simon)

Now I equate it to American consumerism and how much we like to waste and over consume. (Jane)

The trip to Africa made me see that there is a whole another world out there and that America is extremely sheltered and we are naïve and we haven’t a clue. (Kim)

Americans need to open up their eyes more and see that everything is not perfect. (Kim)

We go out there and try and tell the world how to think and act. (Kim)

It would probably do us some good if American kids contributed to building their own schools. (Kim)

Americans don’t really like to see what they are eating. I think there is a disconnect in US culture between where our food comes from and what is served on our plate. (Sandy)

Here you have to take liability for yourself if you want to do it. In Bolivia there is not someone or some regulation watching out for you. (Sandy)

Americans are just too fat and happy and pampered. (Sandy)

Especially as Americans, we need more worldly awareness. (Sandy)

It seems like other people, other than Americans, take more time off to travel and travel for greater lengths of time. (Mike)

It is a much different mentality than our American supermarkets and Wal-Mart. (Mike)

In America we have lost a sense of community, we have a sense of place, but not really of community. We don't really rely on other people. (Mike)

Americans are so disconnected from their food and what we buy. (Mike)

The trash in this picture kind of reflects what our culture has pushed on other people, convincing people they need a plastic bag to take an item home, you need this plastic Coke bottle even though it does good when you are done with it, and it feels like we as Americans are part of the problem. (Mike)

It is kind of like us Americans being disconnected from food, it is the same with our trash. (Mike)

It is the concept of out of sight, out of mind. (Mike)

Americans are not ready for real change. (Mike)

In America it feels like you have to be invited to go to a church, they can be daunting places. (Mike)

Americans are kind of a tear down society. I think the only thing standing around a thousand years from now will be the thing we don't want standing around like dams. The things that will be standing will be things that show our dominance over nature rather than our harmony with it. (Mike)

What Americans need to do is look and learn from other cultures, we need a change in mindset. (Mike)

The America bubble is large and hard to pop. (Mike)

We have created the ultimate transportation system for cars. Our transportation system is totally unsustainable and at this point it would take a fundamental mind shift to change that. (Mike)

Our culture is very reactive rather than proactive. It is far easier to be reactive, not cheaper, but mentally easier. (Mike)

In the States I always feel so confined by rules. (Janice)

It is sad because most Americans think they could never travel overseas and explore an exotic land like I did. (Janice)

However, we hardly saw any Americans on the ILAnd or on the whole trip, it is just not a part of the American culture. To Europeans, Australians, Israelis and many other cultures in the world travel is a rite of passage. (Janice)

In American it is just not important for us to travel and gain those perspectives, which is sad because these kinds of trips are huge eye openers. (Janice)

That is what I associated freedom with, the freedom to make money to own as much stuff as you want. That is American freedom. (Janice)

I feel we are free to make money but I don't feel we are free to explore. (Janice)

Everyone has the opportunity to go through this but Americans don't use this opportunity wisely. Americans don't learn. (Richard)

A typical American is someone who travels overseas and they hire a tour guide and stay in five star, four star, or a hotel. They don't stay in a hostel. They go out every single night to eat, they don't mingle with the locals, they don't practice leave no trace. (Ken)

The United States has no clue how to do public transportation. (Ken)

Theme Three: Personal Growth

All participants experienced significant personal growth. Some expressed a greater ability to go with the flow and others felt more confident all around. Many of the ILA participants experienced new horizons that led to personal reflection, stressful situations, overcoming fear, and finally adapting to their new surroundings. Many talked about learning new skills, building confidence and becoming empowered by the experience. Group dynamics played a huge role that allowed for much of the personal growth to emerge. An area that played a vital part for many of the participants was the idea of solo experiences, ranging from home stays to simply bargaining in markets. Other



areas of significant discovery for the participants were the ideas of giving back to communities and being in the moment.

For many of the participants, their first overseas adventure started with an ILA trip, naturally this led to a whole list of new experiences. The students mentioned their first jungle experience, first scuba diving, first time sea kayaking, first time to climb a mountain, first real connection with the earth, first time relying on public transportation, first moped ride, first glacier, first pristine environment, first time doing laundry by hand, first time budgeting their money, first monkey in the wild, and first time traveling backpacker style. One student even felt more spiritually free due to all the new learning and experiences. No doubt traveling to a foreign country can lead to many new experiences, however, the personal reflections that follow from these experiences elude to a sense of personal growth, rather than a simple first time encounter.

The majority of the participants talked about personal insights and reflections that emerged during their travels or as a result of their travels. Some reflected about their own lifestyle and becoming more self-aware, others talked about feeling lucky and privileged to have friends and family. One student mentioned not blaming others anymore and rather looking inward and acting more responsibly. The general comments about personal reflection stemmed from engaging in new experiences, gaining a new perspective and then reflecting on personal assumptions, attitudes and beliefs. Many students seemed ready for change, especially personal change that comes from soul searching and exploring ones personal limitations. One student said that she no longer felt confined by all our imaginary limitations. Another expressed that the ILA trip was indeed a life changing experience that lead to personal inspiration, educational moments and made her

a better person. A better person could be interpreted as someone more tolerant and accepting of other cultures as one student expressed. Another participant said the trip allowed her to start exploring herself in a more positive fashion. Regardless of the personal reflections and their meanings, each student needed some kind of catalyst for self exploration. For some it was simply being in a new situation, for others stress played a major role.

Stress can come in many forms, for some participants not knowing the language and culture created low points, for others it was simply missing loved ones back home. One student talked about the scariest bus ride of his life and how it was terrifying and beautiful at the same time. A lot of mixed feelings occur during an ILA trip with a few participants experiencing shock and stress only hours after landing. One student who landed in New Delhi at 1:00 am in 110 degree heat and no luggage had this to say, “Oh my god, what did I get myself into.” This same student said he hated India at one point and didn’t want to be there anymore and that he had experienced the most alone feeling of his life. This represents one extreme but others simply said being in a foreign land is bound to bring on stress, but then again that is what they came to experience, something new, something cultural, and something shocking. On any given ILA trip you will experience some kind of stress, from culture shock to simply being part of a group; it is what happens next that makes the difference. Most participants talked about adapting to the stress and overcoming their fears.

The participants talked about constantly experiencing new things and adjusting to each new encounter. As a result the students learned to adapt much easier to situations, especially as the trip progressed. One student talked about traveling for so long that she

started feeling comfortable with situations that had been very stressful only a few weeks before. The backpacker style of travel necessitates that the traveler learn to constantly adapt. Part of adapting is learning patients and tolerance and becoming flexible, all key components to adapting on a long trip. In fact one student expressed being forced to learn new skills that teach you to deal with stress. He stated that you need to learn how to deal with situations as they come along without totally breaking down; this is what you learn while traveling on an ILA trip.

Stress and fear go hand in hand, many students talked about overcoming personal fears and coming away with a sense of accomplishment. The students became masters at tackling personal fears such as fear of the unknown, fear of water, fear of heights, fear of being in a group, and simply fear of doing something new. The student from the India trip who had expressed hatred toward India had this to say, "The India trip ended up being way harder but way more rewarding." Much of tackling fears and overcoming stress is simply learning from new experiences and building confidence and ultimately being empowered. The students talked extensively about these issues.

From the participants' comments, it would appear that learning is a key component to an ILA experience. Some students talked about learning about wildlife while on safari, learning how to bargain while in a market, learning how to budget their money, learning how to live really cheap, and just focus on the things they really needed. Others talked about learning skills that teach you how to deal with stressful situation and gaining awareness and paying attention to your surroundings. In particular the students talked about learning how to travel independently and get around other countries: and how to get out and explore on their own. Several students made statements such as being

“ready to go explore on my own” and that “I feel like I can do it on my own.” Another student said, “My trip through Peru really prepared me to travel.” On a deeper level, some students talked about learning how to find themselves, becoming alive, using their senses, learning how to live in a different manner and really appreciating the things they had. A student from the India trip said that India had given him many gifts, even in the bad times. Often learning can build confidence.

On the ILA trips students talked about having confidence to do anything. A student expressed that after the ILA trip he thought he “could do anything after this point.” Another student put it this way, “By facing all these fears, my confidence level just boosted into the air.” In the same manner a student from the South East Asia and India ILA trips said, “Now I have all these experiences under my belt and feel so confident that I could do anything.” Put another way, these students felt accomplished and confident in themselves. A lot of building confidence is simply knowing you can rely on yourself. Backpacker style travel gives you the opportunity to use new skills for adapting to challenging situations and this can be very empowering.

Perhaps the biggest catalyst for learning and building confidence was learning how to embrace group dynamics. On a very basic level, traveling with a group forces you to learn about yourself and others in your group. One student said, “You learn how to read other people and meld your needs with the group.” There are not many situations in a person’s life where you experience stress within a group for a whole month or more. When this happens you gain a much larger comfort zone with groups because of a better understanding of where people are coming from. The most interesting aspect of group dynamics came in the form of learning from each other. One participant said she learned

a lot by watching others on the trip, making her reflect about her own actions. Another student talked about seeing people order tacos from a taco stand. This may sound so simple, but according to the student at the time just ordering tacos was a very extraordinary situation, especially not being able to speak the local language. The student stated that, "It seems so crazy but just a little experience like that can really open your eyes."

Other basic concepts of group dynamics were the sense of security within the group and the supportive nature of fellow travelers. The participants talked about how the group could push a person to do things they never really thought they could do, helping them achieve greater heights. Others said they really wanted to push themselves and be part of the group. Some students sensed some stress within the group, but most participants said they got along well and had a lot of fun with the people in the group. On a basic level the participants liked being part of a group because they were able to meet new people and build meaningful and lasting relationships. One participant expressed learning how to live symbiotically, a word not often used to explain human interaction. One last concept of the group dynamics was the collective bargaining power that comes from being in a group. This often led to cheaper accommodations, safaris, scuba diving and other excursions that many students would not have been able to afford otherwise.

In contrast to group travel, many participants talked about 'solo' events that led to great personal growth. A solo event could range from staying with a Masai tribe for a week, simply wandering around the city alone or taking off with a part of the group to travel on their own. The fact that many students ventured out on their own suggests that they were truly gaining the skills and confidence to explore without the security of a

group. Solo moments also provided a means of escape from the group stresses. Perhaps having the ability to step away from the group allowed many participants to simply vent without the pressures of group conformity. Another aspect of solo moments was the ability for an individual or a group of participants to explore areas of interest. For example, on the Africa trip, one group of student decided to climb Kilimanjaro while another group traveled to Zanzibar. Both groups split and reunited at a later moment in the trip. In this way everyone in the group could easily compromise and devise a plan that everyone could agree too. Many of the students talked about traveling solo after their ILA experience, saying they had gained the skills to travel on their own.

Two students talked about gaining a sense of peace and being in the moment. The students talked about becoming heightened, where all their senses came alive. This allowed them to really soak in the culture and their surroundings. One of the students talked about being in the most perfect moment of his life, being completely happy and how nothing else mattered. This experience led to the realization that “you have to put yourself in position for things to happen and if you don’t, then things will not happen for you.” The student had trekked to the base of Fitzroy and waited for several hours and was rewarded with a twenty minute view that he called “the image of life.” The same student used his knowledge of ‘setting yourself up for success’ when he visited the Dalai Lama during the India ILA. Again, he talked about being completely happy and likened the moment to an out of body experience. Obviously for some students, intense moments can lead to profound personal growth.

On most ILA trips, the participants seek out volunteer opportunities in order to give back to the host communities. Some of the participants talked about the personal

growth that comes with volunteering and supporting the locals. In contrast to mass tourism, the participants felt like they were giving back to the local communities by buying directly from the locally owned restaurants, hostels and shops. One student talked about being very conscious where her money went, especially when it pertained to giving money to street kids. She learned that most of the money does not end up in the hands of the children but rather in the hands of someone that forces the kids to beg. So to help the children, she bought directly from families so they could support their kids. In addition to buying local, students talked about volunteering opportunities such as cleaning up beaches, helping out at an orphanage or teaching at a primary school. One student became inspired by the volunteering opportunities and now seeks out volunteer jobs where ever she travels. Another student talked about climbing Aconcagua in Argentina and how the group brought a couple hundred rest stop portable toilet systems to help control the problem of human waste in the high altitude environment. For many of the students the volunteer opportunities were a highlight during the ILA trip.

Personal growth and awareness emerged as a vital theme for the ILA trips. The statements from the participants clearly supported the theme of personal growth. The backpacker style of travel and gaining a global perspective no doubt set the students up for intense inner reflection and personal growth. While most traditional study abroad students experience profound levels of stress and personal reflection, it is believed that ILA students experienced similar levels of personal growth. However, the backpacker style travel clearly created unique experiences that may have enhanced or hindered the personal growth. According to the interviews, the former appears to be true.

Table 5**Interview Statements Related to the Personal Growth****New Experiences**

This was my first jungle experience. (Alice)

I had never experienced any of this stuff before. I was so excited to experience all this new stuff. (Alice)

I had never been out of the country. (Alice)

First learned how to put on our scuba masks. I never thought in my whole life I would learn how to scuba dive. (Alice)

Trip because it was my first time out of the country and my first time sea kayaking. (Simon)

I remember feeling the weight of my backpack and thinking I am really going to do this, climb this huge mountain. (Jane)

I have never interacted with the earth so much and been so in touch with it. (Jane)

I feel more spiritually free when traveling because I am constantly learning new things. (Jane)

I woke that morning know it was going to be one of the biggest days of my life and knew it was going to be physically hard but even more mentally demanding. (Jane)

We first got into Lima, my first time in a foreign country. (Sandy)

I think this international trip really triggered a sort of self exploration that I never had to face before. (Sandy)

It was the first monkey in the wild I ever saw. It was awesome because we were in the wild, totally different than anything I had ever been exposed to. (Sandy)

It was my first international trip ever so I was really excited, a picture of true joy and happiness. (Janice)

For the first time in my life I felt like I could just go where I wanted and no one was out to get me. (Janice)

This was the first time in my life that I totally relied on public transportation for a whole month. (Janice)

Learning how to drive a moped for the first time. (Janice)

It was my first experience really watching where my money went. I really learned how to stretch my dollar. (Janice)

I had never been scuba diving and I ended up getting certified. (Janice)

The first time I ever went outside the U.S. (Richard)

Before this point I had never been anyplace so pristine. (Richard)

The day before this picture I saw my first glacier. (Richard)

This is also my first experience in the jungle and my first trip to South America and I really enjoyed it. (Ken)

Was also my first time traveling backpacker style.

Doing laundry by hand was a new thing for me, eating very little was also new. (Ken)

Personal Reflection

This experience made me think about my own lifestyle. (Simon)

Now I am more self aware. (Simon)

Instead of blaming everyone else I now look at myself and act responsibly. (Simon)

This trip really humbled me. (Jane)

Travel has put a balance into my life. (Jane)

I feel like life needs to be a balance of simplicity and things not so simple. So often we focus on the harder things in life. (Jane)

After these trips I feel more whole and feel more tolerant and accepting of other cultures. (Jane)

I did a lot of self exploration on this trip. (Sandy)

I think this trip was really a way for me to start exploring myself in a more positive fashion. (Sandy)

I was just so ready for change, ready to be me. (Sandy)

You don't have to be afraid of places, you just have to be a smart traveler and be aware. (Sandy)

Travel is a way to just open yourself up and I think it is really important. (Sandy)

This trip was a life changing experience. It was inspirational, educational; it made me a better person. (Jane)

Travel is a way to grow personally and it can really help you with your own relationships where ever you are. (Mike)

I didn't go on this trip to find myself or do soul searching but it ended up being kind of soul searching. (Richard)

It helps you seek out what you want to do in life. (Mike)

I became very conscious of what I was buying and how much I was spending. (Janice)

It is expected for you to travel, to help you realize who you want to be, to gain a global mindset, to become an adult; it is a coming of age. (Janice)

Now I know that you don't have to be confined by all our imaginary limitations (Janice)

It just made me feel like what the hell do I have to complain about ever. (Richard)

I just think of her and realize how lucky I am and so privileged to have a family, friends and all these things that I have and that helps me. (Richard)

These trips helped shape who I am today. (Richard)

This travel experience is one of many steps that I have to take to become who I am going to be. (Ken)

Stress

Which is fun but it will also wear you down, but you will get over that and start learning the language and culture more. (Simon)

On a long bus ride between Kampala and Nairobi, I experienced a low point on my trip (Simon)

Some of the stress came from travel shock. (Jane)

When I found out I was just angry. (Sandy)

I was a little scared because I didn't know Spanish very well. (Sandy)

I have never really had a threatening experience in my travels to this date, except for someone robbing me. (Sandy)

You go to these foreign lands, totally surrounded by these different people, and it can get pretty stressful. (Mike)

It was hard at first but then it just became fun and I was able to reap the benefits of the training. (Janice)

I was just so overwhelmed with everything. (Richard)

So now we are in India and this is the first picture I took in India. This is at two in the morning. I got dropped off and I was completely in shock. (Richard)

I thought oh my god what did I get myself into. I was already missing people back home (Richard)

I had to walk past these cows and I didn't know what to do. I thought the cows might trample me or something. (Richard)

You are just completely emotionally and physically exhausted from the day, (Richard)

The scariest road I have ever been on, super steep. (Richard)

It was so terrifying, but it was beautiful at the same time. (Richard)

I was going through some kind of shock. I hated India at this point. I didn't want to be there anymore. (Richard)

I was scared and sad and alone. (Richard)

It was culture shock. (Richard)

That was the most alone I could ever imagine being. (Richard)

I was by myself, it wasn't big deal, morally it just sucked, I just wanted the day to be over with. (Ken)

Adapting

The trip allowed so many opportunities for new things and I got to see everyone in the group constantly adjusting to new things. (Sandy)

We had been traveling for so long now that I was now comfortable (Alice)

I have learned to adapt much easier to situations. (Simon)

I feel like I am the most flexible while traveling. I think I am able to adapt while I am traveling. (Jane)

My mind becomes so open when I travel, I am able to take things in and adapt. (Jane)

I love traveling without a plan because you have to learn to adapt. (Jane)

I learned patients and tolerance. These two things are key plus being flexible. On a long trip we are forced to learn it. (Jane)

All these skill sets teach you how to deal with stress. It is all basically the same, if you tip your sea kayak over in the ocean or are looking for a place to stay in a foreign city, you need to learn how to deal with situations as they come along without totally breaking down. (Mike)

Ultimately you never know what is going to happen in life, these trips simulate that reality and help you embrace it. (Mike)

Overcoming Fear

I think it is good for all these students and especially myself to be reacquainted with overcoming fear and being able to figure things out. (Tim)

I think some of it is a feel that you develop over time; you just develop this experienced gut. (Tim)

It was very empowering to be with a group of girls out on a beautiful beach by ourselves. It was nice to tackle my fears. (Alice)

I did this all by myself even though I was really scared to do it. (Alice)

Again I am tackling another fear of mine, a great fear of heights. I became really good at facing fear, a fear of not knowing.

I decided I was going to go a week early and fly in there by myself at night just to challenge myself and see if this is possible. (Simon)

I know I can change directions if I need to. I think it all started right here. (Sandy)

I just wanted to check things out and that was a challenge for me because it was the first time I really took a step to just be by myself without the group and see how I do. (Sandy)

This experience tells me that we can often be over paranoid about going into a place. (Sandy)

There is always this inner competition to challenge yourself on an ILA trip. (Janice)\

I had a big fear of diving, a fear of being under water. I was able to face that fear and I have come a long way. (Janice)

The India trip ended up being way harder but way more rewarding. (Richard)

Learning

Through these trips you really learn how to travel independently. (Tim)

It is all about the experiences, those are the only things you take with you, your experiences and your education. (Tim)

Travel does this for you, it allows you to just focus on the things you really need. (Jane)

But now I have become much more relaxed about things, and more cognizant about how I can stress about things I can't do anything about. (Tim)

The travel experience has affected every area of my life in a positive way. (Alice)

However once you are there, you get an awareness about a place and you just pay attention to your surroundings. (Alice)

Then I learned how to do all these things on the ILA trip and now I feel like I could do it on my own. (Alice)

By the second week I felt like I was ready to go explore on my own. (Kim)

I remember that on this safari, I learned more about zoology than I ever did in any text book. (Kim)

It taught me a lot about hunting, animal hunting and animal techniques. (Kim)

It is really possible to get a lot of cultural interaction because sustainable travel and what you taught us, taught us how to go off on our own and be by ourselves. (Kim)

My trip though Peru really prepared me to travel. (Sandy)

Travel taught me to really appreciate the things I do have. (Mike)

It also makes you realize that you don't need a lot of the things we do have. (Mike)

I put this in to represent the skills that you learn from travel, like learning how to get around in other countries. (Mike)

All these skills you learn on an ILA travel experience teach you how to deal with stressful situation and not freak out. (Mike)

Another skill is bartering. I think this is a very valuable skill. (Mike)

On this trip I really learned how to budget and evaluate where my money went. (Janice)

The main thing I learned from the ILA experience is that there are so many different ways to live and that you don't have to live in a repressive state. (Janice)

The reality that I have learned is that you don't have to be wealthy to explore. (Janice)

This is what the ILA experience has taught me, to get out and explore and let all my senses come alive, to become alive. (Janice)

Everyone needs to go out and find it for themselves. (Richard)

India gave me many gifts. Even in the bad times. (Richard)

I had to learn how to live really cheaply or I was going to be in a world of hurt. I owe a lot of that to the people on the trip, teaching me how to do that. (Ken)

Confidence

These experiences taught me to not just admire other people but instead actually get out there and do it myself and admire myself for doing it. (Alice)

I feel like I can go where ever I want and do whatever I want. I think this is why the ILA experience was so freeing to me. (Alice)

I now approach situations at home like I am traveling; I am so much more relaxed. (Alice)

I thought I could do anything after this point. (Simon)

Traveling has helped me make that awkward transition to adulthood and how it feels to be independent. (Jane)

The main resource when you travel backpacker style is yourself and the people you travel with which is awesome. (Jane)

I was never this kind of traveler, I used to have everything planned out but now I have a lot more confidence to just jump in and travel anywhere. (Jane)

It was really cool because I think we started feeling more confident in ourselves, that we could do it. (Sandy)

There was a sense of accomplishment after a fourteen hour bus ride and traveling all through Cambodia and Laos, we finally made it, could finally jump into that warm tropical water and just relax. (Janice)

When I come back I feel really confident, like I can go anywhere and do anything. (Tim)

By facing all these fears, my confidence lever just boosted into the air. (Janice)

Now I have all these experience under my belt and feel so confident that I can do anything. (Janice)

Empowering



It was just a really good empowering trip and I would do it again in a heartbeat. (Alice)

Travel is one of the things I feel I have done the most that nurtures my body and mind, initiating growth and development in myself. (Jane)

It was so cold, frigid. I am just in awe. I could not believe I was standing there at 19,200 feet. It was just such an accomplishment for everyone individually and as a group. (Jane)

I now think I could go anywhere and live on a budget and make travel a reality. (Janice)

Group Dynamics

Just cool to go out with people who are just outgoing and not afraid of new experiences and embrace the new experiences (Alice)

I learned a lot of this from the trip by watching others on the trip. It made me reflect about my reactions to situations. (Alice)

I looked forward to meeting all the people in the group. (Simon)

I think because we had this trip together, this shared experience we ended up being friends afterwards. The common experience gave us a unique bond to become friends. (Simon)

I remember going to a local taco stand and just watching people in the group walk up and order a taco. It seems so crazy but just a little experience like that can really open your eyes. (Simon)

On a basic level traveling with groups, you get to know what kind of person you are because you learn a lot about yourself. (Jane)

Then you learn how to read other people and try and meld your needs with the groups. (Jane)

I feel like travel has enhanced all my relationships. (Jane)

Group dynamics was a big part of this trip. For the most part everything went great within the group. (Jane)

I liked traveling with the group in the sense of security (Kim)

One great thing about the group is bargaining power. (Kim)

This trip challenged me in a lot of ways to open up, it challenged me to learn how to interact with a group and how to face myself, my insecurities. (Sandy)

I think on this trip, especially with the group of people I was with, I was inspired by their positivity, their mellowness. (Sandy)

The group was very supportive. (Sandy)

It seems that when you are on an ILA trip and traveling like this, it is easier to build relationships. (Mike)

Everyone is together and out of their element, and you have to learn to rely on the people in your group. (Mike)

When you travel in a group, you are forced to deal with your comfort zone within the group and you learn to rely on the group to help you through stressful situations. (Mike)

You can get multiple viewpoints from the people in the group. It helps you figure out your own ideas and how they relate to other people. (Mike)

Rarely are you ever placed in a situation where you are with people all day for a whole month. You learn how to deal with people a lot better. (Mike)

Everyone is happy, you are not using people, you are living symbiotically. (Mike)

Sometimes the group can push you to do something you would have never wanted to do but then you do it and feel better about yourself. (Mike)

I really wanted to push myself and be part of the group. (Janice)

It is one of those days I will always remember and a group I will always remember. (Richard)

These are my tent mates on Aconcagua and I really became good friends with both of them. (Ken)

Being in the tent with them, our group dynamics were just awesome. There were no arguments; we got along so well, it was a lot of fun. (Ken)

At this point we had all twelve people. There were a few of us struggling, me included. It was just so awesome to have all twelve of us up there. (Ken)

The tent mates are like your life and blood. You can't go anywhere without your tent mates. (Ken)

I have a much larger comfort zone now with groups and can better understand where people are coming from (Simon)

Solos



It led to my great solo experience in the rain forest. (Alice)

At one point it the trip I broke off from the group and I went and visited and lived with the Masai, the Masai tribe. (Kim)

I needed some time alone, I needed to get away from the hostel, away from Westerners, and go out on my own. (Kim)

I started going out by myself and sitting in the Plaza de Armas, talking to little kids. (Sandy)

So we spent a lot of time traveling in smaller groups at this point. (Sandy)

The further we got in the trip I think the less people felt that they needed to stay as a group. (Sandy)

A lot of the time we just wandered around city, not really knowing what to look for, but we still did it. (Sandy)

On the second month of the trip I was by myself and that was the first time I had ever completely traveled alone. That was the hardest month of my life. (Richard)

I wanted to be out there and see what traveling alone was all about. (Richard)

A week later we were in Shimla and I left to go get my lost luggage and that was really the first time I had been on my own (Richard)

At that point I felt like I was ready to be on my own. (Richard)

Being in the moment

I have learned from travel not to focus so much about how long something will take but rather be in the moment. (Jane)

When I travel I feel like all my senses are heightened, I can hear better, see better, smell better and taste better. (Jane)

This is the time when you can use your heightened awareness to really soak in the culture. (Jane)

At this point nothing seemed real. Nothing else mattered at all. I was just being. (Richard)

I was just happy with what I had at that moment. When you travel it forces you to be in the moment. (Richard)

You have to put yourself in positions to see those things and once you see those things, you become really open to these moments and really see them. (Richard)

When that moment happened, it was like an out of body experience. There was absolutely nothing going on inside of me. I was completely happy. I didn't even think, oh my god this is the Dalai Lama. (Richard)

This is Fitzroy. This is the most beautiful, awe inspiring, perfect twenty minutes of my life, ever. (Richard)

Being there in that moment, with the lightening storm the night before showed me that you have to put yourself in position for things to happen and if you don't try, then things will not happen for you. (Richard)

I started to live more and not worry so much about what the future hold but just being in the now. (Richard)

It gives me a sense of peace and that is what I felt from this trip. (Richard)

It was perfect. That twenty minutes was everything. This is the image of life for me. (Richard)

Giving back to communities

Then the next morning I woke up and helped feed some orphans their formula in the morning. (Simon)

I like it because this is our group cleaning up a local beach. (Simon)

I wanted to do volunteer work, my boyfriend and I wanted to work with orphans or animals and he really wanted to work with animals so we went to a refuge. (Kim)

We volunteered at a primary school in Jinja, Uganda. (Kim)

I became very aware of where my money was going, I didn't want to contribute to keeping these kids on the street. (Janice)

I also learned that a lot of money enters Thailand through tourism dollars. I feel like we as travelers are contributing to their lives when we go there. (Janice)

I think it was awesome that we brought those wag bags up there. The wag bag or rest stop is essentially a bag that you open up and it has powder in there, it gives you some toilet paper and a wet napkin, and all you do is poop into it and seal it up. (Ken)

Theme Four: Connections and Transformations

Seeing “connections” was an overwhelming theme established from all of the interviews. The travelers shared a feeling of being connected with the world and other cultures. A feeling not previously experienced. As the students immersed deeper into the cultures, they realized that many aspects between the cultures were different, but more often than not, the differences were shrouded in similarities. For example, even though each region had a unique cuisine or transportation system, the end reality is that everyone needs to eat and get around. The knowledge and understanding of these similarities led to a feeling of interconnectedness, like we are all in this together; that we share the same planet, the same resources, and need to find a way to coexist. Many students realized how they never saw the similarities and rather had focused on the differences between cultures, often resulting in a kind of disconnect.

Through these connections, many students expressed a kind of transformation in their thinking and attitude towards other cultures, themselves, the environment, and life in general. Not only did every interviewee mention future travel as a part of their lifestyle, nine out of the ten actually did it and they did it backpacker style. In conjunction with exploring new destinations, many students exhibited changes in behavior back home as a result of learning through other cultures and becoming more aware of environmental and sustainability issues. In light of the researcher’s definition of sustainability, having the ability to see connections, the information presented in this description sheds light on the power of backpacker style study abroad to create unique travel moments that can lead to personal growth, a global perspective, transformation, and perhaps most important of

all, seeing connections. The following statements from the participants will shed light on some of the key areas of seeing connections and transformations.

All the ILA participants expressed a connection, a kind of feeling that we are all similar, that we have way more in common than different. Obviously there are cultural differences; however, all cultures have a common starting point, planet earth. One participant realized while traveling “that even though different cultures do different things, the basic principles of cultures are similar. The people and ideas are similar; they just have a different way of doing the same thing.” Another student said that people are basically the same everywhere you go, they just want a good life and they are good hearted. A student from the Central America trip gave a more concrete example. He noticed trash in many of the regions he traveled and he realized that U.S. culture creates the same exact trash; however, Americans are just better at moving it around and out of sight. The same student talked about cultural vices and how everywhere he traveled he saw that beer was a commonality worldwide.

On a deeper level, one student expressed that we live on an interwoven globe and we all want the same thing: to have meaningful work, to have food, a place to live and we all have dreams, goals, and aspirations. Another student echoed the same thought when she said that “people just want a good life.” From a religious standpoint, a student from the South East Asia ILA trip said that most religions are based on the same principle, citing the Christians’ 10 commandments, Buddhists’ precept and the universal golden rule of “do unto others as you would like done unto you.” In conclusion he stated that some people may worship a few more gods but fundamentally world religions are not so different.

At the basic level one student noted that he found in common with the locals of Northern India a love for food, the mountains, and self pride. Even more so he was amazed at being able to have a conversation with a person who lives 8000 miles away. Speaking the same language is a major unifier; in fact several of the participants learned how to speak fluent Spanish, no doubt a major tool for greater cultural connections. One student who was an avid photographer said that, “As soon as you experience those other cultures, experience traveling with other people, experience seeing the world, you start to view the world through a similar lens.” However, as any photographer knows you must learn how to focus the lens. One student stated that an ILA study abroad experience often forces you to look for the similarities with people rather than focus on the difference. Perhaps this is one reason so many participants saw a deep connection.

“I can now see the big picture” exclaimed one student. Like putting a puzzle together, participants overwhelmingly claimed having a feeling of connectedness. They seemed to be able to see connections, that there is an interwoven web that connects everything and everyone. This profound idea of connectedness was reiterated over and over. One student explained that before the ILA trip she thought travel was self centered and individualistic, but now she understood that travel is about “creating a connection with the world.” She further stated that she now has a “deep concern, deep love, and profound respect for other people and our planet.” Another student made the analogy with Tibetan prayer flags, saying that we are all connected through our commonalities, just like prayer flags flying in the wind.

No doubt the ILA study abroad experience created a ripe environment for students to see connections. A feeling of happiness and joy overcame some of the participants.

One student made a connection though the cosmos. He remembered looking up and seeing Orion's belt and realizing that it was the exact same as back home. He said that was the moment that connected everything for him. That it is all the same, the same stars, the same sun, the same moon, the same planet, we are all connected. In essence the student realized that we live on a small planet and that if we all want to prosper we will need to find a way to collaborate and share ideas and resources for the betterment of all earth's inhabitants. Many students started to bring up sustainability issues during the individual interviews.

As stated earlier, sustainability is simply seeing connections, particularly through personal choices of lifestyle, resource use, and how we interact with the planet. Students started to think a lot more about sustainability issues. In particular one student found it a scary thing that other cultures may start to live like Americans. After making the connections between wealth, resources, and the sheer number of people on the planet, many students started to understand that indeed the world is on an unsustainable path. One student gave the example of India. He stated that if all Indians had cars like most Americans, we would simply see the biggest traffic jam in the world, not to mention the negative effects on the environment. We simply cannot have a billion Indians all driving in cars. Another student saw how the Masai in Kenya didn't need to manufacture fences, instead they grew special plants that acted as fences and it worked great. That simple encounter made her think more about sustainable development and what she could do personally to help out. As stated in the global perspective description, many participants said that Americans would need a mind shift to start living more sustainably; in other

words, Americans would need some kind of transformation. Several of the students talked about change and transformations during the interviews.

Change is often associated with becoming conscious about other people, the environment, problems in the world, and more importantly, how individuals are attached to these issues. The students talked about becoming more conscious, particularly as Americans. One student talked about the leadership role of the U.S. and what a huge impact we have on the world. In light of becoming conscious, many participants talked about how they had changed forever after experiencing the world. The things they saw while traveling really made them think about their own actions. On a personal level, one participant said that she learned that she is the only one that can make things happen in her life, so when she came home from the Jamaica trip she decided to start a compost pile. She said she started to feel like she could make a difference. Another student said that she now approached situations at home like she was traveling. In other words, she became empowered to make changes. For one student she said the ILA trip inspired her to do more volunteer work. The students appeared to be mimicking some of the aspects of sustainable travel. One student said he used to wear a different set of clothes each day. However, after the ILA trip in which you wear the same clothes day after day, he now wears the same set of clothes four days in a row. Why wash your clothes if you don't need to, it is just a waste of time and energy. These students had really gone through a transformation; they had actually changed their behavior.

Transformation is really about behavioral change. Once a person sees an alternate reality, they often choose a different path. For many of the participants, the alternate path meant living a simpler life or becoming free of personal stuff. Some started to walk more

or ride a bike. One student says he now drives less than 1200 miles a year because he bikes most places. He also applies his travel skills to find his way out of any situation. So instead of worrying about a problem, he just faces it like he would on an ILA trip. Others also talked about getting a bike and riding to and from work or school. The thought had never really entered their minds before. Without seeing others around the world biking and walking everywhere and without actually experiencing walking and taking public transportation, these students would probably still be riding in their cars to go five blocks down the road. One student talked about being happier because he didn't feel he needed extravagant things anymore. He realized if other people on the planet can do without the material absurdity of the U.S. then so could he. Perhaps the most profound change in the participants is the fact that they still travel. For most of these students, travel seemed like a distant dream, as if travel was for other people. Now the students feel more confident and travel has become a fundamental part of their lives. And as one student stated, it is hard for Americans to travel because they have no time or money. In order to make more time and save money for travel, the average American will need a fundamental shift in mindset. These students seem to have made this transformation even though students traditionally have less disposable income than people with a full time job.

All the participants had either already traveled or were making plans to travel at the time of interview. The participants would say, "We are now planning a trip somewhere" or that "I bought a plane ticket a few days ago and now I just want to get out of here." One student had already traveled to Europe, spent a summer surfing in Costa Rica, volunteered at a Bolivian wildlife sanctuary, and had a work visa for Australia. Another student traveled to South East Asia and Nepal for four months and then moved

from Grand Junction, Colorado to Portland, Oregon. One of the participants that had described herself as “not outgoing” had already been to Europe by herself and was heading to China only a few days after the interview. Clearly the ILA trips had inspired travel, all the participants had expressed that they felt they could travel and go anywhere, and it appears that they are indeed following their bliss.

The fact that the students are still traveling suggests a fundamental shift in behavior because it takes sacrifice to travel. You must save money, put aside time, and figure out what to do with all your stuff. While writing this dissertation, several students grabbed their backpacks and traveled across Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Nepal, Bolivia, Peru, Thailand, Indonesia, and Chile. These are just the students that participated in this study; indeed there are many more ILA alumni traveling at this moment. To my knowledge none of these participants won the lottery, so what allows them to travel so often? It is called a fundamental lifestyle change. Every American knows that if you want to travel for more than the golden two weeks, you must sacrifice something. The participants clearly gave up something. If the participants were still students, they simply stopped buying frivolous things and just bought what they needed. The end result was extra cash for traveling between the semesters. Others had graduated from College and chose careers that allowed them to travel or their job allowed them to travel. One participant is a teacher (Tim) that travels every summer; another is studying to be a teacher (Kim). And yet another is building a business plan to take people on international climbing expeditions to help teach people to explore the world.

All these participants shared something in common, they changed, they transformed from something they were to something entirely different. They all



experienced a different reality, became conscious and eventually chose a different path.

In essence they saw that we are all connected and, when you see this, anything is possible. If these kinds of changes can occur from a simple short-term backpacker study abroad, then perhaps changing the American mindset will not be that difficult after all.

Table 6**Interview Statements Related to the Connections and Transformations****Similarities**

Deep down we are a lot more similar than different. (Tim)

Pointed out during travel, the fact that we are so similar (Tim)

In many ways you see how interwoven we are and when we have an economic crisis in one place it effects the whole interwoven globe. They all want the same thing, they want to work, have food, have a place to live, and they have dreams, goals and aspirations. (Tim)

Things will be different on certain levels but on the fundamental levels we are all still the same. (Tim)

I realized that people are basically the same everywhere you go. People just want a good life, they are good hearted. (Alice)

A big thing I have learned from travel is that people are not really different but rather the same. (Jane)

We have the same trash; we can just move it around a lot easier. (Mike)

What I have learned from travel is that religions are pretty much based on the same principles. Christians have their ten commandments, the Buddhist have their precepts, all religions seem to have the golden rule of ‘do unto others as you would like done unto you.’ Religions are not so different; some may worship a few more gods. (Mike)

When you travel you realize that even though different cultures do different things, the basic principles of cultures are similar. The people and ideas are similar; they just have a different way of doing the same thing. (Mike)

You are forced to look for the similarities with people rather than focusing on the differences. (Mike)

Every culture has their vises. (Mike)

You can see that they are the same as us; they just live a different lifestyle. They don't know how we live and we don't know how they live. We think it is crazy that they are living like that. Even so we are still so the same. (Richard)

The simple fact that we spoke the same language, you have so much in common. You have no idea of who they are or how they grew up or how they live but you still have so much in common and you can find things to talk about. (Richard)

Some of the things I found in common were the love of food, the love for the mountains, and love of having self pride. (Richard)

As soon as you experience those other cultures, experience traveling with other people, experience seeing the world, you start to view the world though a similar lens. (Richard)

Connectedness

I had this feeling about being connected with the world that I had never felt before. (Tim)

As we travel around I feel more connected, more natural, as if it is an extension. (Tim)

So there is this connection whether I live here or am talking to someone 8000 miles away, you realize that you have these similarities, you just feel more connected. (Tim)

We are all interwoven and connected together even though we don't do things the same way or where the same clothes. (Tim)

After all these trips I feel so much more connected (Tim)

I saw this kind of connecting thread throughout the human race, that most people are good hearted. (Alice)

I can now see the big picture. (Jane)

It makes me feel more connected with other people. (Jane)

Travel teaches you how to really communicate even without words. That gives you a really nice connection with people. (Jane)

It made me feel good about people, about the connections we can have with people. (Jane)

Before travel was all about the individual but now I understand it is about creating a connection with the world. I now have a deep concern, deep love and profound respect for other people and our planet. (Jane)

This event showed me a lot of things; it showed me how small the world is and how everything is connected. (Richard)

The people were so different but I still felt a connection with them. (Richard)

I thought about my parents and I remember looking up, while I was in Delhi, and seeing Orion's belt and it was the exact same as back home. That moment made the connection for me, that it's the same. It's the same sun that we see, the same moon that we see, the same stars that we see, that moment connected everything for me. It gave me a way to connect with other people. (Richard)

You could feel the energy in the forest. It was crazy, almost scary. You could just feel it, I felt connected to people back home. (Richard)

There becomes a commonality in how you see the world. You begin to see that we are all connected, just like all the prayer flags. (Richard)

I felt so content and happy and connected with everybody. (Jane)

Even though the religions are different with their different gods and operational standpoints, there are these fundamental core pieces that are the same. (Tim)

We are the same in the sense that we are all human beings but also in other areas like religion. (Richard)

Sustainability Issues

Traveling with the OP and with you I have started thinking a lot more about sustainability issues. (Jane)

Having an emphasis on sustainable travel made me look at these issues in a different way and different light. (Jane)

It taught me about sustainable development. (Kim)

A natural fence, which is all you need. (Kim)

The scary thing is that these other cultures may start to live like us. (Mike)

In India it is not an option for people to have cars because they don't have the money for them and they can't have a billion people with cars. The traffic jams would just be too

big. If all those people had cars, the environment would get worse, road rage would get worse, congestion would get worse and then they will turn into us. (Richard)

I feel like I have grown a lot from this trip, like being more sustainable. (Ken)

Transformations

Because of these trips I think I am more conscious about other people, the environment and problems going on in the world. (Simon)

I am more conscious about the U.S. being a good leader and that what we do as a country has a huge impact on the rest of the world. (Simon)

I have always been conscious about the environment but I learned so many small ways I could make a difference and help out. (Jane)

Sometimes you see things like this when you are traveling and it really makes you think. (Richard)

I now approach situations at home like I am traveling; I am so much more relaxed. (Alice)

I just remember being completely changed from this point on. (Simon)

Now I really value uniqueness and individual cultures (Simon)

These trips have changed me forever. (Simon)

I seem to take more interest with people back at home now. I want to know more about people. (Jane)

I now bring a lot of these ideas back to my own life, for example I started my own compost. I am learning that I can make a difference. I learned that I am the only one that can make things happen in my life. (Jane)

It actually inspired me to do more volunteer work (Kim)

On the trips I intentionally tried new things every day and now back home I do the same thing. I have expanded my interest and what I am capable of doing. (Janice)

That is another thing I would always do and the typical American, I would bring a set of clothes for every single day I was gone. I can't believe I used to do that. Now I wear the same set of clothes for four days, even in Grand Junction. (Ken)

I thought I could do anything after this point. (Simon)

Behavioral Change



After these trips I found myself walking and riding my bike a lot more (Simon)

My life is so simple now, so less stressful. (Simon)

I have more freedom from my stuff. (Simon)

Before if I had to go to the store, I would hop in my car but now I just hop on my bike. (Jane)

I can say that I put less than 1200 miles a year on my car because I bike most places. (Mike)

Now when I need to get somewhere I just get there. If there are any problems along the way, it doesn't really matter because I can always find my way out of any situation. (Mike)

These past few months have really clicked for me. I have a bike now, I had a bike before but I didn't really use it that much, but now I just bought a bike from a friend for twenty bucks and I just ride it everywhere. (Ken)

I guess the main thing I am trying to say is that they are happy and don't need extravagant things and that is kind of how I am now. (Ken)

Future Travel

We are now planning a trip somewhere (Alice)

I now don't think it is impossible to travel, I really think I can travel anywhere now. (Alice)

After the Baja sea kayaking trip, the next time for me to leave the country was on this East Africa trip, which the Baja trip inspired me to do. (Simon)

I am planning another trip to South East Asia and I leave in a week for four months. (Simon)

I plan to travel to England and France this summer and maybe get down to Spain. (Jane)

The Africa trip just inspired me to explore the world and since Africa, the following summer I went to Costa Rica and surfed. (Kim)

My next plans are to go to Australia this summer with the boyfriend, we got working visas. (Kim)

Now I consider myself a master backpacker traveler (Simon)

My work is sending me to China on Sunday. (Sandy)

I went to Europe in 2005 by myself. (Sandy)

I was climbing really hard, probably four days a week before I bought this plane ticket. I bought this plane ticket a few days ago and now I don't really care if I climb another foot, I just want to get out of here. (Ken)

Career Choice

I am getting my masters in teaching and I got this idea from traveling. (Kim)

Now I am working at a pretty cool job. I am not sure if this is the field I want to be in forever. It is centered around greenhouse gas quantification and verification. (Sandy)

I now want to start taking people on climbing trips to Southeast Asia and Spain and Argentina. I would do it the same way as the ILA trips, to climb and to teach people to explore the world. (Richard)

The following table gathers all the major themes and sub-themes into a single location for easier reference.

Table 7. Major Themes and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Sub-themes
Backpacker Style Travel	Adventure/Explore
	No Itinerary
	Serendipity
	Fun
	Style of Travel
	Affordable/Accessible
	Cultural Contact
	Local Economy
	Food
	Hostels/Accommodations
	Transportation
	In Contrast to Mass Tourism/Resorts
	Length of Time
Global Perspective and Awareness	Different Perspective
	Customs
	Kids/Child Labor
	Religion/History

	Globalization
	Trash
	Materialism
	Happiness
	Community Oriented
	Food
	Transportation
	Traditional Tourism versus Sustainable Tourism
	U.S. Reflection
Personal Growth	New Experiences
	Personal Reflection
	Stress
	Adapting
	Overcoming Fear
	Learning
	Confidence
	Empowering
	Group Dynamics
	Solos
	Being in the moment
	Giving back to communities
Connections and Transformations	Similarities
	Connectedness
	Sustainability Issues
	Transformations
	Behavioral Change
	Future Travel
	Career Choice

A Fundamental Description of International Learning Adventures

The final step in this phenomenological study is the fundamental description which describes the essence of the International Learning Adventures as perceived by the 10 participants in the study. The description includes the collective view of all the participants with the idea that some details may not hold true for every participant. However, after sifting through the details of every interview, writing individual

descriptions, and creating general themes, this researcher is confident that the fundamental description paints an accurate picture of the ILA phenomenon.

The International Learning Adventure experience as described by the 10 participants was eye opening, reflective, transformative, and empowering. The experience allowed the students to dive into the culture in a unique fashion, utilizing backpacker style travel. The ILA trip allowed for adventure and exploration, a chance to get away from the classroom environment and really get out into the world. The flexible itinerary allowed for even further exploration. No longer confined by a syllabus or strict schedule, the students could actually let chance encounters and serendipitous moments determine their future. The experience rewarded and encouraged students to choose alternative routes for learning rather than sticking to the well trodden paths. No longer did the students hide their inner desires to have fun and explore; instead they fully engaged this side of learning. Indeed the ILA trips allowed the students to *play*, quite possibly Mother Nature's greatest tool for adapting and finding meaning in an experience (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008).

The participants were intrinsically motivated to learn. There were no prearranged tasks or assigned books, instead the student sought out opportunities for learning based on their own creativity and learning styles. Some students jumped into every experience with two feet while others observed. In the end every student had the opportunity to advance his or her learning at their own pace, without risk of failure and without the extrinsic motivation of getting evaluated for effectiveness. Indeed failure was viewed as a learning moment. If a student messed up on bargaining or communicating effectively,

they learned from this incident and moved on. Within an environment that doesn't penalize for failure, students were able to take their personal explorations to new heights.

The ILA trips allowed for deep cultural contact within the authentic environment of their host country. Students did not simply exchange the walls of their homes and classrooms for another set of walls in a foreign country. Instead the students traveled and interacted with the local cultures on public transportation, markets, restaurants, small hostels, volunteering in schools, and simply meeting and mingling with people on the streets and in communities.

The ILA trips were affordable and contrasted with traditional mass tourism and mass study abroad in terms of accommodations, transportation, food and length of time. On the ILA trips students camped out under the stars, slept in hostels and cheap bungalows, and in general spent very little time inside a hotel room or home stay bedroom. While private mini-vans and taxis were arranged from time to time, most travel was conducted within the public transportation sector, ranging from ferry rides and trains to buses and camels. A lot of time was spent walking around and in this fashion students tended to lose five to ten pounds due to all the exercise. The length of time was typically four to seven weeks. This is considered short-term for study abroad trips but is longer than a typical two week vacation. The length of time allowed for in depth cultural understanding and personal growth.

The students developed a different perspective towards viewing the world and other cultures. They viewed the world through a different lens, often opening their minds to new ideas and cultural realities. The participants experienced different customs, new ways of communicating, and alternatives to the Western view point. The students

interacted with children, often seeing them in a different light. Religion and history sparked interest for the students, with many students exploring temples, churches, monasteries, and talking to locals about their beliefs, dreams, and aspirations. The students experienced history by exploring ancient ruins, observing timeless rituals, and performing traditional practices. In contrast to the ancient traditions and history, the students saw firsthand the positive and negative effects of modern globalization. They saw endless piles of trash and unsanitary living conditions but also experienced cultures that derived happiness from relationships with family and friends instead of material wealth. The students witnessed cities and communities designed for people rather than cars.

In light of their new global perspectives, the participants became critical of their own culture, particularly areas regarding materialism, transportation, and tourism. They often saw Americans as consumeristic, lazy, and in general disconnected from the realities of the world. The students also saw the U.S. in a leadership role and thought Americans should see more of the world before they push their ideas and agendas on other cultures. In essence, the American bubble should be popped to let the realities of the world emerge. The students had learned a lot from the other cultures they had visited and thought the U.S. could learn a lot from other nations, especially when it came to happiness, resource use, and transportation issues.

On the ILA trips participants enjoyed a host of new experiences, ranging from using public transportation to scuba diving. For many, the ILA trip was the first time going overseas and indeed, the trip allowed for many more first time experiences. These new encounters led to personal reflections, particularly on lifestyle choice and

assumptions. The participants experienced stress on multiple levels, from culture shock to physical exhaustion. However, the students learned how to deal with these stresses by adapting to their new surroundings. The students overcame many of their personal fears, such as being afraid of heights or water, but most importantly they tackled fears of the unknown. When the students no longer let fear stand in their way, learning came naturally and students became empowered and confident in their actions.

Group dynamics played a big role during the ILA trips. The students adapted not only to their new surrounding but also to members of their group. They learned patience, understanding, and how to give and take. The student had to be respectful with time and focus on building relationships. The group provided security and a platform for trying out new things and pushing personal boundaries. The group also allowed for collaborative volunteer opportunities and group discounts on several activities and outings. The participants comfort zone expanded tremendously, especially when it came to understanding other people's points of view. In general the group dynamics were positive, giving the students a sense of friendship and camaraderie. In contrast to groups, several students went on solo journeys, ranging from buying local products in a market and wandering around the jungle to staying with a Masai family. These solo journeys led to intense personal growth, particularly building confidence to travel solo on future trips.

Through intense cultural immersion, personal reflection, and a new found perspective on the world, many students found themselves "being in the moment." They learned to focus on the 'now' instead of the future or past, often resulting in powerful moments of peace and understanding. The students experienced a heightened sense of awareness that allowed them to really soak in their surroundings and local culture. During

these times of intense reflection and understanding, student realized that many similarities existed between seemingly different cultures. They became aware of their tendency to focus on differences and as a result found new levels of understanding and compassion towards their new cultures and environments.

The realization of so many similarities led to a feeling of interconnectedness. The students felt more connected to other people and realized that religions, customs, and ideologies stem from a common source of wanting to fulfill personal dreams, goals, and aspirations. There was an overwhelming sense that cultures around the world may do things in a different manner but fundamentally people are basically the same. Students started to view the world's problems such as resource depletion, pollution, and poverty as collective problems and not just problems for developing countries. Even deeper, the students realized that their individual actions could negatively or positively influence cultures half way around the globe.

Finally the participants surveyed became personally transformed by the ILA experience. Many came away from the ILA trip with a new found respect for other cultures and environmental issues around the world. They started to think about sustainability issues and made personal behavioral changes to create a more peaceful and meaningful world. Many adjusted their lives to walk more, live simpler, to do with less material stuff, to compost and recycle; and to tackle their fears as they had done on the ILA trip. All the students surveyed changed their lifestyle to accommodate more backpacker style travel. Every participant was either planning a trip in the near future or had recently returned from a trip abroad. A few had even made career choices that would allow the time to continue exploring their world. In short the ILA short-term study abroad

experiences were broadening, leading to a sense of interconnectedness and giving the participants the confidence to live as if the planet and cultures around the world mattered.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This phenomenological study describes the Mesa State College Outdoor Program's International Learning Adventures and its significance for participants between 2003 and 2009. This researcher hypothesized that through the ILA study abroad programs, personal transformation, meaningful connections, global awareness and self-awareness of one's own actions in creating a more sustainable planet would occur as a result of immersion in another culture, environment and practicing sustainable backpacking travel. The research clearly upholds the basic hypothesis.

To get an even better picture of the ILA experience, I must address 2 important issues in the research. The ILA experience for the surveyed participants represents a small focus group, 10 participants out of a possible 88. While choosing interview participants I wanted to include possible discontent with the ILA experience, as such, I chose some participants based on the fact that I had not seen or had contact with the participants in over a year or who appeared to have more difficult experiences and a harder time adapting to the foreign environment and group dynamics. It is possible for students participating on ILA trips to feel less empowered, disconnected and closed minded. In fact, as the ILA trip facilitator, I did witness this kind of behavior or mindset in several students while participating in the ILA trip. A few of these students are included in this research group such as Sandy, Alice, and Richard. I was pleased to find out during the interview, that all these students had been transformed by the ILA experience as the results demonstrate.

One more qualification must be addressed. I am a very passionate and confident leader with over 22 years in adventure leadership and 16 years as an international guide.

As such I am highly qualified to lead these ILA trips and exude confidence in foreign environments. My ability to access risk, make judgment calls, influence the group and guide the overall flow of the trip are extremely important to the dynamics of the trip and the overall learning outcomes. Skilled leadership and a keen understanding of experiential learning are paramount for the success of an ILA trip. In the hands of a less skillful leader, the results of the research could be entirely different.

After describing the experiences and realizing the potential positive outcomes of ILA trips, I felt compelled to promote this kind of education. I feel that other colleges and universities with outdoor programs and study abroad programs could utilize backpacker style travel, especially if they understand its significance and advantages. As more colleges and universities strive to create unique international education experiences that promote cultural, environmental, and economic awareness, I hope to add one more unique program to the field of international study. Considering that all the surveyed participants grew from the ILA experience, describing moments of empowerment, cultural understanding, and a sense of interconnectedness with other cultures and the world, the implications of this study could shed light on a new and transformative short-term study abroad experience. The following conclusions give a brief overview of the ILA experience and its significance for short term study abroad and transformational and sustainability education.

Conclusions

The following conclusions about the ILA short-term study abroad programs were compiled from the study:

1. The backpacker framework influenced every aspect of the study abroad trip and laid the foundation for the overall experience. All the participants talked extensively about backpacker style travel, citing it as a major component that led to a sense of exploration, fun, and transformative learning.
2. The ILA participants gained a global perspective. They realized that not everyone lives like Americans and that there are many ways of doing the same thing and indeed the American way is not the only way. The students became critical of their own way of life, especially in areas such as transportation, food, sustainable development, mass tourism, happiness, individualism, community, and materialism.
3. All the ILA participants experienced significant personal growth. Some expressed a greater ability to go with the flow and others felt more confident all around. Many of the ILA participants experienced new horizons that led to personal reflection, stressful situations, overcoming fear, and finally adapting to their new surroundings. The participants learned new skills, built confidence, and became empowered by the experience. Group dynamics played a huge role that allowed for much of the personal growth to emerge. Solo experiences played a vital part for many of the participants, ranging from home stays to simply bargaining in markets. The ideas of giving back to communities and being in the moment were also significant discoveries for the participants.
4. Seeing “connections” was an overwhelming theme established from all of the interviews. The travelers shared a feeling of being connected with the world and other cultures, a feeling not previously felt. As the students were immersed deeper

into the cultures and new experiences, they realized that most culture are more common than different. The knowledge and understanding of these similarities led to a feeling of interconnectedness. The feeling of interconnectedness showed a fundamental mind shift or transformation in the participants.

The four conclusions together demonstrate the powerful, broadening, and life changing experiences for each participant. As Sachs (2008) has stated, there is “no substitute for meeting and engaging with people across cultures, religions and regions to realize that we are all in this together” and indeed students should not miss out on life-changing and life-shaping opportunities learned from traveling abroad (p. 40). The ILA participants now understand the significance of ‘all in this together’ through their newfound realization that we are all interconnected and share a common future. Now the goal must be to connect more students with these kinds of broadening experiences. The next section will discuss the practical significance of the research and how an ILA trip can meet the demands for sustainable and transformative education though backpacker style short-term study abroad opportunities.

Significance to the Field of Study Abroad and Sustainable Education

The research on ILA trips demonstrates a unique link between sustainable and transformational education and backpacker study abroad. There is an opportunity to replicate and model the outcomes of an ILA trip by simply offering more backpacker style trips. In fact, demand for short-term study abroad programs is increasing each year. The Institute of International Education (2009) stated that the primary growth area for degree-granting institutions will be short-term programs sponsored by the institution itself. The Institute of International Education (IIE), with over 1,000 member institutions

including universities, two and four year colleges, national and international exchange agencies and educational not-for-profit organizations around the world, is the world leader in the exchange of people and ideas. The IIE report stated that administrators would like to see more faculty-led short-term study abroad trips; that there is a greater need to integrate study abroad trips to the institution; a need to develop less expensive programs; and a need to create short-term trips that allow students unable to participate on a semester/year long international experience.

The ILA short-term study abroad experience addresses all these needs and does so in a sustainable and transformative manner. An ILA trip is essentially a faculty- led trip and is conducted within the institution. There is no third party organizing the trip. The ILA trips are accredited and allow for international studies credit as well as kinesiology credits. In addition the trips can be non-credit, simply allowing students to participate without receiving credit, thus permitting even more students to participate. The ILA trips are integrally connected to the college in that the students receive credits that directly transfer to their degrees and the college's popular outdoor program helps to integrate experiential international learning with the college experience. The nature of ILA trips are based on backpacker style travel in developing countries, essentially making the trips less expensive by traveling in less expensive countries and staying in economical accommodations and eating locally and taking inexpensive public transportation. Several participants in the study mentioned that ILA trips were incredibly affordable and accessible. Mesa State College has many time demanding programs that do not allow students to travel abroad during the semester such as the nursing program. In addition athletes often cannot participate during the semester. The ILA trips occur in between the



semesters which allows for more participation. Indeed several ILA participants have been nurses and college athletes. The ILA trips appear to address the needs for institutions to expand their study abroad programs. To further expound on the uniqueness of ILA trips and the use of backpacker style trips in short-term study abroad, the following sections will contrast ILA trips with traditional study abroad programs including short-term programs. I feel that one of the core contributions of this research will be aimed at providing new opportunities of international education, particularly in the form of study abroad. Study abroad program directors and students who want to study about will be one of the primary audiences for this study. Since the current mode of study abroad is in stark contrast to backpacker style travel, I wanted to compare the similarities and differences between traditional study abroad programs and the backpacker style study abroad.

The results of the study suggest that short-term sustainable backpacker style travel played a huge role in creating cultural understanding, personal growth, and a sense of interconnectedness that ultimately led to some kind of transformation of behavior and mindset. Since the results suggest that backpacker style travel played a significant role in the experience, this researcher concludes that more short-term study abroad programs should offer these types of trips. The following helps to build on the idea of backpacker style travel by contrasting it with traditional study abroad programs. The contrasts are not meant to single out traditional study abroad programs as bad or unsustainable. Quite the opposite, the researcher wishes to build on traditional study abroad programs by offering different programs that could reach a different audience. ILA style study abroad is not for every kind of student, neither is the traditional study abroad experience. For the purpose of this comparison, the traditional study abroad experience is defined as any program that

takes place in a foreign country; incorporates a home stay or permanent housing; and where the learning takes place in a classroom or university setting. The assumption is made that most short-term study abroad programs follow the same frame work. Although many short-term programs such as volunteer programs spend a significant amount of time outside the classroom, in general the students still remain in the same geographic location and do not include extensive overland backpacker style travel.

The ILA study abroad experience was imbedded in the idea of sustainable backpacker style travel, in which students adhere to sustainable travel techniques such as buying local, utilizing public transportation, reusing water bottles, hiring local guides, giving back to communities, and respecting local customs. The ILA trips starts with some general goals but are without a set itinerary and instead students explore and learn in an informal manner. Students engage with learning in a different way. Instead of sticking to a set schedule, the students are free to explore collaboratively or solo. Instead of learning from a book or in a classroom, the students learn through their senses, such as touching the water of the Ganges, smelling the incense burning in the temples, seeing the ancient sights of Machu Picchu and Tikal, tasting the fish tacos in Baja, and hearing the chanting of Buddhist monks in Nepal. This type of learning is extremely experiential in nature and students are intrinsically motivated to learn about and explore their new found environment. As such the entire study abroad experience is exploratory in nature, ever changing and breaks the mold of traditional classroom teaching and traditional study abroad programs.

Backpacker style travel can be intense and often stressful: students often do not know where they will get their next meal or sleep for the night and are constantly making

decisions on the go. In other words, the students are constantly adapting. In contrast, a typical study abroad program involves a home stay in which the student returns to the host family every night and returns to the common setting of the university during the day. A backpacker may stay in a specific place for several days but this is by choice, not so in a traditional program. Backpacker style travel is very stressful at first but becomes very natural toward the end of the trip. In fact all the participants in ILA felt that backpacker style travel is the only way to travel. Indeed the participants actually learned how to travel instead of being led by the hand.

In traditional programs, students usually venture out on organized field trips with a guide, private transportation, meals and entrance fees included. In other words, everything is taken care of. On a backpacker trip every day is an excursion that is conducted collaboratively or solo. The logistics are left to the group or individual, not a tour guide. Although the ILA trip has a facilitator or faculty member, he or she makes decisions with the group and helps to guide the students with logistics, rather than prearrange every event. A student can choose to take part in a particular excursion or choose their own. In this way the student is the primary motivator for learning, not some professor saying they must attend a field trip.

A traditional program may involve group dynamics but typically the students live with individual host families and do not interact with a group on a constant basis. On an ILA trip, students have the added stresses of being part of a group and making decisions together. The participants talked about forming powerful relationships and learning to respect different points of view within the group. While relationships no doubt form

during traditional study abroad experiences, the added stresses from group backpacker travel suggest that the bonds on an ILA trip are stronger between the participants.

The transient nature of backpacker style travel starkly contrasts with traditional study abroad programs where students typically stay in one location. On the daily basis ILA students must find a place to stay, find food, utilize public transportation and constantly adapt to new surroundings. In other words students must constantly recreate their reality and comforts. They must find shelter, food, water and companionship in unfamiliar surroundings. This kind of adaptation is extremely difficult at first but as students realize they can do without many of the comforts they thought were so necessary, they start to adapt faster and more easily to everyday challenges. Students on traditional study abroad programs most likely will need to adapt one time geographically to a host family and often have food, water, and transportation provided.

In light of the differences between a backpacker style trip and a traditional program, the researcher believes each style of experience presents both different and similar learning outcomes and probably each style draws in a particular type of student. An ILA trip will most likely attract someone that wants a change on a profound level, where learning, living, and everyday life are totally different and constantly changing. While a traditional study abroad program may attract someone who simply wants to study in a foreign country and in a traditional manner with a classroom, professor, syllabus, and comfortable home stay. Both styles of study abroad programs can lead to tremendous growth and cultural awareness. Indeed the literature suggests that traditional long-term study abroad programs do create more empathetic and global minded citizens (Brown, & Smith, 2005; Comp, 2000; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Gmelch, 1997;

Laubscher, 1994; Lee & Moscardo, 2005; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995; Mbaiwa, 2004; Orndorff, 1998; Sell, 1983). This study backs up these previous findings and adds to the literature that short-term backpacker style study abroad programs do give their participants a broader global view and different perspective.

Another major contrast between traditional and ILA study abroad trips is the idea of empowerment and confidence building. The literature review did not reveal information about the empowering and confidence building on traditional study abroad trips that occurred on the ILA trips. Although students on a traditional study abroad experience must adapt and overcome cultural differences, the literature does not emphasize this as empowering or confidence building. This study concluded that the experience for the ten participants was very empowering and instilled confidence, especially in the areas of overcoming personal fears and being ready to travel solo. This aspect is significant because it points to more personal transformations than just becoming more globally aware and culturally sensitive. The research in this study suggests that the backpacker style of travel may be more empowering and confidence building than a traditional study abroad experience. The implications are significant when considering the personal transformations that will be needed to live in a more sustainable manner. Indeed the students on the ILA trips did transform from their experience and changed personal behavior back home. Some participants even made career and lifestyle choices that would enable them to live in a more sustainable manner and allow them to continue exploring the world through sustainable backpacker travel.

Ultimately I tried to create a program that could foster sustainable education through sustainable backpacker style study abroad. My definition of sustainable

education is creating an environment for students to see the interconnections between the environment, society and the economy and to actively maintain each of these components. In light of this definition, ILA trips definitely create this kind of environment and actively involve students in sustaining the vital connections that link us to the planet and its inhabitants.

Overcoming Obstacles with Sustainable and Transformative ILA Trips

If colleges and universities want to promote sustainable education through study abroad programs, they will need to address issues for making study abroad more accessible. This research suggests that ILA trips could help make study abroad more affordable and attainable and reach a different audience. Still the fact remains that no other programs exist like the ILA program, at least not to the knowledge of this researcher. The following implications are based on the research and the need for more short-term study abroad programs. The IIE (2009) report suggested a need for more faculty-led trips. Some of the difficulties associated with faculty led trips are desire, funding, time, and workload. Many faculty want to spend time with family and fulfill other obligations; in addition they must publish in order to make tenure. Normally facilitating study abroad trips is not considered for tenure. Funding is always an issue especially with the high cost of air fare and supporting operational and administrative costs. Faculty often have too much of a work load to concentrate on study abroad programs. Considering all the obstacles, it a wonder that short-term institutional study abroad programs even exist, but somehow they do and faculty do find the time to lead short-term study abroad trips. However, they do not utilize the time honored backpacker style of travel.

The factors that are unique to ILA trips are the backpacker style, group dynamics, unplanned nature, and lack of an itinerary. These are huge issues that may pose a daunting obstacle to any potential faculty member who wishes to lead an ILA style trip. Americans don't typically travel abroad with backpacks but rather with groups and on tours. A lot of fear exists in the states with overseas travel and parents don't necessarily want their children gallivanting around a strange and foreign country unless they are sure about their children's safety. To address these issues, this researcher has concluded that faculty need to be trained in backpacker style trips, risk management issues pertaining to backpacker travel must be addressed, and that outdoor, adventure, and experiential educators are probably best suited to lead ILA style trips.

Some of the participants in the study said that very few Americans were encountered on the trip. In fact the researcher can confidently say that in 18 years of foreign travel in over 60 countries only a handful of Americans were encountered compared to the vast numbers of Israelis, Europeans, and Australians. The simple fact remains that few Americans travel backpacker style. Americans in general love a packaged tour and many study abroad experiences model this all inclusive style. Travel organizations such as EF Tours have provided packaged study abroad tours for years. With EF Tours a faculty member need only enroll a certain amount of students and then EF Tours will take care of everything else, including the logistics of food, transportation, and lodging. In the opinion of the researcher, a lot of vital learning is lost with this type of trip, especially if the students are to learn how to travel on their own. To help foster more ILA style trips, a comprehensive backpacker style training program and manual could help facilitate an ILA style trip. To get started, on each ILA trip, a potential faculty

member could assist the trip facilitator or faculty ILA leader and learn the basics of traveling backpacker style with a group. Then when the new faculty member is confident, which according to the ILA participants is a vital part of their experience, the newly trained faculty member could lead their own ILA style trip along with another potential faculty member. In this way, the potential leader could get hands on training in a real life situation.

Risk management issues must be addressed particularly when administrators require itineraries, plans, learning outcomes, and emergency contingency plans. These issues are all addressed in the Mesa State College ILA program. In many ways leading an ILA trip is no different than leading any backpacking trip. For this reason, perhaps outdoor, adventure, and experiential educators could more easily adapt to an ILA style study abroad. In fact many College Outdoor Programs around the United States conduct climbing expeditions domestically and abroad. Many correlations can be made with climbing a mountain and leading an ILA trip. First of all they are both adventuresome by nature and most likely will draw in a particular type of student. A trip may include prescreening the participants to determine if they are ready for an ILA style study abroad. In the researcher's experience, the first orientation about the trip will usually weed out the students who find the idea of backpacker style travel unappealing.

Just like planning a mountain climbing expedition, training and mental preparation are paramount, as well as facilitating positive group dynamics. Typically ILA participants will meet 2-4 hours a week for 8 weeks. During this time the trip facilitator will explain the ins and outs of backpacker style travel, will help the students build an itinerary with the idea it will most likely be broken, and assign study topics to help the

group learn more about the region of travel. Group building exercises are often important. A simple hike to a local peak can build camaraderie and also let the trip facilitator see what kind of shape the participants are in. The physical nature of climbing a mountain is similar to an ILA trip in that students spend a great deal of time walking and trekking around.

On an ILA trip many unplanned events will occur, but this is all part of the adventure. Similarly, while climbing a mountain, for example, snow storms can trap climbers in their tents for days. The same kinds of events can happen on an ILA trip. While it may not be a snow storm, unplanned events could include not enough space on the bus, delayed train departures, lack of cheap accommodations, and no safe drinking water. Any good expedition leader will help his members be prepared. One area is making sure the members of the team have the right kind of gear. You would not want to be stuck on the side of a mountain without a tent, sleeping bag, and sleeping pad. Much of the same can be said for an ILA trip. All ILA participants receive a comprehensive checklist and are required to bring everything on the list. Some items include sleeping bag, tarp, water bottles, water purification tablets, head lamps, and rain gear. Of course all this gear is stored in a backpack or large duffle with wheels. The ILA participants receive training on how to pack the gear and where to put important documents such as passports and money. With the correct gear, ILA participants are prepared to sleep practically anywhere and indeed the students usually prefer saving money by sleeping on a rooftop or floor rather than paying more to sleep in a room or bed. Students carry water bottles and water purification tablets to ensure they always have clean drinking water and reduce waste associated with plastic water bottles.



A mountain climb also requires expertise in wilderness medicine. ILA participants and for sure the ILA trip facilitator will be trained in wilderness and travel medicine. Just as a wilderness setting is considered an hour or more from definitive care, an urban setting in a developing country is much the same. For this reason a few members of the group should have basic wilderness medicine first aid. All travelers are required to carry medical and emergency evacuation insurance to allow the trip facilitator to get a student to prudent emergency medical care. All students fill out a medical emergency form with contact and insurance information. These are a few areas in risk management where training and knowledge could help facilitate more ILA style study abroad experiences.

Finally, to address the issue of study abroad expenses, trip facilitator should work with their college's financial aid directors. In the researcher's case, financial aid is usually available for students as long as they are taking it as a credit or non-credit course. In fact several ILA students have used AmeriCorps grants to travel. Also, financially, students have a great deal more control over their spending. Indeed many of the ILA participants learned how to budget their money while traveling. Each ILA trip will vary in cost but usually the greatest expense is air fare. The rest of the travel expenses related to transportation, food, and lodging are usually less than 40 dollars per day. So students simply budget 40 dollars a day and plan accordingly. In many cases, students end up spending less while traveling abroad than at home in the States. Once the student spends enough time in country, they adapt to the local foods which are usually very cheap and learn to live on less money. These are very powerful lessons on how to live frugally and

save your money for more important things like scuba diving in the Caribbean or trekking to Everest Base Camp, both achieved while on ILA trips with only \$40 a day.

Recommendations for Future Study

Considering the young nature of backpacker style short-term study abroad trips, much more research could be conducted on ILA style trips. This researcher would love to have someone else conduct the same kind of study or different study on ILA trips to compare data and descriptions. Research could also be conducted on a different set of ILA students to compare the result. As more backpacker style trips emerge, similar studies could compare similarities and differences between different organizations.

Of particular interest are the personal transformations that occur on ILA trips. Although the data in this research suggest that long-term changes did occur with the participants, a much deeper analysis could be conducted on the matter of transformation. For example, what kinds of transformations were most common, what were the specific catalysts and how long do changes last? More research could be conducted on the individual solo experiences that students had while on the ILA trips.

An in depth study could focus on the kinds of participants who choose an ILA trip over a traditional study abroad experience. The information gathered could help pinpoint potential ILA participants for marketing. The research could also reveal what kind of learner is best suited for an ILA style trip. Finally, if enough students participate in both an ILA style trip and traditional study abroad trip, what are the differences as perceived by the participants.

The nature of a phenomenological study is to shed light on a particular experience as perceived by the participants. Considering ILA trips had never been studied, this

research provided a foundation for future inquiries. Now that a fundamental description exists, new research can build on this initial study of a potentially powerful and transformative style of study abroad.

Summary

This phenomenological study increased the knowledge about short-term backpacker style study abroad. The 10 participants provided insightful photo elicitation interviews that help describe the ILA phenomenon. The interviews were taped and analyzed for common themes to develop individual descriptions for each participant. The final descriptions and transcribed interviews were validated by each participant for accuracy.

The final description of the ILA short-term study abroad experience supported previous literature on study abroad, sustainable education, transformation, and building cultural and environmental understanding. The findings of the research suggest that backpacker style travel played a major role in the overall ILA experience and that each participant gained a global perspective, became empowered, and gained confidence. ILA trips could also provide an avenue for meeting the demands of more short-term study abroad trips.

Perhaps the greatest finding was that each participant felt an overwhelming interconnectedness to other cultures and the environment. With this newfound knowledge and understanding, the participants came away from the experience transformed. As Orr (2004) has explained, more of the disconnected status quo style of education will only lead us down an unsustainable path. We need a transformation in mind and thought to see the vital connections that link all things on this planet. Perhaps ILA study abroad trips

can be a small puzzle piece in the large picture of creating a more integral, stable, and beautiful world for all.

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Appendix A. Letter of Invitation to Potential Interviewees

Date
Name
Address
City/State/Zip

Dear:

As a past participant in a Mesa State College Outdoor Program's International Adventure, I am inviting you to participate in a study to develop a description of the experience and its meaning to the participants. For the purpose of this investigation I have named the international adventures as International Learning Adventures (ILA). I am presently a doctoral student at Prescott College and the Director of the Mesa State College Outdoor Program. I have directed the ILA program for seven years, leading ten international adventures to South America, East Africa, South-East Asia, India, Nepal, China, Central America, Mexico and Jamaica with approximately 110 fellow travelers. My research for my doctoral dissertation is going to study the experiences of sustainable/adventure/backpacker style study abroad and travel for college students, faculty and college graduates, specifically looking at the ILA program, in hopes of developing a picture of the experience from the perspective of the participants and gather some meaning and insights the experience had for them.

Ten past ILA members will be selected to participate as co-researcher and serve as the focus group for this project. As a participant you will be asked to move back in space and time to describe your particular international adventure as you experienced it. You need not make any analysis of the adventure, simply let the meaning and themes emerge naturally.

The participants who take part will be asked to give an individual free-flowing interview, lasting no more than two hours in length. The interview will take place in an agreed upon location and time convenient to you. Before the interview you will be asked to choose ten photos of the adventure. These photos will be used to help you focus and remember events about the experience during the interview.

If you are willing to participate in this research group, please email cthatche@mesastate.edu or thatcherchad@yahoo.com by April 20, 2009. I hope you share the same excitement as I about this study of the ILA program and the valuable information it can give to the Mesa State College Outdoor Program and to the field of sustainable, transformational and international education.

If you have any questions, feel free to call my cell number at (970-201-2866) or at work (970-248-1670) or email. Thank for your kind consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Chad Thatcher

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participant in a Research Project

International Learning Adventures

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

Purpose of the research study

The main objective of this research is to assess the transformational learning of students actively participating in an international learning experience, particularly a Mesa State College Outdoor Program international sustainable learning adventure.

Possible participants

You are being invited because of your past participation in a Mesa State College Outdoor Program International Learning Adventures (ILA) program.

Number of people participating in this study?

Approximately 6-12 persons will be asked to participate in this study.

Procedures

If you participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
You will take part in an individual interview regarding your insights into your active learning experience while on an ILA expedition. You will participate in a photo elicitation interview regarding your insights into your active learning experience while on an ILA expedition. This will involve selecting ten photos from your experience and bringing these to the interview for discussion. I will scan some of your photos to keep with the transcribed data. Any photos that include people will be used only for descriptive purposes, and will not be published in the dissertation. Only people who live too far away to participate and who do not have photos will be excluded from the research process.

Length of study

I anticipate that the interview will take up to two hours of your time. In addition, I may call you back for clarification over the phone as I transcribe the interviews. The phone callbacks would only take a few minutes. Data collection and transcription is expected to be complete by December 2009.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions we ask will be stressful or upsetting. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish. You are free to stop participating at any time. There is also a risk to your anonymity. I will ask you to

select a code name that I will use for your transcripts and tapes. I will keep a list of code names with your contact information in a locked file cabinet and destroy that list once any callbacks are complete.

Potential Benefits to subject and/or society

You will not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, although the data obtained may provide insight into the benefits of international and transformative learning.

Associated Costs

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Payment for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation.

Video or audio recordings during the study

I will make a video or audio recording of the personal interview and later transcribe the interview only if you check the box below:

I give my permission for audio/video recordings to be made of me during my interview for this research project.

Video and audio recording will be kept for one year. Typed transcripts will be kept for three years.

Photos used during the study and interview

I will make copies of the photos used during the interview process. These photos will be included in the final dissertation as part of the appendix. I will only include the photos in the final dissertation if you check the box below:

I give my permission to use my photos for the final draft of the dissertation.

Confidentiality

The only persons who will know that you participated in this study will be the research team members: Chad A. Thatcher

Your records will be confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study. It is possible that representatives of the Federal Government, Mesa State College or some other group that supports the research study will want to come to Mesa State College to review your information. If that occurs, a copy of the information may be provided to them but your name will be removed before the information is released.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time. Your refusing to participate will have no effect on your status in the program.

You can discontinue your participation with no effect on your status in the program. Also any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

Study Contacts

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling the Principal Investigator Chad Thatcher at (970-201-2866) or email at ethatche@mesastate.edu. You may also send a letter to Mesa State College Outdoor Program, 1100 North Ave, Grand Junction, CO, 81501. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can't reach the researcher, or want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may call the Director of the Mesa State College Office of Sponsored Programs; Cindy Lueb, at 970-248-1424

Your Signature

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

Rights of Research Subjects

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Mesa State College, 1100 North Ave., Grand Junction, CO 81501-3122; Telephone: (970) 248-1424.

Signature of Research Subject or Legal Representative

I understand my participation is voluntary. I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Printed Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

Date

Printed Name of Witness

Signature of Witness

Date

Appendix C. Letter accompanying individual interview transcript, description and fundamental description.

Date
Name
Address
City/State/Zip
Dear:

Thank you for supporting my study of the International Learning Adventures experience. I value your willingness to participate in the interview which we recorded on tape. Please see an attached copy of your individual transcribed interview with comments related to key areas or themes that emerged from the interview. I used the coded themes to write an individual description of what I believe are the essential aspects of your learning experience. Also attached is a fundamental description of the International Learning Adventure experience derived from analyzing all the individual interviews in the study. Basic themes surfaced from the interviews to form the fundamental description.

Please read your individual description and verify its accuracy. In addition please read the fundamental description and ask yourself if your ILA experience matches the fundamental description. The fundamental description is a broad description and I realize that your experience will have different aspects. However, I do feel that the fundamental description should encompass the essence of your ILA experience and its significance for you. Please read and reflect upon these two descriptions. If you think I have missed or stressed an inaccurate idea, please let me know.

Thank you so much for your assistance in this study. Without you, this research could have never taken place. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Chad Thatcher

Appendix D: Simon's Interview

I am starting with a picture from the Baja trip because it was my first time out of the country and my first time sea kayaking. I just remember the whole road trip and crossing

the border for the first time. I was just really excited to be out of the country. I just remember being completely changed from this point on. I look at myself paddling out in the middle of the ocean and I think that I could do anything. I think that is why I chose this picture first, that I thought I could do anything after this point.



I went on this trip because it sounded awesome to get out of the country for the first time. The trip was incredibly

affordable. I didn't know anyone and I looked forward to meeting all the people in the group. Before this trip, travel just seemed so distant and hard to accomplish. I think I had that American mentality that it cost a lot of money first of all, second of all that travel was a totally different type of thing than what we did, normally very scheduled with an itinerary seeing things and not really meeting the people. This was my idea of how Americans traveled. This is what I thought of as travel.

This trip really opened my eyes and showed me that travel does not have to be itinerary oriented at all and that everything will work out. I just had a blast doing that, learning to travel without an itinerary for the first time. I also never thought about traveling for more than a couple of weeks. On this trip we were gone for almost a whole month. Now I can't imagine traveling for less than a month.



When I look at this picture I remember how beautiful the Baja was and how we were seeing it without exploiting anything, in a way that was not harming the environment. It introduced me to a whole new way of viewing the world. I defiantly did not think about the environment being associated with travel because travel to me did not have anything to do with the environment. Travel was just about seeing sights, you know, maybe going out to good restaurants, staying in good hotels. It meant fun. It didn't matter if it was going to exploit anybody or hurt anybody.

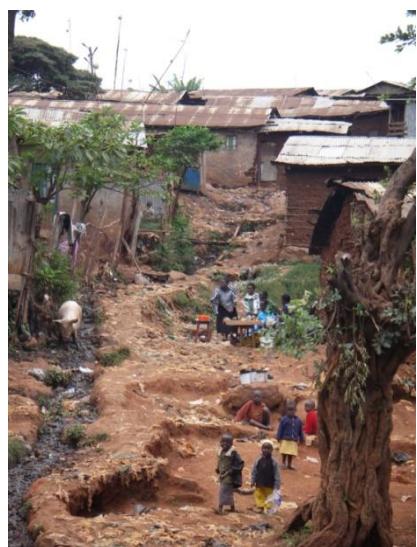
My next picture is actually an orphanage in Nairobi. After the Baja sea kayaking trip, the next time for me to leave the country was on this East Africa trip, which the

Baja trip inspired me to do. And I decided I was going to go a week early and fly in there by myself at night just to challenge myself and see if this is possible. So I got in there late at night and didn't know what I was doing. I was the only white person at the airport. I think I flew in there at eleven o'clock and everyone had left. They all had rides and I did not. I was so nervous that I forgot my pin number so I couldn't get my money out of the ATM. I had no money. So I went back inside the airport to spend the night in the airport because I did not want to deal with all the touts outside the airport. It was late at night and I just did not want to deal with it. So I try to go back in. There were big military guys with AK-47's slung around their neck, hanging around this tiny office and desk with a fan. So I went into the office and tried to talk with them. They wanted to know what I was going to do for them, wanting me to bribe them. So then I thought it was better to go back outside and take my chances with that. Then this guy I met on the airplane who I had talked to a little bit. He owned and operated an orphanage in Nairobi. I found this out earlier and I saw him walk by the door of the security office. I grabbed him and told him my situation with no place to go. He was pretty surprised by that. So he said I could go with him to his orphanage to stay the night. So I ended up going to the orphanage in this picture. I remember getting to the orphanage and the bed was disgusting because he really put me in an orphan's bed. So I put down my sleeping bag. You can see it in the picture. And I basically spent the night there. I slept fine. I remember there were some mosquitoes. I wasn't too worried about that. Then the next morning I woke up and helped feed some orphans their formula in the morning. And got some breakfast, hung out there all day and then he helped me get a room at the YMCA after that.

It is hard to explain what that experience meant to me. I will never forget that experience. You know before that I had never thought of that as being the most important thing on a trip. Before if I were going to Africa, the most important thing would be seeing giraffes and rhinos and seeing animals and going on safaris and things like that. But now I look back at the experience like this and remember these as being the most important things, like meeting that guy on the plane and the adventure of being in that situation and staying at the orphanage. And actually helping out at an orphanage without even knowing I was going to do that. It was so serendipitous; it is so hard to explain how important serendipity is while you are traveling. It is just so hard to explain, I don't know how to get at it.

I remember waiting at the hostel in Nairobi and feeling very lonely. It was kind of low point in the travels for me but I think low points are important in travel because it give you a different perspective. When you first arrive in these developing countries, a part of you feels bad because we live such an extravagant lifestyle compared to their humble existence. You feel guilty, but you can't just sit around feeling guilty, you have to act. There are constant low points in your everyday life but you have to learn how to act. I have learned to adapt much easier to situations.

The third picture is Kaibera, the second largest slum in Africa behind Johannesburg. This is the slum of Nairobi and this was pretty striking. We got a little tour from this guy named Cartoon and he showed us around this place and it was pretty eye opening. In this picture it is kind of an uphill slope winding up into some ram shackled houses made out



of mud, sticks and tin roofs with eight little kids running around with a pig that is bigger than the kids. They are all walking down this little mucky trash filled stream. It is filthy but at the same time it is not ugly. It has an aesthetic value to it. It is pretty in some ways and bad in some other ways. The little kids actually are loving life. You get to actually talk with the people that live there.

This experience made me think about my own lifestyle. This may sound kind of corny but if I ever think that I am having a bad day I can always look back on an experience like this and feel there is a lot of stuff I should be doing to help the world and not be focusing on petty things that we go through every day. I do not have to worry about getting clean drinking water or

where I am going to go to the bathroom. I lot of people do not want to see this because it does bring out those realities but I think that it is important.

The fourth picture is a fish market in Zanzibar, Tanzania. This is just kind of a fun one. We had just climbed Kilimanjaro at this point. We had just gotten off the mountain. We get to Zanzibar and go out at night and right along the beach there was this huge, huge fish market where they bring in fresh catch every night and they have these cook outs. They cook it right there, season it. There are skewers of shark, yellow tail, snapper, lobster, shrimp, potatoes, plantain bananas, crab, squid, octopus, and then dumplings. There are just a couple of camp lanterns lighting it all up. It looks like a thousand dollar buffet.

I think food is an important part of travel and it is an important part of our life. So obviously we are going to be eating many different foods where we are traveling to and a lot of people worry about that. This fish market probably does not have the same standards as we do in the United States. They probably do not have a health board or health inspections. I know this fish market never gets inspected. That never bothered me too much. You get a little sick now and then but it is really just increasing your immune system. I had a really lousy bus ride after getting sick one time between Kampala and Nairobi. I will never forget that experience.

I remember thinking about where all this food is coming from and how this community had relied on eating seafood for a long time. In this place there still seems to be enough fish in the ocean because they are still eating a bountiful selection. So they are not over fishing. I liked thinking about how all this fish was provided one hundred percent by locals and that the locals are able to make a living from fishing in the ocean right outside their house. They are going out there with their own boats; individuals are making money from fishing. I remember being in Jamaica and seeing a resorts where they had a buffet but instead of the money going to local fishermen, that money went out of the country to the base of the operations for the resort. I never thought about that kind of stuff before



these ILA trips. Now I actually think about where my food comes from, how it effects the environment and the local people. I think a lot of it has to do with meeting the local people because you meet them and you realize that people are living here and when you put a resort here you are shoving them out and I never thought about that before.

I think Zanzibar is a great example of how sustainable travel should be or how it can be. Every hotel there and

every little beach place is not a resort style at all. They are all tiny little bungalows, small operations, which are probably the same size of operations that have been going on there for hundreds of years. There is no rapid change going on there.

I also remember thinking that these people from the Zanzibar fish market had very inventive ways of using things. A lot of things we want to do, especially in the United States have standards for everything. For example all our houses are so standardized but if you go to developing countries they have no problem using a shipping container as a house. All over the world shipping containers are used because they are great and they work. They are fantastic for so many purposes but we would never think about that and if we did think about it, it would be looked down upon because it is a shipping container that is not being used in a proper way. It is really amazing how creative you can use things especially when the environment promotes this type of thinking. When everyone else is being creative, you are more inclined to think more creatively.

One thing I have learned from travel is that people do things differently all around the world. I really enjoy it. I like the variety of people doing different things all around the world. The world would be very boring if we all just did the same thing. The world has created so many cultures over time and while things are changing and globalization is happening, it is also really interesting to look at and to keep individual cultures going and keep them alive because it is so interesting and fun to explore. It is important to

understand their history and cultural identity. A huge part of travel for me is having fun exploring the different cultures around the world.



I think the ILA style of travel is fun because you get to see everyone else having fun also. It is not just the people staying at a resort that are having fun but the people that actually live there are having fun as well. You're having fun learning from that culture, not impressing on that culture but just taking in that culture and what they

have developed. Their culture has been around just as long as your culture or longer. We should take in and learn from that culture. If you do this with an open mind it just a lot of fun.

Now I really value uniqueness and individual cultures and I look at the globalization of cultures as a bad thing because it may do things like replace the fish market with a McDonald's. If you think about what McDonalds has done. The term McDonaldization is the opposite of unique. When you look at this kind of fish market, you really start thinking about the value uniqueness. Even in America we have this uniqueness. We don't use the metric system which in a way is kind of cool, it is unique.

The fifth picture is of downtown Kampala, the capital of Uganda. We are looking at a sea of matatus for as far as you can see in the background. There are a few little signs and there are hundreds of people walking around with well over a hundred and fifty matatus. This is essentially a bus station or the matatu station with all these mini buses made to fit twenty. However, in America they would fit probably ten people. They like to pack those mini buses tightly.

So the way this works is you walk in and ask someone. They will be more than happy, not because they want to make money, sometimes they may make a small amount, but a lot of times they just want to help out. They are just hanging out in the day and if you ask them a question and they have the time to help you then why not. And so you go in there and say I want to go here, say where ever you're going. And they will be like, "Oh just follow me." You walk for five or ten minutes, dodging and weaving out of these cars and people and you just get on the next matatu and you are gone in less than twenty minutes. Most of the time, depending on where you are going.

Transportation is a big part of these trips. You are on a matatu with local people that are actually from there. A big reason I went on this trip in the first place was to meet the locals, public transportation gave the perfect opportunity to do this. If you spent all your time by yourself in a taxi or in prearranged transportation, you never really get to see how the locals get around. For example I learned that first you are crammed into a matatu. You sometimes put your luggage up top or on your lap. That is why you want to pack really light. Usually you will end up talking to someone while on the bus and they will tell you what is going on in their life and you can tell them why you are traveling. Usually they are pretty excited about it. You get a three hour conversation with a local out of a dollar bus ride.

I was surprised at how easy it was to get around with English in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania but Rwanda was harder. I had no idea how influential the English language was before this trip. It is nice to have English everywhere but at the same time, going back to that uniqueness. Going to Rwanda, where they speak French and Kinyarwanda. It is really exciting because they have this unique thing that you are not used to. Which is fun but it will also wear you down, but you will get over that and start learning the language and culture more.

On a long bus ride between Kampala and Nairobi, I experienced a low point on my trip. On a twelve hour bus ride with chunks of asphalt as their highway. The bus was bouncing all around, it was a big bus and I was way in the back, crammed in between two people with six people in the back row of the bus which is a lot. Bottles are rattling, dust is flying in the windows, I could barely breath and on top of all this, I was sick and couldn't control my bowels. I was leaking pretty badly and I forgot my Imodium under the bus and the bus will not stop for you to use the bathroom. So this was a pretty low point on the trip. I remember getting the bottles and throwing them out the window and I kept thinking why am I putting myself through this. However, this is how all these local people get around, to the average American this kind of bus ride would be completely insane, torture almost. This experience gave a totally different perspective on something so simple as transportation.

It was amazing what I could tolerate and now I look back on that bus ride and I think it was really funny and not that hard to do. In America we always have to have a personal vehicle, just to get around town. In America it is usually one person in a whole car versus how people get around in Uganda. It is such a huge difference. It was amazing to travel all over Africa without a car and on top of it; you get that experience with the locals. You can usually get a three hour conversation with a local on a four hour bus ride.

Great public transportation systems are all over the world. If you look at the environmental impact of transportation, especially in the U.S. it is a huge part of our carbon footprint. It is a huge problem and it should be fixed. These transportation systems in Africa look crazy but they are not and they work really well.



This picture is in Jamaica at Boston Bay, I like it because this is our group cleaning up a local beach. Nobody asked us to; we just decided to start cleaning up the trash at a beach where we had been surfing at for a few days. We had a little bit of involvement from the locals, at the very least the locals saw us cleaning up their beach without any external incentive. There was a lot of trash on that beach and we cleaned it all. One of my favorite parts about this was that there was no

program. Lots of times you will hear about people doing something similar as this beach cleanup but they do so much planning to do it. I learned that you don't need to plan it all out; you can just go do it anytime. You don't get any certificate or anything like that when you are done, you just do it to help out. Then perhaps the locals will start to pick up trash from time to time.

I was amazed at all the trash. Here in the United States we don't see trash as much. Part of it is infrastructure; Jamaica doesn't have the trash collection like the U.S. In Jamaica it is not as easy to throw things away. So you end up throwing things into the ocean to get

rid of the trash. I realized that we have such a disposable mentality. Everything is made to be disposed. You just don't want to keep things because they have no value. There are disposable pop bottles, disposable everything. Nothing is made to stay around. If you go to a supermarket in Jamaica, everything is packaged because they import so much food. It is all packaged in plastic. There is just so much packaging and no facilities to take care of it.



This picture was taken at the base of Blue Mountain at a family owned hostel. It was owned by a couple and this is one of their kids. This little guy was intrigued by us. He has probably been around a lot of foreigners and the kids just love hearing about our stories and they love telling their stories to us. They see our group going to climb a mountain for the fun of it, which is something they probably would not have done if they hadn't had other travelers coming through to show the locals that climbing a mountain can be fun. This little boy was just super excited about climbing the mountain.

Hostels are great places to stay. They are usually family owned, usually really small, even the big ones are small operations, especially when comparing a hostel to a resort. This one had 15 beds and nothing more. The owners cook for you.

It is a great form of income for the locals, completely sustainable. The money stays right with the locals, not even a fraction of the money leaves the country, it stays right there. Versus a resort where roughly ninety percent of the revenues leave the country.



This picture was taken in Buenos Aires. It is kind of a transportation thing again. This is the oldest running subway in the world. I wanted to show this picture because it is in motion. That is big part of travel. I love being in motion on planes, subways and every form of transportation. One day we used a taxi, bus, and boat. Sometime you can use twenty modes of transportation in a day and you still walk a lot. It is just fun using all the different forms of

transportation.

I always lose around ten pounds every time I leave the U.S. just from walking. I don't ever work out when I travel, I just lose weight from walking around. In the U.S. we have gyms and all these things to lose weight but in other places no one goes to a gym to lose weight. Instead their daily lives, the way they live keeps them fit and healthy. I think this

idea of just walking is something we have lost in the U.S. I would argue that we shouldn't have to go to gyms but rather our everyday lives should be enough to keep us fit. After these trips I found myself walking and riding my bike a lot more. Now I don't think twice about walking or riding my bike to the supermarket or school. Whereas before I don't think I ever rode my bike to school before I participated on these ISLA trips. I always just drove because it never seemed like a bike able distance. It is over four miles from my house to school and it just didn't seem realistic and now I just think why wouldn't I bike that simple four miles. It adds on five minutes to my day.

Another thing I realizes is that all these people without cars just live really close to everything they need. Their communities are designed a lot differently than in the U.S., they are for people and not cars. Our U.S. design is for cars and it just isn't environmentally sustainable. It may have seemed like a good idea at one point but now it just doesn't make sense anymore, even though it is unique and different. Our drive the car mentality has huge consequences when it comes to the environment. Our communities are not designed for walking. We do not have supermarket close by or schools. Everything you need is not designed to be within walking distance, it is designed so that you have big shopping areas that are spread out away from the residential areas. It is almost necessary to have a car. I still will argue that you don't need a car but in our current U.S. mind set it seems like you do. Even within a huge city like Santiago, Chile or Buenos Aires, Argentina, within a few blocks area you can walk to everything you need for everyday living, including bus stations if you do need to go outside your local neighborhood.

Even with our group it is so easy to travel by local transportation. Usually you can just walk and if you can't walk you just jump on a bus, subway or train. In the U.S. we just don't have a good transportation system because everyone has their own personal cars. I like this subway shot because it shows you that even though it is old it is not bad. It is still operating just fine. Some people may think this subway car is outdated and maybe unsafe but I think sometimes we are a little ridiculous with public safety issues. We never seems to mind when someone gets in a car accident. The idea of safety and the word 'liability' really irritate me. We are not taught to be self reliant. In the U.S. we have so many regulations and laws put in place. The U.S. system is designed for people that do not think at all, so they can go through their daily life and not get hurt. This system teaches us not to think. We have this brain and we just don't use it. In this picture you could easily stick your hand out the window and have your hand cut off by an oncoming subway. In Argentina this would be considered your own fault for doing something so stupid but in the U.S. we would sue the subway owners. Now I am more self aware and really annoyed by stupid safety regulations.

When I travel I feel free from all our regulations and nitpicky laws. I do think we need some laws but when you nitpick every little thing, you end up hacking away at our freedoms. In Argentina, they just don't regulate every little thing. Before these ILA trips I used to think all laws were good things but now I just think it makes us lazy and less responsible for our actions. I have learned from these travels to be more self reliant. Instead of blaming everyone else I now look at myself and act responsibly.

This is a picture of my friend and some girls from Uruguay rollerblading in a local park. We met these two girls on a boat ride and the next thing you know we are all rollerblading in this park in downtown Montevideo.



I chose this picture because during the trip I really didn't get along with this guy, he seemed like an asshole. But since the trip we have hung out more and become friend. I think because we had this trip together, this shared experience we ended up being friends afterwards. The common experience gave us a unique bond to become friends. Otherwise I don't think I would have ever been his friend.

The group dynamics is a good thing. We are a group of Americans interacting with all these strange situations. A lot of the time it can be hard, especially for certain people, just like in any group. In the beginning the group goes through a honeymoon phase but then everyone starts to disagree. So you have to learn how to get along with your group. That is the biggest thing. Getting along within a group is so important. I can't think of a single job now that doesn't involve a group. You have to learn to work with people. After an ILA experience it is so much easier to handle groups back home. I have a much larger comfort zone now with groups and can better understand where people are coming from. These trips teach you to see through other people's eyes.

Because of these trips I think I am more conscious about other people, the environment and problems going on in the world. I think for so many people they see the U.S. as such a large place but now I just see it as another country within many. I am more conscious about the U.S. being a good leader and that what we do as a country has huge impact on the rest of the world. Before these trips I just had no idea about other people, now I have a different connection.

This is a picture of a sunset at Nido de Condores on Cerro Aconcagua in Argentina.

Cerro means 'mountain or hill' in Spanish. I now speak Spanish rather well. It all goes back to that first trip to Mexico. I remember going out to the local restaurants in La Paz



and all the little towns in the Baja. That trip really kicked off my passion for travel and to learn another language. The sea kayaking was amazing as well but I really remember mingling with the locals and experiencing another culture. I remember going to a local taco stand and just watching people in the group walk up and order a taco. I had a little Spanish but not much and I remember thinking wow, you can really go and order a taco. You can do that. It seems so crazy but

just a little experience like that can really open your eyes.

My world has expanded hugely from these trips. Now travel is my passion in life. I just love to go out and meet other people. I am planning another trip to South East Asia and I leave in a week for four months. I have no plans, I will travel the same style as all the ISLA trips. I spent around \$1100 for the plane ticket and will spend another thousand while I am over there. I used to think travel was so expensive now I just see it is a choice. I tell people. I think a payment plan for a car seems crazy now because that would be money I could use for a trip. Obviously I have to save money, but I don't eat out anymore, I buy my clothes at Goodwill. Travel has taught me to let go of material items. I realize now that I just don't need many things. I used to go to the mall and spend money on new clothes and stuff. Now I just don't have any desire to buy things I don't need. Now I feel bad about spending money. Now, not spending a lot money has become part of my life style because of travel. On these trips I am constantly thinking about my budget and how much I am spending and now back at home I do the same thing.

When we are backpacking around, you have everything on your back. When I went to Africa I realized I had way too much. I had things I never touched. It was just stuff. When it came down to it, if you really need something, you will make due or you will find what you need. Just pack the bare necessities, a couple shirts, some shorts and that is about all. Now I consider myself a master backpacker traveler. It will only take me two hours to pack for four months. I will have a twenty pound pack and that will be all I need for four months. I realized you do not need much to live and now I bring those realizations to my everyday life. My life is so simple now, so less stressful. If you don't have so many things to take care of, it is just less stressful. I have more freedom from my stuff. For example if you have a nice car, you are constantly taking care of that car. A lot of people invest their money in TV's and cars which I think is ridiculous. When it comes down to it, those cars can be taken away, the TV can be taken away but these travel experiences can never be taken away. I will have these ISLA experiences for the rest of my life.

This is sunset on Aconcagua at 17,000 feet. I took this from the inside of my tent because it was so cold. This an outdoor aspect of travel which is a little different than the cities and being around people but still an intricate part of the ISLA travel experience. This is the ultimate backpacker experience with an 80 pound back. Still everything you have in your backpack is a necessity. We were climbing to the top of Aconcagua at almost 23,000 feet, the tallest peak in the Americas. I made it to the top and felt really accomplished.

These trips have changed me forever. I used to be interested in money and material things, now none of these things have meaning for me anymore. Now I want to focus on sustainable travel and how to connect people with these kinds of experiences that I have had. I think it is so important for people to open their eyes to the realities outside of America.

Appendix E: Jane's Interview



This picture is not super spectacular but I do have a clear memory of the event because we were about to take our first steps toward Aconcagua. I am starting with this picture because I remember feeling the weight of my backpack and thinking I am really going to do this, climb this huge mountain. I was in disbelief and awe that we were all there, that we had decided to go and climb the highest mountain in South America.

We spent a lot of time preparing for

this trip and many more hours getting to this point. We brought a lot of the gear to climb the mountain with us but we had to get fuel, food and permits before we could start the climb. We prepared as best we could. There was a lot of preparation. We just prepared for whatever came at us. Sometimes things work out and sometimes they don't. The

important thing to remember is that it always works out.



I took this picture while I was relaxing in a tent at 16,200 feet at camp Canada. It is after the big base camp. I felt so accomplished to have made it this far. This was our second trip to camp Canada and we were waiting till the morning to head up. I just remember looking outside my tent and being amazed at my surroundings. It was just incredible, one of the most amazing feelings I have ever had. That is why I wanted to start with this photo. I loved the Jamaica trip but this trip really humbled me. I have never interacted with the earth so much and been so in touch with it. We really just had the very basic needs for survival and this was very new for me.

Travel does this for you, it allows you to just focus on the things you really need. It gives you a sharp mind, an open mind and a fresh perspective. You have your own set of beliefs but you need to be willing to expand them. Now all I do is save my money to travel. I work really hard, buy a plane ticket, travel overseas and come back and do it again. Now there is nothing I love more than traveling. It is just amazing. It is incredible what travel does for the human mind. I am a firm believer in the mind body connection. Travel is one of the things I feel I have done the most that nurtures my body and mind, initiating growth and development in myself.

Traveling has helped me make that awkward transition to adulthood and how it feels to be independent. Not only are you meeting your basic needs and budgeting on these ISLA

trips but you are doing it in a foreign place, always adapting. I now see independence as something different than just a career and having a good salary but rather my mind now feels free. Travel makes me feel free. I feel like I am allowed to be who ever I want to be. I get to dictate that and make my own decision that are good for myself and for the group I am traveling with. Seeing the world is so priceless, there is nothing that matches it. I feel more spiritually free when traveling because I am constantly learning new things. Travel also gives me the perspective of how free I really am when I get home. Travel has put a balance into my life. Real freedom is about balance. Travel has given me a nice perspective. I can now see the big picture. I don't worry so much about the day to day stuff. It is the big picture that counts. I now have a very spiritual view on life. Travel puts you in contact with other cultures and the earth on a very basic level.

A big thing I have learned from travel is that people are not really different but rather the same. It makes me feel more connected with other people. We are all just trying to do the best we can. I remember this one time in Jamaica seeing this guy dancing in the street. So my friend and I joined him and everyone around could just feel our energy. I felt so connected to everyone, everyone was so happy. I felt like I was expressing myself, not through words but non-verbally. Travel teaches you how to really communicate even without words. That gives you a really nice connection with people. Dancing is a common connection that is so universal.



This is another shot of Aconcagua. I was just in disbelief of my surrounding in the mountains. All I could see were mountains. We were just in it, a part of it, living it and loving it. This at 19,200 feet at Cholera at sunset and we are getting ready to climb to the summit the next morning. It was so cold, frigid. I am just in awe. I could not believe I was standing there at 19,200 feet. It was just such an accomplishment for everyone individually and as a group.

We really did a great job of teamwork. I think this picture actually does the mountain justice. I remember thinking I would not get a shot that did this place justice. This is what we saw every day.

On a basic level traveling with groups, you get to know what kind of person you are because you learn a lot about yourself. Then you learn how to read other people and try and meld your needs with the groups. This is an important part of travel if you are going to be with people. This is how it is in life as well. I learned about myself that I am almost always happy. I really don't think that things bother me that much when I travel. I feel like I am the most flexible while traveling. I think I am able to adapt while I am traveling. My mind becomes so open when I travel, I am able to take things in and adapt. The good

traveler doesn't make judgments, they just compare. They need to figure out where they fit in within their new culture.

The one thing that always sticks after my travels is the music. After Jamaica, I just love reggae music. Whenever I hear reggae music, I can feel, visualize, smell Jamaica in an instant. At home I look at things a little differently now. At home I feel a lot more relaxed now. I feel like travel has enhanced all my relationships. I think anyone that does these kinds will have a similar feeling. I think these trips are so important. On a scale from one to ten, I think the importance of traveling like we do in the OP is a twelve. Travel is so freeing, it is good for your mind, body, soul and a way to look and know yourself as a whole person and to know other people as whole people. You get to know the whole picture, not just what you grew up with but what life is really like for other people. I still have a lot more to learn and I want to learn more. I think everyone should be able to have this kind of opening and freeing experience.



This picture is from the summit of Aconcagua at 22,841 feet, the highest peak in South America. I woke that morning knowing it was going to be one of the biggest days of my life and knew it was going to be physically hard but even more mentally demanding. I knew I would not be comfortable that day, I would be cold, tired and sore. It went so quickly, 12 to 14 hours of hard work. Not so bad. To many people this kind of time may seem like a lot but I have learned from travel not to focus so much

about how long something will take but rather be in the moment. I think that is why it went by rather quickly for me, I did not focus on the past or future, only the moment. That is what I have learned about time though traveling is just to enjoy the moment. I think so many people get caught up in the small stuff and they forget about the moment. Travel has a way to bring you back to the moment. When I travel I feel like all my senses are heightened, I can hear better, see better, smell better and taste better. This heightened awareness helps you get a better perspective on the moment. You can really sense it and feel like you are right there.

I feel like I am better able to do this at home. I notice how I am better able to focus on the moment doing little things like having a cup of coffee or really enjoying a nap. I also feel like I am really concentrating on being the best person I can be. I just want to be the best I can be. I think travel helps me be a better person and it will always be a part of my life.

I love this picture because we were just enjoying the beautiful weather, just doing that wonderful thing that you do when you travel, just wandering around and seeing the sights and finding whatever you find. Just looking around, having great conversations, and being carefree and happy. We had just gone to a pastry shop and everyone was so happy to be eating these pastries. It was something so simple and so easy to enjoy together. I felt so content and happy and connected with everybody. I got a lot of satisfaction and a great



inner smile to see everyone having a good time. That is why I picked this picture. Some of my favorite times of travel are the simple times. This is the time when you get to look and see. These are the times you can get a good feel of local life. You can see what the locals are wearing, how they get around, see what kind of resources are available, see the stores and restaurants, supermarkets. You can see how the local people meet their needs, what time of the day they do it and who they are

with. This is the time when you can use your heightened awareness to really soak in the culture. I find that I do the same thing now when I am home. I seem to take more interest with people back at home now. I want to know more about people. I genuinely want to know how other people are doing and what is going on in their lives. I like to constantly be observing.

One of the things I love about travel is that you have everything you need on your back and there are just a couple of things you need to figure out each day. Basically you have nowhere to go and all day to get there. I just love to be able to live a simple life like that for a little while. I feel like I can bring some simplicity back to my life. I feel like life needs to be a balance of simplicity and things not so simple. So often we focus on the harder things in life.



This picture is at Montego Bay, Jamaica at one of the local beaches. When I was in Jamaica I was very aware of kids. There were lots of kids around. I have never seen so many kids just hanging out, playing in the streets, and just being kids. These kids are ages 10 to 14 and they are all boys. This is one of those moments when we got to observe everyday life. We were able to see kids playing in the water, see locals on the beaches. There were no travelers or other tourist around, just us with the locals. We heard

that this beach was not a good place to hang out. I never really understood why people said that because it felt perfectly safe. In fact all of Jamaica felt safe; however, as a female traveler I did feel a little anxious at times. Sometimes I felt very different and that difference made me feel a little exposed. For example one night in Ochos Rios, we were at a club and I felt a little nervous but everything ended up just fine.

One thing I appreciate about ILA trips is the style of travel. We don't go to places so we can get a taste of our own life and mostly be with people that are like us. Our goal is to go

and see the culture and meet the people and if you are really going to do that, you need to be where the people are living and doing their everyday activities. The real locals are not at resorts. I felt like I was really able to experience Jamaica and I also felt like the locals were able to experience us, which is equally important. We were in a couple of places where we saw the cruise ships rolling in and out. These locals only see a tainted side of us. I was getting my hair braided one day and I could hear the locals interacting with the cruise ship people. I could hear the urgency of the tourist needing to rush around. They only had a few moments to interact and I don't think either the tourist or locals gets much out of these interactions.

A couple of times I went out with some of the locals to see what was going on. The time I got my head braided is a good example of mingling with the locals. I saw this guy with a shirt that had the name of a salon. He gave me directions to this tiny place. It was hard to find but I found it and it was this little barber shop. This lady owned it and she did a good job of keeping it up with what she had. I was able to hear her talk to her friends coming in and out. It took almost the whole afternoon to braid my hair and I would watch and listen to her talk to her friends and customers throughout the day. Of course they were speaking in Jamaican Patois, the local creole language, so I didn't understand what they were saying. It was interesting to see their daily interactions. Another time hanging out with some of the local surfers guys, I felt like I got a glimpse of the local's lives. That is what they did every day, just hang out at the beach and ride the waves. I got to see what they joked about, see what they did to relax, how they surfed and see how they interacted with the ocean. That was a very cool experience.



This is a local market in Port Antonio in Jamaica. I picked a local market scene because this is what people here did every day to get food and earn a living. I could see how these people were interacting within their own culture. We could check out prices and food quality and see what everyone had to eat every day. I was surprised that a lot of the Jamaican supermarkets did not have a lot of good food. We found out that they export a lot of their food to make money on it, forcing them to import cheaper and less nutritious

food from the US and other places. There was a lot of noodles and canned vegetables, canned foods, and the prices were no cheaper than in the US but their standard of living and salaries were way less. So that was eye opening. We learned from the locals like the one of our mini bus drivers that had eight kids and he worked at a resort where they had a huge international buffet. A lot of the good local food is bought up by the resorts and consume by American tourists. A lot of waste occurs because they left over food is simply dumped out and no food can go to the locals. They make way more food than they need and people just waste the food. It was a shock. I never really thought about how wasteful a buffet could be. Now I equate it to American consumerism and how much we

like to waste and over consume. I like the US but the buffet is a pretty accurate metaphor of the American lifestyle. Traveling with the OP and with you I have started thinking a lot more about sustainability issues. I have always been conscious about the environment but I learned so many small ways I could make a difference and help out. Having an emphasis on sustainable travel made me look at these issues in a different way and different light. I feel like I now bring a lot of these ideas back to my own life, for example I started my own compost. I am learning that I can make a difference. I learned that I am the only one that can make things happen in my life. I think a lot of people hold themselves back and don't think they can make things happen in their lives.

I think a lot more about transportation now. I really take notice how people get around. I am lucky that I live central so I can ride and walk around town for most my activities. Before if I had to go to the store, I would hop in my car but now I just hop on my bike. We walk so much when we travel and we see locals walking and riding their bikes so I think this is how everyone else around the world does it. People use public transportation, ride their bikes and walk a lot. Here our public transportation is not that good. In Jamaica we did a lot of walking and took mini buses where ever we wanted. We did not have to plan at all to get around. We just went to the local mini bus station and just went. No planning at all. The places we stayed were great as well. We had everything we needed. We always met great people, travelers from all over the world. We never had to plan that out either. There just wasn't a lot of planning on our whole trip. I love traveling without a plan because you have to learn to adapt. You have to look at your resources and critically think. It is not easier by any means but it is not harder either. The main resource when you travel backpacker style is yourself and the people you travel with which is awesome. I think the typical pre-planned and pre-packaged travel lessens the authentic experience of travel because one of the things about travel is that you find these things, the small things that get you from one point to the next. That is what traveling is about, finding wonderful things, and you do this when you don't have a plan you have to keep to. I was never this kind of traveler, I used to have everything planned out but now I have a lot

more confidence to just jump in and travel anywhere.



This is place we found outside of Ochos Rios while walking to Dunn's Rivers Falls. We were just walking down the road and heard some people having fun so went to see what was going on. This was just one of those traveling moments. What we found there was so delightful, it was shady, a refreshing waterfall, we were surrounded by Jamaican families enjoying each other and life. This picture represents the adventure of travel and discovery. Just being able to come across these amazing moments, this is what travel is all about. Adventure is about pushing your limits and striving for new experiences. I like how you always put in your emails about the ISLA trips that this is not a

vacation but an adventure. I think that is one of the most exciting parts of travel is the adventure and that I get to drive it, I get to facilitate where I go. A huge part of adventure is playing and having fun. It is so great to be able to go play. It is so important to be able to just explore and play. That is very important for quality of life for me.

It seemed to me that the quality of life for Jamaicans was pretty good, most of the people seemed happy and smiled a lot. The Jamaicans were respectful to each other and to us. I think when people are mostly happy they can treat others well. The Jamaicans were always smiling and listening to music. Like in Kingston on a Sunday afternoon there were thousands of people jumping off the piers, having a ton of fun. There were just so many people congregating to have fun and relax. I think when thousands of people want to be together and they seek that, I would say that is pretty happy.



I chose this picture because Boston Bay is so beautiful. I was really touched this day, I was walking around feeling so exhilarated and euphoric. The weather was perfect, the colors, the people, everything was so relaxed. This is the ocean where we went surfing, the surrounding is lush and green, the water is blue, and there are some clouds in the sky which gave the rays of the sun an incredible light. We could jump off this diving board as the waves rolled in. We found this place

just by wandering around after visiting the Blue Lagoon. We wanted to find a beach and this is what we found. Then we found some huts overlooking the beach, it was kind of magical how we found Great Huts. Great Huts was such a unique place to stay because, so different than the resorts that we saw along the coast. They were outside but still had

all the amenities of a restaurant, nice beds, and was comfortable and clean. It was very relaxed. There were local Jamaicans working there, they were not fake. We were able to go outside and eat at the jerk chicken stands and we could bring our food back to Great Huts where they had a communal area where we could all hang out and watch movies that had been filmed on Jamaica. We watched a lot of James Bond movies.



This is a picture I took in Trench Town at a Bob Marley heritage museum in Kingston. It was just fun to play with the kids. I saw these kids on the other side of this fence and stuck my hand through the hole and they all came running up to play. It was fun to just interact with these kids, very shortly but very

positively. When they were walking away, they were waving and had huge smiles and the same for me. It was a very quality interaction that really enhanced everyone involved. It made me feel good about people, about the connections we can have with people. We didn't say a single word; we just laughed and had fun through simple interactions.

I decided to go on this trip when I got the mass email about the Jamaica trip, the one you send to everyone at the school, I just decided to do it. I have always been interested in the Mesa State Outdoor Program, a place where I can find instruction, gear and get connected with people who like adventure. Everyone in the OP is just awesome. I had the time and couldn't wait to meet all the people I was going to travel with. I knew it would be backpacking style travel, although I had never backpack traveled before, I knew I wanted to do it.

Group dynamics was a big part of this trip. For the most part everything went great within the group. Sometimes when we got a little stressed the dynamics would go downhill a little. Some of the stress came from travel shock. I didn't really have a lot of shock but I sensed some shock in some of the people in the group. I am good at coping with stress. I usually listen to music and remove myself from any stressful situation and try and get a fresh perspective. I try and come up with fresh solutions and move on. I just give myself a little bit of space to think about the situation. Looking back at this trip I now think I am better at interacting within a group. I learned patients and tolerance. These two things are key plus being flexible. On a long trip we are forced to learn it. After these trips I feel more whole and feel more tolerant and accepting of other cultures. Travel is helping answer the question of what is my purpose in life. Travel has been very spiritual for me.

I plan to travel to England and France this summer and maybe get down to Spain. This will be my first backpacking style trip by myself. I would have never thought about going by myself and traveling if I had never done these ISLA trips first. These ISLA trips have prepared me to do it.

Finally I think travel is about bettering human interaction. Everything you learn on an ILA trip, should you choose to apply it; can be applied to every aspect of your life. I never thought before that travel could have such an impact. Coming from a very individualistic society, I always thought about what travel could do for me but now I think about what I can do for traveling. I always thought travel was simply about me exploring other cultures but now I feel it is my responsibility to be an ambassador for my culture and let other cultures interact with my culture. Before travel was all about the individual but now I understand it is about creating a connection with the world. I now have a deep concern, deep love and profound respect for other people and our planet.

Appendix F: Kim's Interview

At one point it the trip I broke off from the group and I went and visited and lived with the Masai, the Masai tribe. While I was there, the family I was living with took me to



church. I chose this photo because I am not religious and you realize that there is tons of Christian influence in Africa. It kind of rubs me the wrong way because you see all these churches, these missionaries and they come in and erect all these huge churches. It rubs me the wrong way because these Christians come in and they totally take away from traditional African beliefs, what these people have believed for hundreds and hundreds of years. They come over here and tell them they are wrong and they build all these churches and have the people conformed to western ideologies. So that is why I chose this photo because you see a lot of it, especially in the poor regions, especially out with the tribes and you just have to question it. Is that the right thing. Just because you believe it, should these people believe it too?

A big influence from the west is the style of clothing. You go out to the tribe and you think they are going to be in this elaborate jewelry and elaborate dress. When I got out there they were wearing jeans and Mickey Mouse shirts. I asked my local friend, he was my translator, if we were going out to the tribes. I wanted to see some Indian stuff. The truth is it wasn't like that and they actually only dress like that to attract the tourist. Most of them only dress traditional for ceremonies, but traditionally they don't wear that every day. They wear it for the tourist.

It makes me sad in a way because you want that diversity and you want to experience what it was like a hundred years ago but unfortunately, with the rise of the internet, and communications, it is not like that anymore. These people have the same internet access as we do. Every person has a cell phone.

I had been traveling with the group for about three weeks, it was a lot of fun, we were going to national parks and on safaris, but a part of me wanted a little more adventure and I wanted to go off on my own. At first not many people are comfortable doing that but after two weeks you get the hang of it and then personally I wanted to go off on my own to see what kind of adventure I would get into. By the second week I felt like I was ready to go explore on my own.

I had heard it was possible to go live with a tribe but I didn't know how and I had no idea how to pursue it. After a 24 hour grueling bus ride from Kampala, Uganda to Arusha, Tanzania, I needed some time alone, I needed to get away from the hostel, away from Westerners, and go out on my own. So I started walking around Arusha by myself, I was being harassed by peddlers wanting to see my stuff and I was saying no I don't want anything. I ran away from them. To get away from them I stopped into a four or five star hotel with a big iron fence around it, security guards holding AK-47s, so I decided that this looks safe. I went in there and I met this beautiful girl named Nima, she was my age, she was 24, she was working in the casino. We started talking and she wanted to know everything about me, she got off work and we went up to the hotel bar and we had a drink together. She was really well dressed, well spoken and she wanted to know everything about me and I wanted to know everything about her. I thought she was so cool. I told her I wanted to go live with a Masai tribe and she said that she was of Masai blood. My relatives live in the tribes. I will take you there. So that night over to her house for dinner and it was such an amazing experience. Nobody in the family spoke English except for Nima and her brother. Her mother sees me and runs over to me, she was a really big woman, and she grabs me and smooshes my face into her breast and starts laughing and hugging me and she is so happy. I asked why she was so happy. Nima said she was so happy because she had never engaged with a white person before and she couldn't believe I was taking so much interest in her culture and it made her so happy. It made me feel amazing. It made me feel good that she was just as interested in me as I was her. It was a great experience.

After dinner I told them I have to go and the family said no, you have to sleep in my bed. I said I can't do that. In the Masai culture, what is mine is yours. That is their philosophy. They were teaching me the Masai language because I wanted to know how to say things.



materialistic, they don't care about materialism, the biggest importance is family. It doesn't matter what you have, as long as you are with your family, that is all matters. If we lived in a world where everybody shared and everybody was equal, that would be great. Just think, they don't even have a word for 'yours.' It cannot be translated. I thought that was so cool.

I told the brother to tell his father, "I like your family." And he says I can't do that and I asked why. He said there is no word for 'your' in the Masai language. Because in the Masai, everything is everybody's, we all share. So what's mine is yours. They can't say 'yours' because you have to say 'ours.' So I learned how to say, "I like our family." This taught me that this is an amazing culture and that everyone should live like that. They are not

Two photos here go together. I chose this photo because it taught me about sustainable development. When I was with the tribes I got me little journal and did a lot of research. I wanted to know. I had taken a lot of environmental politics classes, world politics classes, I was thinking about all these terms. When I went to the tribes I wanted to be hands on.



So I chose these two photos because they taught me about sustainable farming and development. For example that photo had natural fences; they don't have the money or the tools to build fences. This is what each lot looks like. This is the natural fence around the perimeter. This plant here has a bunch of thorns on it so it is a barrier, it keeps their crops safe, and no predator animal will cross it. This one here is a milk thistle; it is extremely poisonous if you eat it. If the predator eats this, the animal will die or get sick. So these are natural fences. You just plant them and that is it. A natural fence, which is all you need. This fence goes around the perimeter of the lot. This fence keeps out predators from eating the herds like lions, mostly lions and hyenas. Inside are the crops. Then you

have the bushy thorns. This is a natural interior fence and this protects the household. The houses are made from local resources from the land. Inside the interior is a hut where everyone sleeps. There is one hut for the man and his hut in a square and it is also where they eat. The wives live in the round huts. A man can have a lot of wives, the more wives he has, the more money he has and it elevates him in status in the tribes.

When I thought about the multiple wives from a Western perspective, at first I felt bad because I wanted to tell them in the Western world there is so much more. I told them that men and women were equal the guy, his jaw dropped to the floor, he couldn't comprehend a term such as equality. I could tell him that men and women, we both cook, we both clean, we both take care of the children. I told him that and he just shook his head in disbelief. He couldn't grasp the concept. That kind of concept is not even a reality in their world. They don't know how to visualize it. For example, most Americans can't visualize quantum physics. It is real but our brains are not big enough to comprehend it. Like them, it is real but they can't comprehend it because they have never been exposed to it.

Throughout the trip I was on a quest to find out why the Masai wore red. During the safari, when we were in the Ngorongoro crater, we would see these Masai people walking in the crater, down in the crater with the lions, jaguars, the elephants and you are wondering how they can do that. We kept asking ourselves that. So my quest was how can they do that and why do they always wear red. When I was in the tribes, I asked them. They can walk with lions because they put this powder on their face that comes from a sacred tree found high up in the mountains. They walk for weeks to find this tree. On foot, they walk into the mountains to find this tree and they take the root of the tree and grind it down into a powder. It is a red powder. And they apply it all over their body and the scent cause the lions not to bother you. The lions know that the color red

combined with the powder means do not approach that person. I don't know the science behind it, you can only guess in theory. But that is why they wear red. The lions associate the color and the scent of the powder as don't approach.



This is us on our four day safari, in the Serengeti. I chose this photo because you can see that there is nothing for miles and miles. It is just beautiful with the sun coming down through the clouds. That was a beautiful day. It was like the *Lion King*, you would see Simba on top of the mountain. I remember that on this safari, I learned more about zoology than I ever did in any text book. There are so many movies you could watch and so

many text books you could read but you will never learn more about animals in their environment than you will on a safari. For example, I learned that only lionesses hunt for food. I didn't know the male lions didn't hunt for food. They just guard the family. I learned about cheetahs, remember the cheetah chasing down the gazelle, that was so cool. Our driver pulled up next to the cheetah and it looked like he was annoyed. He wanted us out of his line of sight, so he jumped off his mound and started scouting his prey from fifty feet away. It taught me a lot about hunting, animal hunting and animal techniques. It was really cool. Cheetahs are short distance sprinters. They will have the initial burst of energy and then they will go after the prey, but if they don't get the prey in the first few seconds, they will give up.

I learned a lot about animals. The leopards will pull their prey up into the trees. You just don't think about that type of behavior. I will never forget this stuff because it is a visual in my head. Zebras always stand together in pairs, they stand with their butts together in opposite directions, to look out for each other. Their back is never exposed. You just don't pick up these things in text books.

I am getting my masters in teaching and I got this idea from traveling. The Africa trip just inspired me to explore the world and since Africa, the following summer I went to Costa Rica and surfed. I went with some friends and we rented a house. And then I met a Scottish boyfriend and I lived in Scotland for four months. I met him in Breckinridge as a snowboard instructor; I met him on the chairlift. From Scotland we backpacked all over Western Europe, seeing Amsterdam, Belgium, Spain, and then the following summer, this last summer, I went on a month long surf trip in Mexico and then immediately after that I went to Bolivia for seven weeks and volunteered at a wildlife refuge, working with Pumas and monkeys. I wanted to do volunteer work, my boyfriend and I wanted to work with orphans or animals and he really wanted to work with animals so we went to a

refuge. I had to walk a puma through the jungle every day, six hours a day. And I got bit, it scared the shit out of me. There are no rules in Bolivia, you don't have to have any experience, you can just show up and they ask if you want to work with a monkey or a puma. I just said I will work with the puma. I got pounced, I said, "abajo, abajo" because they are Spanish speaking pumas. I said, "no salto" which means "no jump." I got in three "no mas" and then she bit me. She jumped on me, I was shaking so hard and I exited her cage, it is a huge enclosure and I just started crying. Now that I look back it is cool. But at the time I was crying and this other volunteer was asking if I was ok. After that happened, I stopped working with the pumas and went to work with the monkeys. The trip to Africa made me see that there is a whole another world out there and that America is extremely sheltered and we are naïve and we haven't a clue. Eighty percent of Americans haven't a clue about how the world works, why the world works the way it does, other cultures. They just have no idea. This really ticks me off. No matter how much I try to tell them how it is, they all think I am naïve. For example when I was in Bolivia, it was during pre-election time, I write blogs and one of them was about how Americans need to open up their eyes more and that everything is not perfect. This is why the world hates. But I think it is getting better now that Obama is in office. All my international friends say that they like us again. Most international people don't like our foreign policy, they think America tries to play big brother all the time. We go out there and try and tell the world how to think and act. You know, this is the best way for us so you should do it too.

I learn this stuff from personal observations and engaging with other people from other cultures. When you travel to Africa, you don't just meet the Africans, you meet the Brits, the Australians, the Israelis, the Japanese, you meet people that are traveling in the same manner from all over the world. And you can discuss things, you can actively engage in a conversation about politics, environment, whatever you want.

I usually meet people at hostels. Hostels are like hotels for backpackers, a low budget hotel for backpackers. A lot of times you share a room, it is like dorm style. You can have your own room, it costs a little more. You just kind of show up, you look in your Lonely Planet guide book, find out what places seem to suit you, then you check it out and if you like it, you stay, if you don't like it, you go to the next one.

Backpacker travel is where you go to a country and you don't stay in one place too long because you want to experience the culture and see what it has to offer. If you are in one place too long, you don't get that. You spent two or three days in a town and then you move on to the next town, staying in hostels along the way. Your plan is always changing. You can have an itinerary, but it never goes the way you plan it. So it is better to say that you definitely want to do these three items, in what order it happens, I don't care as long as it happens. The best way to travel is to not have a plan because where you go next is often reflected upon the people you meet, hearing other people's stories, and your experiences kind of dictate where you are going to go next. Backpacker style travel is the best way to travel because it is the cheapest and it allows you the most exposure to culture.

I never knew about backpacker travel before the Africa trip, as an American I thought the only way to travel was to book it through a travel agency or go on a guided tour and pay thousands and thousands of dollars. This is the biggest thing, particularly aunts and uncles, they ask me how can I afford to go to all these places. I tell them it is easy because it is cheap, as long as you can lower your standards just a bit, you don't have to lower them that much, lower them just a bit, you can do it. When you're backpack traveling, you're not going to be staying in four star hotels.

My next plans are to go to Australia this summer with the boyfriend, we got working visas. The visa is a one year working holiday visa, anyone can apply as long as it is once in your life time and you have to do it before you are 29. It is \$150 bucks and it is valid for a year and my boyfriend and I are going to work at a ski resort called Mt. Fuller, about two hours outside of Melbourne. So we are going to do another ski season, he will be an instructor and I will bar tend. We will do that for five months and then I have no idea. We are going to try and incorporate New Zealand, we have Kiwi friends, so there is always someone we can stay with.



I chose this one because I thought this woman was very beautiful. She just looks so exotic. Look at her cheeks, she has some kind of tattoo on her cheeks. Even though the kids here are wearing street clothes, there were still some women wearing traditional dress., the men not so much. She did not wear this for tourism because I was the first white person to come and visit the village, minus some missionaries that build the church twenty years ago.

You can look in the horizon, there is nothing for miles. Basically how we got here, I hoped on my African friend's motor bike and we went for two hours, we just kept going and going. I kept asking if we were there yet and if he was sure where we were going. He said yes I know. All the sudden we showed up and here we are. I felt pretty safe but I had wanted to go to the village with the girl I met in the hotel. I feel much safer with local women than men. I really wanted her to take me but she had to work so she had her brother take me. He was a gentleman and really respectful. I felt a little nervous but when we arrived I felt completely safe. He got me there, he knew what he was doing.

She is just so beautiful. Look at how they are looking at the camera. It is like they don't even notice the camera is there. I don't think these are her kids, there are always random kids running around. Their dress is so different. If an American wore this much jewelry we would call them a freak and that is sad but true. Her ear rings are four inches long, she has tons of necklaces and a beautiful cloak, a red cloak. They don't conform to the

traditional t-shirt and pants. All the women wear dresses, I never saw a women in pants, they wore lots of flowing fabric.



This is in Jambiani, on the southeast cost of Zanzibar, you were not with us. This is when four of us from the group went to Jambiani while the rest of the group was climbing Kilimanjaro. This is one of the schools, about a block from our bungalow on the beach. We met this guy and said he would take us to the schools, you can come visit for a day. So I went and visited with the people, I got to sit in on their classes and tell them about myself. They were all really excited and liked to hear about

me. They can all speak English. That was really good for me.

I took this photo because they have the children do all the construction work, if you can tell in this photo, what they are doing is picking up rocks and dirt and brick and hauling it into the school for some kind of construction project. It demonstrates that they have different morals and values, it's ok for the children to work, there are no child labor laws. You see a lot of child labor in Africa, tons of kids begging on the streets, working anywhere, in the mines. There is no law against it because they don't have any other choice and at first it is really shocking. I would say the first week I was in Africa I thought it was so sad but then after being there you don't think about it anymore and it doesn't seem like it is a big deal. Is that bad to say? You become assimilated to the culture. The first week it's super shocking and then after that you don't think twice about it. The children don't seem unhappy and there not being abused, there just doing construction. They are doing manual labor but it is for a greater good. It is not like they are someone's slaves, they are simply building their own school in which they are getting

an education. That doesn't seem like a big deal for me. It would probably do us some good if American kids contributed to building their own schools.



This is a picture of me inside the same school. I chose this picture because look at how happy they are. It is a photo of me with the children and I am just walking around seeing what they are doing and they are just so happy and they think I am really cool. It was kind of nice feeling like a queen for a

day. They were just really interested in me and I was equally interested in them. These people were different than the Masai because in Zanzibar they are all Muslim, where as in mainland Tanzania, they are mostly Christian or a native religion. Being around the Muslim culture was really cool because it was at a time of a lot of Muslim resentment in America. We just had this stereotype of all Muslims, that they are bad and they are all terrorist. So when you go to culture that is heavily Muslim and you see that they still love you and that they don't care if you are white or wearing a headdress, they don't care what you look like or your beliefs. They are just real open minded. It was

really cool being around Muslims and it gave me a new perspective about them.



My new perspective on Muslims is that they are not all bad. Just like Americans are not all bad. I actually didn't know that there were African Muslims. It did not occur to me. I only thought Muslims were in the Middle East, so that was cool. Travel is just mind opening in all aspects. I took this picture also in the classroom; I took it because it was really powerful. It is a beautiful little Muslim girl. It is just really cool, the contrast, the color. You look at the classroom and the walls are chipping, all the paint is chipping, it is just one big cement floor. But then you look at this little girl and her Muslim dress, she is so beautiful. She looks so put together.

In school they learn all the basic subjects, reading, math, writing, and science. They are pretty much the same subjects as us. A high schooler is defiantly behind the rest of the world, a high schooler is learning the stuff I would have learned in middle school. So in that sense they are very far behind but they are still learning the traditional subjects and stuff. They knew where America was. I told them I was from America and they knew where it was located. I drew a map of the world and asked them where America was and they all pointed to it. There was a big chalk board but not a lot of resources. However, in Kendwa, they had an internet café that was for the school children. It was for the school but tourist could pay to use the internet. Actually in Zanzibar they are way further advanced in education than the rest of Tanzania.

I felt like Zanzibar was way more progressed than for example Arusha. I think that is because of the tourism, there is a lot of tourism in Zanzibar and there is more wealth from the tourism. I think it is a valuable source of income for a country, tourism. Tourism has its pros and cons, it's bad if the tourist come in and disrespect the local cultures, beliefs and environment but there is a thing called sustainable tourism, eco tourism. Eco tourism is when you travel , you want to sustain your environment. I haven't researched it fully I just kind of learned during our trip. Eco tourism is when you go into a culture and you respect their culture and you want to learn about them. For example, I was traveling with an Australian though Costa Rica, I was by myself at this point and she said, "You know what really pisses me off about you guys." I said what? You Americans come to Australia and expect everything to be done the American way. I said what do you mean.

She said, "For example I was working at the store and this American couple came in and they had American dollars and they wanted to pay with American dollars." The girl said they could only accept Australian dollars and the Americans could not believe they would accept American dollars. The American tourist said that the American dollar is excepted all over the world and they just got pissed off. The Australian had to tell them it was her country and you need to respect my heritage and culture. It is just stuff like that which is not a good example of eco tourism.

I had wanted to go to African for a couple of years and I think it was just random coincidence that the OP was going to Africa. I was going to go by myself. I thought when I graduate from college I am going to go to Africa. I wanted to experience culture and adventure. About half way through my last year or college, I found out the OP was going to Africa, it was perfect. It could not have gotten more coincidental. So I decided to go with you. It was pretty accessible.

I was going to go by myself because nobody wanted to go with me. When I was growing up, nobody had any money: they didn't want to go off on any adventures. I did a lot of OP trips, so I was always in and out of the office and that is where I heard about the trip to Africa. It was real easy. It was really cheap to go through the OP. I thought it was so attainable. Anybody can do that.

I felt like a great aspect was that I learned how to travel. The biggest question that I get is how can you do this, travel all over the place. How is possible, how do you have money? How can you just go to Africa? Weren't you afraid? The things on this trip that I learned, I want to share with other people. I am going to school to become a teacher because I want to change the way Americans think. Honestly, I think the baby boomers are a lost cause. I have tried to change the viewpoints of older Americans and they call me naïve. When I tell them why other countries hate us, this is the response I got. They only hate us because they are jealous of us. No I said, that is the wrong answer. Don't say that. So I have given up. I have tried to educate older people like my parents friends, aunts, uncles and they don't get it, they think I am naïve, they will never get it. So I have refocused my efforts to become a teacher and start with the youth because the youth will be running this country in the next ten years. So I think that is an important place to start. I will be able to

bring some of these concept that I have learned from travel back to the classroom for sure. I am going to teach social studies and focus on geography and humanities.



This is in Jambiani, you can see the sandy beaches, it is probably the least traveled place on the island. There was probably five white people in the whole town. It is really desolate, if you look at the buildings it looks like a ghost town. There are so many

deserted buildings, you don't really know why; it almost looks like a hurricane went though that town and it just left the skeletons of the buildings. There are tons of buildings that are unoccupied. I asked but they did not know. The locals have nothing to do. I chose this photo because they really just liked hanging out with us. All day and all night we had a little cult following us. No matter where we went, these women and other people would follow us around. They always wanted to hang out and ask us questions about America. They all spoke English. We are just chilling at night and having a good ole time.

It is really possible to get a lot of cultural interaction because sustainable travel and what you taught us, taught us how to go off on our own and be by ourselves. That is what allowed us the freedom to meet these other cultures. If we were in a tourist group, going from one destination to another, we would have never had that opportunity. Because we didn't have an itinerary, it allowed us to do those kinds of things.

These ladies were really cool, they would paint henna all over us. They just chilled all day. I don't think they had any jobs. I wasn't there long enough to explore how they survived. There were some hotels they could work at, so maybe some of them worked in tourism. There was the school and it was pretty nice.

We went to Jambiani to kill some time while the rest of the group was climbing Kilimanjaro. So we had three days to kill, so we looked in the guide book and read about Jambiani, there was like two sentences about it. We had no idea what to expect, so we decided to go there and see what happens.

I liked traveling with the group in the sense of security. It was good to always have it in the back of your mind, that even though we had the freedom to leave whenever we wanted, that I could always go back with the group at anytime. I like that because it gave me some security. Now that I am older and I have done some traveling, I don't need that security anymore. For a first time traveler it was cool. Now that I know what I am doing I think I would only like to travel with one person, maybe two. However one great thing about the group is bargaining power. You can really get a lot more stuff done, for example, when we would arrive at a town, some of us would stay with all the bags, some would go search for the best rates at the hostels. So in that sense it is a lot easier. When we went on safari it was cheaper for the group. Stuff like that has the benefits of a big group.



In this photo we volunteered at a primary school in Jinja, Uganda. We went to a preschool for orphans and there were tons of little kids running around. There were one or two teachers around. This photo is amazing because the kids were so happy that we were there. You just got this really good feeling but at the end of the day when you reflected back on it, it was kind of sad.

because this little boy I held in my arms for two hours. My arms hurt so bad at the end of it but he would not let me put him down. No matter how many times he tried to set me down, he would not let go of me. So I just held him. It was a good experience because it makes you realize how important it is for a child to be loved and these children are orphans and they don't have that. It was so sad. I didn't want to leave them. When it was time to leave, I really wanted to stay. It actually inspired me to do more volunteer work. I love volunteering in third world countries. Before I started my masters program I was looking for jobs with NGO's in Africa but a lot of them require you to have a master's degree. So that is why I am getting my master's degree. I am getting it in teaching so I can have some job security and teach in America but the master's portion is to open up more opportunities like this and working for NGO's.

This trip was a life changing experience. It was inspirational, educational, it made me a better person. I came back knowing so much more about the world than I could have ever imagined and all around it was a wonderful trip and I would do it all again in a heartbeat. And I really want to go back to Africa. Everyone I meet I encourage to travel to a third world country or actually any country, it doesn't have to be third world. Just go somewhere, I encourage everyone I meet to take a month off and backpack somewhere.

Appendix G: Sandy's Interview



high with energy, playing on the beach. This picture is of us all running towards the water with huge waves crashing down. So we are running back and forth having fun. My feelings about this photo is that I was just extremely happy to be there. I was really giddy. This was my first travel experience. I was just ready to explore and ready to see what was going to happen. I wasn't worried about too much, I was just having a good time at the beach. The trip started out very well, very fun. It was like a dreamscape, with the lighting. It was a good start for the trip.

I was twenty years old when I did this trip and now I am almost twenty seven years old. This first picture was when we first got into Lima, my first time in a foreign country. We are at the beach, it's a pebbly beach and very pretty, it goes down the rocky cliff that looks like it should be in some kind of Lord of the Rings movie. We were extremely giddy being in a foreign country and all



The second picture is of two friends on the trip, we are on a little balcony in Cuzco, Peru. We are getting some breakfast as a small café. I chose this picture because it showed two people I built a friendship with, that I probably would have never met. The woman turned out to be a great friend for a couple of years and then she moved away so I have not been in contact with her in awhile. The last I heard she

had a boyfriend and was doing well. So yeah, I chose this picture because it kind of encompassed an average backpacker thing to do, which was go explore and eat, try some different food. That was a lot of what we did was try out different places to eat. A lot of it turned out to be white bread with eggs. A lot of places we ate at were hard to tell if they were restaurants, some places looked more established but some places just looked like a house with tables. They are smaller, more family operated, you don't know what is on the

menu, you don't know what to expect. A good part of it was just trying to find things on the menu to eat. It is not like a typical American restaurant where you pretty much know what you are getting. A lot of exploration in travel is trying new foods. The juices were good, but I got a little tired of French fries. I had a lot of French fries, rice and chicken. I was desperate for a salad by the end of the trip. You were supposed to avoid fruits and vegetables because of all the bacteria. The cuisine wasn't all that exotic. It was very plain and basically just sustained you.



this picture is of two friends and a plate of cuy. It is roasted guinea pig. It is a delicacy there. He was the only one to get it, so we were all amused by it. The rest of us had eggs and potato pancakes, maybe some chicken with French fries of course and white bread. I tried a little and it tasted like dark turkey or dark chicken, a little greasy. It was something I hadn't tried before. I hadn't eaten any rodent to my knowledge. It was good but it came out with the little teeth that looked like fangs, it had little claws. The whole time in the restaurant we kept hearing small footsteps upstairs. We kept joking that all the guinea pigs were kept upstairs, like a herd of guinea pigs saying don't eat me. It was a really fun restaurant. If you were to order cuy in the states, its head would be chopped off, you would probably just get the breast and the meaty part, you would never get the little legs with its paws. I don't think Americans would like this, we don't like anything that would gross us out. Americans don't really like to see what they are eating. I think there is a disconnect in US culture between where our food comes from and what is served on our plate. We like to see everything presented well and we are so worried about disease. It all

Again this picture is about eating in a restaurant; it is a little tiny place, a hole in the wall. We went here after looking at some ruins outside of Cuzco. One was called Sacsayhuaman, it was funny because it sounded like "sexy woman." It was really cool. Apparently it was really huge jaguar. We were looking at the head with the teeth made out of enormous blocks. You were supposed to feel energy from the blocks. One of the builders was telling us that story but I can't remember it now. I remember that the belly was supposed to be the center of town; the tail went out of town, with the legs going down. It sounded like it was massive. I wondered how they could build such a huge picture, how it could be laid out. It was awesome. They did point this huge picture towards the sky, maybe the gods helped them out.

The restaurant had a variety of dishes but

has to be clean and cut. Like the cuy head would be cut off. I wonder if we would consider it a health code violation, eating rodents.

I think a lot of people in less industrialized nations have to work a lot harder for their food and are probably closer to the source than here. That is just a perception I have because most people don't go out onto a farm their entire life. Unless you grow up in a rural area, like me, I grew up on farms my whole life but still most of my animals were like pets. Like my guinea pigs were my pets. But this is food here and we don't eat them. I think at this point we were all really happy and we had a really good day. This was a fun end to the day and I think that night we went dancing.



The next picture is of us rafting the Urubamba River. In this picture we have our guide, I don't remember his name but he was a cool guy. Then we have other members of the group and myself. It is a group of us together, all smiling at the end of the day and it was really cool to be rafting in a foreign country. I never expected I would do outdoor activities in a foreign country. Before when I would think of a traveler, I thought you

would visit cities, ruins, or going to churches, or something like that. I didn't really think of the prospect of playing in the outdoors. At that time it wasn't even a concept. This was really cool.

Before this trip, I had just recently gotten involved with the Outdoor Program, like my junior year. The OP was really a doorway to exploring myself, being involved with the outdoors. I did a lot of self exploration on this trip. At the onset of this trip I was very insecure with myself, very socially awkward and uncertain of a lot of things. I didn't have a lot of friends, didn't know how to interact with people. This trip challenged me in a lot of ways to open up, it challenged me to learn how to interact with a group and how to face myself, my insecurities. I saw a lot of what I didn't want to be and what I wanted to be. The group interaction was actually the biggest challenge for me when traveling because I never really had to put myself out there before and I did on this trip.

You're around a group of people for awhile and no matter how hard you try; people are going to see through any façade you put up. If you are a grumpy pants person, people are going to pull away. I was grumpy, kind of an angry person at that time; I had a lot of insecurities and anger issues. I think on this trip, especially with the group of people I was with, I was inspired by their positivity, their mellowness. I saw these people in my group move through situations and not get stressed out. I think this trip was really a way for me to start exploring myself in a more positive fashion. And it was really good.

I can remember when we were hanging out at the hostel or something, people would be sitting around playing cards, laughing and joking. I couldn't for the life of me think of something to talk about or joke about. I just felt so gone and then seeing other people interact with each other. Others in the group were always joking, smiling, laughing and rolling with the situation. I was pretty quiet, withdrawn and so I thought to myself, I want to be that way, more like the people in my group. Just laugh more.

I kept going through different cycles, like felling I had hit a new challenge. I would feel happy, sad, kind of like a roller coaster of emotions. I think I am just now starting to mellow out. Seven years later I have had huge personality growth. I think my growth started with the Outdoor Program and I think this international trip really triggered a sort of self exploration that I never had to face before. I was kind of a cold fish before. I think that traveling pushed me to see what opportunities were out there and being with the group, and finding ways for myself to be with the group and interacting with the group in a positive fashion was a huge turning point in my life.

There have been a bunch of things that have helped me down my path. Sometimes I find myself going back to the way I was and I will kick myself because I don't really like it. I don't like getting overly stressed or feeling like I can't interact with people or worrying a lot. I think the more I push myself, especially exploring my personality, the better I will get and be more mellow. Travel does that for me.

My work is sending me to China on Sunday. I leave at 6:30 am and will be going to do a greenhouse gas verification of a methane to market project there. So basically a coal mine is capturing methane that would go into the atmosphere otherwise. I am going with my boss; we will be there for a week. It will be a lot of work, there will not be a lot of play time but what I am really hoping is that I will get try a little bit of Mandarin Chinese. I know a little bit right now like hello, thank you and some other tidbits.

I went to Europe in 2005 by myself. It was scary and fun. It was one of those things in my life where I thought I needed to do things more by myself and see how it goes. That was a trip too, another huge turning point. I first went to England because I knew someone there, then I went to Spain by myself and traveled around for awhile and met a whole bunch of people in hostels and it was great. It was really great. I really learned how to travel from you Chad, all your savvy tips. I didn't get robbed. My trip though Peru really prepared me to travel. In Peru I was only twenty years old and didn't really have a concept of how to travel on a foreign country, what steps to take, like how to keep you money safe, your passport on you. These things I would have probably found out but I learned on the Peru trip.

I learned where not to keep my money. I got robbed in Bolivia. I was being a stupid tourist. Bolivia and Peru don't get along really well apparently and I was wearing a bright yellow Inca Cola shirt and the baggy cargo traveler's pants. We went out to eat, so I needed some money. I went to the ATM and I got out way too much money. I got out like 80 American dollars, like 360 Bolivian Dollars, something like that. A lot of money, 80 dollars is lot when you are a traveler. I think someone must have been watching me or

they targeted me. There was a huge festival going on. I got surrounded by a bunch of Aymara women or women dressed as Aymara women, with the top hats and skirts. They crowded my body and somebody spit on my shoulder. While I was looking at that in disgust, I don't know how it happened but they slit my pocket and they took my money and debit card. They were gone like that, I didn't even know. When I found out I was just angry. I felt violated. I had to go explain to the police and they just looked at us like whatever. And so I learned. It is all part of travel. They didn't hurt me, they just wanted the money and they were good at it. It only took me thirty seconds to figure out that I was robbed but that is a long time when I am looking at my shoulder. Then I looked down at my pocket and then they were gone so fast. It was almost like time just stopped. I didn't know how many people were in on it. It has not happened to me again. I now know how not to be a target. This will come in handy in China. I can't wait to go and find a hole in the wall restaurant where I can eat dog.

When I came back from my Peru trip, another phase of my life, I really wasn't happy going down the direction I was going. You have to be happy in your life and do things that feel right. I was majoring in Math at the time and I am not actually that great at math. I really liked environmental science so I just decided to add on another major, which put on another three years onto my college but I did it anyway. I was just so ready for change, ready to be me. I have always been passionate about politics and environment since I was young. I was in the recycling club when I was nine years old in Moscow, Idaho. Environmental awareness was something I was raised with and I think I decided to go down the Math route because I would magically get some job where I would engineer emission control devices and then I realized that I am not really that smart and I don't really care for theoretical math. It just didn't click with me like I thought it would. It was a constant struggle. I wasn't happy. I decided to switch to Environmental Science.

Now I am working at a pretty cool job. I am not sure if this is the field I want to be in forever. It is centered around greenhouse gas quantification and verification. It is cool but what gets to me is the office work. I don't feel like I am at a point in my life where I need to be sitting all day. I sit for like nine hours a day. There is not much field work, occasionally I get to go on trips but in the mean time I am getting back aches, I am cold all day. I just want to be outside. I know I can change directions if I need to. I think it all started right here.



This is a picture of Machu Picchu. I selected it because it was an amazing place and it was one of the reasons why I wanted to go on the trip. When you talked about Machu Picchu, it was a real clicker for me. I really wanted to go there. It is every bit as amazing as the picture. I didn't get to go on the whole full hike, I got sick in Cuzco, some kind of stomach ailment. Another girl in

the trip was sick also, so we ended up going on a day trip and meeting up with the group. It was a great reunion. I hadn't seen you guys in awhile.

One of my friends in the group and I got sick in Cuzco. I got some type of stomach ailment and had to take cipro. It was right before everyone was going on the trek. The group was very supportive, they would bring us wash clothes, little figurines, and then the group left and it was just us two. We felt really lonely and sick. I started taking the cipro and felt better. When I started feeling better, I tried to find things to do to entertain myself. So I started going out by myself and sitting in the Plaza de Armas, talking to little kids. The kids asked where I was from and then one day I decided to go out by myself to the market which I hadn't done. I just wanted to check things out and that was a challenge for me because it was the first time I really took a step to just be by myself without the group and see how I do. I got lost but I found my way back home. I was a little scared because I didn't know Spanish very well. Everyone else would speak more than I would. It was really cool but it was kind of scary because I needed to converse with people and haggle and bargain for stuff. It was really good but a bit intimidating but I got over it.

I hope I get a chance to venture out in the same way when I am in China but it looks like it will all be business for two days and the other time our interpreter will probably want to take up places. I will venture out if I can. I don't speak any Mandarin but it doesn't really matter as long as you are polite to people and respect their culture. If you don't fight their culture, things tend to go very well. People are very friendly. You know, you have to watch the dodgy parts of town but you would do that in New York City too. I have never really had a threatening experience in my travels to this date, except for someone robbing me.

As a woman traveler, I did feel threatened once. I was in Spain, I was in Barcelona, and I was at a night club with some friends that I met at the hostel. They were upstairs and I went downstairs to sit on a bench and this man came up to me and tried to convince me to go to the beach and have sex with him. I just told him no, no, no, I just want to sit. Then he started grabbing and I had to fight him off and get up and walk away. So I couldn't sit the entire night because if you sit, you are a target. This wasn't a man from Spain, he was another traveler. I was just assertive and made sure that I stayed in a crowd. I don't go walking outside by myself at night in weird neighborhoods. I don't do that anywhere. You have to read the mood of the people around you. You can read when someone is aggressive towards you. You don't have to be afraid of places, you just have to be a smart traveler and be aware.

Machu Picchu was so fun, we explored all around, watched some people in our group get chased around by a lama. We all fell in love with the mama lama and her baby. Then we went and saw some other ruins around the area. What cool places. I would recommend it to anyone if they get a chance to go there. This picture is just at sun rise; we hiked up in the dark and got to see the sunrise over Machu Picchu. That was incredible.



This is sort of a little ways into the trip now; we went to this area called Las Pampas, Bolivia. We're going down this river, can't remember the name of it, but were heading into this tropical area to do some treks and see snakes. This picture is of me feeding a little yellow tree monkey a banana. And they chirped. They were so cute and so cool. It was the first monkey in the wild I ever saw. It was awesome because we were in the wild, totally different than anything I

had ever been exposed to. Like when you see a deer, you don't go up and pet a deer or feed them, but these little guys were different. The guide called them up and the monkeys knew exactly what was going on. They were like cool, tourist brought us bananas. The river was really awesome; we saw all this exotic wildlife, exotic to me, caimans, capybaras, rodents of unusual size and pink dolphins, piranha, turtles, different birds. It was really cool. I remember our guide, Monglio. We were out in the boat this one time and he has his underwear and is washing them on the side of the river. To dry them, he put them on his head like a hat. He was hilarious. What was funny about this picture was when we first went in there, we were all paranoid about the bugs, so we are all wearing long sleeves and white. It was really hot and humid. On the way out we were wearing tank tops, shorts, had our shirts off and wearing swim suits and just lounging around. This experience tells me that we can often be over paranoid about going into a place. I think our expectations are that something bad will happen. It's good to aware but we are way too paranoid. At the end of the trip we were just so relaxed, I felt like I could handle this.



This is also Las Pampas and this is Monglio. Monglio and this other guy are with us on a snake hunt, we were going to see cobras but I don't think the snakes were cobras, I think they were boas. We were out trekking and they called us over and they had this snake, one guy was holding it down with a stick. We are wearing snake boots. We had been out trekking for an hour at this point, tromping through the swamp trying to find a snake. They said if

you find a snake holler at us. These are vipers we were looking for, it seemed crazy. There are caimans out there too. Something again you would get in America, you would get sued. Here you have to take liability for yourself if you want to do it. In Bolivia there is not someone or some regulation watching out for you. Basically if you are stupid and

you get hurt, it is your fault. You have to take responsibility and ownership of what you are doing. Unlike in the US, where if your coffee is too hot or there is a crazy old dip on the side walk that you trip on, you can sue. In Bolivia it just is not this way. I think it is cool being responsible. Americans are just too fat and happy and pampered. It is way too easy to push blame. There are obviously some situations that are dangerous but I chose to go out there and look for snakes and I shouldn't sue if I get bit.

Here in our society you can do something stupid but if you find a good enough lawyer, you can push that blame to someone else, maybe the producer of a product. Take for instance if you abuse a product or don't use it properly, you can still sue and say that they meant the product to be harmful. In Bolivia you cannot. This is kind of a dangerous thing to be doing in this picture. This is not something I would go and do by myself because I don't know what I am looking at or what kind of snake it is or what kind of reaction time they have. These guys have obviously done this before. He is just standing there with a snake biting his boot. I wouldn't go actively snake hunting because I don't know snakes well enough.



This picture is just out of Bolivia. Half the group was going to go climb Huayna Potosi in Bolivia. At this point I still wasn't feeling quite well, my stomach was really messed up and I wanted some acidophilus. All the bacteria in my stomach had been killed and now I was having some troubles. I had some reoccurring symptoms. Down in Las Pampas they

had these fruits that when exposed to air over time it will dye blue. We were doing shirts and stuff with it. In this picture is me doing something very silly. I thought I could use it like henna and do a henna design on my hands. I got some on the top but the whole rest got dyed dark, dark blue. I looked like I had a disease. It was hilarious, everyone kept asking me what was wrong with my hands. I didn't know how to explain it. I found some fruit and was trying to be a hippie. It was really funny and kind of embarrassing. Something I don't want to do again because when you are traveling in a foreign country, you don't want to look like you have a disease on your hands. It was funny and something I like to look back at, something really silly and funny. You could pick the fruits from the trees, the guides showed us. They showed us how to do our shirts and stuff. I made a shirt but I don't know what happened to it. I think I lost it.

This next picture is also in Bolivia. I have to say at this part of the trip half of the group is away; there are only three of us girls together. So we spent a lot of time traveling in smaller groups at this point. This is one thing that happened on this trip. The further we

got in the trip I think the less people felt that they needed to stay as a group. If they wanted to do something as a smaller group or by themselves, we started doing that. You would often go with people that you get along with better. I think it worked well at certain points and at some points I think some people may have felt sad or left out, but I am not sure. I think it worked out well; it is just a natural evolution of traveling. Your interests are going to vary and you



are going to want to do some different stuff. In this case I couldn't go climb the mountain so we went and explored by ourselves without Chad. That was something new. At this point you had been taking care of most of the arrangements. If we wanted to go somewhere, you would set it up for us. So it was like a no brainer. This time we chose to go on this tour bus from the guy at the hotel. It ended up being really silly. It was a lesson learned. It is good to do things on a whim but you should also read up on some stuff to make sure you are not getting ripped off. Actually this picture is in Chile, not Bolivia; it was when we were in Arica, down at the beaches while everyone else was climbing the mountain.

This part of the trip was kind of a big deal. It was totally new for us; we didn't have Chad to determine what we did or where we went. A lot of the time we just wandered around city, not really knowing what to look for, but we still did it. It was really cool because I think we started feeling more confident in ourselves, that we could do it. We found a great place to stay. We were walking towards the ocean and we saw all these two story adobe houses that looked a little run down but on the inside they were fairly nice. This picture is of the tour we took. This was one of the cool places we went. It was towards the end of the tour and we went to this old church. It is sort of misty with a mountain in the background and a silhouette of this old church with two towers and two crosses. There was a lot of rubble around and to the right, you can't see it, is this graveyard. Just a stakes and mounds graveyard, obviously used. Why I chose this picture is because it was a very lonely feeling being there. This is kind of the point where it wasn't a very fun tour, one of the points in the trip where I was feeling self contemplative, feeling a bit on the outside of the group. I don't know why, it was just a feeling. This picture, whenever I look back on that, when I look at this picture, I remember that feeling, kind of at odds in the moment, but still feeling good. I don't know if it was because the trip was about to end or something. I don't know. I think reality was coming back. It was one of those things where I can't explain the feeling but I chose this picture

because it is hard to explain, just like it is hard to explain sadness and loneliness. This is how I was feeling, it was the end. I didn't know how I felt about that.



This is the last photo, I believe it was in Peru in the Atacama Desert in Ica, the sand dunes of Ica. This picture is of the whole group, we are holding sand boards. This is after we had been sand boarding the whole day and that was very cool and hard. It is not like snowboarding. That was so fun. This is towards the end of the trip. I remember us towards the end and going swimming in the pond. I chose this picture

because it is the classic picture of the whole group doing something fun, doing something that we had never done before. It was a really good day. The sand dunes are amazing. In the background there are huge hills, mountains of sand. This is something that I have yet to do again. It was really cool. This is sort of the wrap up of the trip. Everyone was happy, the group is back together. It is after everyone had come back from the mountains. It was that last big thing that we did.

After going through all these pictures I can say the importance of travel is having fun. There is just so many things to do and see that you can't do at home in your daily interactions. You get to meet new people, you explore like Indiana Jones. You don't normally see yourself like that, just going and seeing what is there. It is so important. I think that a lot of kids coming out of high school could really stand to take a year off and travel before they go into college. I think I would have benefited. I think that kids coming out of high school haven't really discovered themselves yet. They are supposed to go to college and know what they want to do with the rest of their lives and get this education that is going to cost a lot of money, going to take a lot of time. I don't think a lot of people are prepared for it. I needed a break. I had been so academic in high school but I hadn't really taken any time to develop myself and I think that is what travel does, it challenges your personality, you learn about yourself. You get to see the rest of the world, how people live. It is a huge eye opening perspective to see what it is like here and what it is like in other parts of the world. Travel is a way to just open yourself up and I think it is really important. Especially as Americans, we need more worldly awareness. You make mistakes along the way but then you have a lot of fun, almost like playing in an imagination world.

Part of traveling is that you go back home and leave this place behind. It was kind of sad because I didn't feel like I fit in. One of the first things that really struck me is how big US people are. Not only wide but in height as well. We had been in a country where people were just a little taller than my height; I am about five foot three. I came back here

and there were people six feet tall and I thought holy cow. It was really busy. I felt like it was kind of dry and crowded. I was in Denver when I came back home, staying with my sister. I turned 21 there, I felt lonely. I didn't have the group to have fun with and joke around with. I had a lot of social learning with the group. I came away with being friends with most of these people. If I ever see them again, I could pick up a good conversation. Travel is important.

Appendix H: Alice's Interview

When I was looking for ten photos, I noticed none of them were really great photos, most



of them I chose because of the feeling I had when I took the photos. I have the photos arranged chronologically by date. The first photo is the beach at Tulum, Mexico in the Yucatan when we went hiking through the forest and we came down on that beach outside of the Tulum ruins. We are looking out over the beach with crystal clear water and people playing on the beach. This was my first jungle experience. I remember this trip had just started and oh my god I am

hiking through a jungle. It is so cool. I had never experienced any of this stuff before. I was so excited to experience all this new stuff. This is the beach where a bunch of the girls from the trip went to for the solstice. We went swimming in the ocean under the stars at night. It was just amazing.

The experience was kind of scary because it was just a bunch of girls and we didn't really know what we were doing or where we were going. We were just going. We had met someone on the beach earlier that day and said to come back and join a drum circle. We never did find it; we just sat on the beach and went swimming. The evening didn't turn out how we had planned, it was even better. It was just us exploring this beach. It was kind of scary, it was dark. I remember that I became very aware of my surroundings. The experience gave me a sense of awareness and it helped me realize you don't need to be afraid of your surroundings. It was very empowering to be with a group of girls out on a beautiful beach by ourselves. It was nice to tackle my fears.

I was afraid to just go on this trip because I had never done anything like this before. I had never been out of the country. I got married really young, had babies really young and just got accustomed to that lifestyle of living in the town I grew up in. Living a mile away from my mom. This little town is my home. To go outside the state is different but to go outside the country is way different. Leaving the country was something I knew I needed to do because it would make me grow better as a person. The travel experience has affected every area of my life in a positive way. But it was scary to step outside that comfort zone and it's scary also because all you hear in a small town is a lot of negative stuff in the press about other countries. And I am thinking that is where I am going and what negative thing is going to happen to me. I am the kind of person that hones in on the negative and focuses on it. It is hard to focus on the positive when I am always focusing on the negative. It is just the kind of person I am. That was part of my fear of going on this trip. A lot of these countries are impoverished. You hear about people getting robbed, raped, mugged and all that stuff. However, once you are there, you get an awareness about a place and you just pay attention to your surroundings. When I look back on it I think that really wasn't that bad. I think what the heck was I afraid of?

The next picture is in the town of Tulum where we were at a bakery at night and this whole group of men were on the street and they came up to us and started serenading us.



They were dressed in costumes and had guitars, mandolins and had a procession of town's people behind them. I figured it must have something to do with Christmas, but I don't really know what. It was just amazing, because they saw us come out of the bakery and immediately came up to us and started singing at us. It was amazing because you don't see anything like that in Grand Junction. They are all singing and being loud, they are proud and not embarrassed. Not like we Americans

would be, they are just loud and proud. It is a thing to be proud of, their religious heritage and the coming of Christmas. Everyone was so happy. We were laughing and they were laughing with us. It was just a great feeling.



The third picture is New Year's Eve, we are in Panajachel and getting ready to go out for the night. One of the girls on the trip is helping a little boy push his taco stand down the road. I loved her because she was not timid, when she sees something, she just goes for it. She just saw this little boy pushing this taco stand and decided to go help him. They start talking to each other even though they don't understand what each other is saying.

It was funny because this boy probably does this everyday of his life. I loved it because she is just so friendly and wouldn't care about something like that, she would still want to help even though this boy has pushed this taco stand all over town. She didn't hold anything back.

She made me think about how shy I am in situations like this. My mom is shy and that is the influence I have always had so it was just cool to go out with people who are just outgoing and not afraid of new experiences and embrace the new experiences. I admired how she didn't even think about it, she just did it. Whereas me, I would think about so much and then the moment would disappear. It was good. When I got back after this trip, it just affected everything in my life. I thought to myself this is it, I need to quit being complacent and unsure, just do it and trust yourself. If you make a mistake, who cares. I learned a lot of this from the trip by watching others on the trip. It made me reflect about my reactions to situations. These experiences taught me to not just admire other people but instead actually get out there and do it myself and admire myself for doing it. I started doing little things like smiling to people and talking to little kids. I loved how people in

the group were so comfortable with themselves. They were comfortable with being outgoing.

I think these trips create unique experiences for people to be outgoing because we were all out of our element, all outside our comfort zone. It allowed us to experiment with being comfortable in a strange environment and around people who do not speak our language. I think a lot of participants on the ISLA trip were outside their comfort zone. The trip allowed so many opportunities for new things and I got to see everyone in the group constantly adjusting to new things.

Now that I am back from the trip I feel much more free. I realized that people are basically the same everywhere you go. People just want a good life, they are good hearted. Now that I have that knowledge I look at people in Grand Junction and see that they are stuck in their everyday lives. I know longer care how people view me because I had such a profound experience, giving me insight and knowledge of a bigger world. I know this little box of a town is not the only part of my life anymore, this box is not what I am confined to anymore. I feel like I can go where ever I want and do whatever I want. I think this is why the ISLA experience was so freeing to me.

The next photo is a picture of me standing on a bridge in the rain forest with a huge smile on my face. It was a wildlife preserve in Panajachel. I did this all by myself even though I



was really scared to do it. I remember thinking I am going by myself, in a strange town, in a strange country, don't know the language and don't really know where I am going but I can kind of read the map and try and figure it out. I had this map and just started walking. I know the typical American Spanish such as where is the bathroom and such. I ended up being the only one in this huge preserve on the mountain side with a loop trail all the way through it and I just

started walking it. I was so happy. It was one of the happiest times of my whole life. I can't even explain it. I just felt so good because I was on this trip but I had been relying on the group to find hotels, communicate, what buses to take and find good places to eat. I was just going with the flow which was alright, however, on this hike I had no one to rely on. I was all by myself. It was such a little thing but it was huge to me. I thought I am doing this all by myself, walking through this rain forest, seeing little animals and sharing this moment with myself. I was so proud of myself.

This trip was something I always wanted to do but I never knew how to make it happen, never knew if it would happen. I had just got out of a crappy divorce and wanted something more out of life. So I made a list of things I wanted to do in my life and travel was one of them. I then saw the flyer for this trip and my brother loaned me the money and then through the outdoor program, all the doors opened up. All the things I didn't know the OP guided me through it. I didn't know what airports to fly in to or how to get

around once there. Then I learned how to do all these things on the ISLA trip and now I feel like I could do it on my own. I still don't like to think about it but I know I could do it. Just like I didn't know if I could do this trip but once I was doing it I realized you don't have to plan out a whole month of travel all at once. You just take it as it comes, one day at a time and it's not as stressful.

A lot of people talk about going on a trip and planning it all out, talking about staying in one place for three days then going to this place for another three days and so on. They usually have their transportation booked in advance. You do all this planning but what if you get to a place and you want to stay there longer. Well then you are out of luck because you already have your train ticket out of there. This was how I thought travel should be but you introduced me to a whole new way of travel, allowing me to go with the flow and it worked out really great. We could stay or we could go, like when we got to Panajachel, we decided to stay a little longer and it led to my great solo experience in the rain forest. I think free flow travel is the way to do it, have a general plan but do not set it in stone. We all get to decide where we go. I like this because you just don't know what life will throw at you, so you shouldn't lock yourself into something just because it is what a book says to do.

I now approach situations at home like I am traveling; I am so much more relaxed. For example I am going to take my kids to Ouray in a few weeks, I made a general plan of some things we could do but we set nothing in stone. I like the idea of getting up and leaving whenever, instead of leaving 9am sharp and being back at a certain time. Just fly by the seat of your pants. I am now so much more easy going.

One thing that was hard was missing my kids. I was ok at first but then I would see something really cool and I would want to share it with them. But to tell the truth I didn't really miss them that much till I knew I was coming home in a week. About the third week I really started to miss them and then there was Christmas and not being with them. That was really hard. But it all worked out, I was able to email them and myspace them whenever I wanted. I kind of held back till the day I was coming home and then it was so great to see them. They were so excited about seeing me. My oldest daughter thought it was so cool that I traveled. She was really excited for me and she really supported me to do this trip. Now my daughter, who is now 14 is always asking when can we go and travel somewhere. We are now planning a trip somewhere, we are saving money and we

will probably go this coming November to maybe Argentina. My younger son, who is 9, only wants to be in front of a video screen but I plan on getting him traveling anyway. He might get that travel bug after all. We will see.



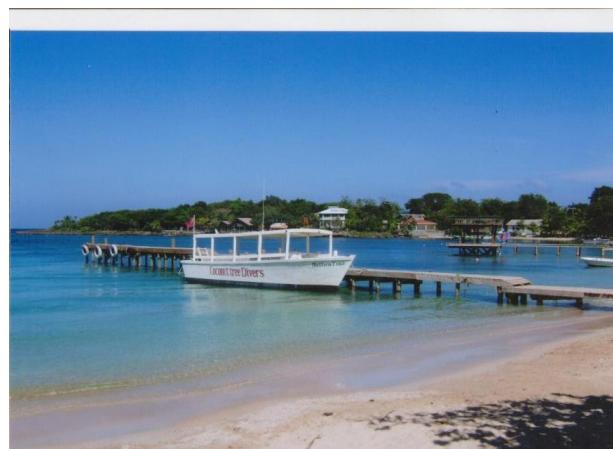
The next picture is in Panajachel with some girls selling things to us. I remember this picture, we had just gotten into town from a windy bus ride, I was really motion sick from

the. It was worse than a roller coaster for me. I love this picture because again it showed how outgoing some people in the group were towards the locals. They really tried to communicate with the local kids even though they couldn't say a whole lot. They were just so cute and friendly with the local kids. I love this picture because that is not how I am but it is how I aspire to be. It is just so uncomfortable for me to be that way for me. Those little local girls really liked the attention, having someone be kind to them. Everyone likes kindness. The people in our group may not have bought anything but they really made an attempt to connect.

This photo is of Roatan, Honduras. It was one of my favorite places on the whole trip. I am glad we stayed the longest there. This was just a little restaurant on the beach with a beautiful sunset. It is so tropical with palm trees and this is always what I wanted to see. I love the warmth. It was like a dream come true. They were playing Bob Marley and we were all singing. I remember thinking this is the way it should be. Give me a margarita and I will live here the rest of my life. It was warm, quite, very rural, just that small town feel. The locals were so friendly and low key, easy going and relaxed. Even the people

who were working seemed very relaxed. There is just so much to experience and what we saw I realize is just a small slice of the pie. There is so much more out there to explore and see, so many great people. I saw this kind of connecting thread throughout the human race, that most people are good hearted. Most people do not want to cause other people harm, they just want to live their life in a good way. I was never really conscious about this

before the ISLA trip. I think before I would just focus on myself and family and now I often wonder how people are doing back in places like Panajachel, especially the kids and the dogs.



This photo is also on Roatan, it is the beautiful cove where we first learned how to put on our scuba masks. I never thought in my whole life I would learn how to scuba dive. I was never interested in learning in a pool, what fun is that. Diving was amazing and scary at the same time. I don't know why I was scared, maybe because it was new. I really had that nervous energy when I first went out and then someone said put your mask on and

look under the water. So I did and wow, there was this whole new world underneath me that I had only seen in magazines. I would have never known I was so close to it. I had a little trouble going down because of my ears. It was awesome and amazing. It was one of

the most memorable things I did on the trip. I ended up snorkeling every day after the dive trip. The snorkeling was amazing too. I saw the little conch shells walking along the ocean floor. I never even realized things lived in those shells before. I had never seen so many fish.

This is a picture of me and some of the girls on a beach at night in Nicaragua. I remember thinking that this wasn't knew anymore, it was now a way of life for me. We had been

traveling for so long now that I was now comfortable. I was not in awe all the time, allowing me to soak in the surrounding even more. Finally here I could just soak it all in. I am here and this is amazing. I could finally relax with that knowledge and not feel like I had to take everything in. I look different in the photo; I look more relaxed and confident. Going traveling for a month is the perfect amount of time. Many people take ten days for a trip but you don't

really get to do anything during that time. A month gives you time to get accustomed to your new surroundings. I didn't ever really want to go home; instead I wanted everyone I knew to come to me. I wanted my friends and family to get out of their comfort zones and come and experience something new like I was doing. The funny thing is that the place was almost like a natural disaster because the cruise ships had stopped coming to this port. This beach we were on was not even pretty, it smelled bad and the wind was always blowing the sand but it was still so cool to be there. I remember the water being really cold because we were on the Pacific side now and I was stung by a jelly fish. I was so excited to get stung by a jelly fish, even though it hurt, I did it.



This picture is still in Nicaragua around Granada up in the rain forest. We went zip lining and that is something I always wanted to do. It was so cool, when do you ever have the opportunity to go zip lining in Nicaragua. Again I am tackling another fear of mine, a great fear of heights. I became really good at facing fear, a fear of not knowing. It was always a fear of not knowing. Like what am I going to do if I can't find a place to sleep or eat? All these things stopped me before I even started and it sucks to be that way because you miss out on so much. I now don't think it is impossible to travel, I really think I can travel anywhere now. I remember going with some of the girls to get our own place to stay. I kind of was in the background but I went with the flow

and we ended up staying in some really neat tree houses. I just don't think you would find such great places to stay if you prearranged everything. I remember we were on the balcony of the tree houses looking down at a church service, listening to them sing in a foreign language; they were so into their religion.

The last picture is of a huge lake in a caldera, an extinct volcano in Nicaragua. The place was so peaceful; the owner had a little shack that told us to be tranquillo. The beach was

great, it was full of pumice stones that I wanted to bring back to my friends because I had gotten them in the middle of Nicaragua in a giant caldera. How cool is that. I didn't even know these kinds of lakes existed. Just the thought of myself swimming in a lake, in the crater of a volcano, the thought never even crossed my mind. I never even knew. I did that. It was just a really good empowering trip and I would do it again in a heartbeat. This trip really opened my eyes to the world. I

really feel like world travel is possible and it made we want my kids to experience travel. I want to take my kids with me next time. It is so important. I end with this picture because it gives me a sense of peace and that is what I felt from this trip.



Appendix I: Tim's Interview



The photos are no particular order, I am kind of random. This photo was on our China trip two years ago in the summer of 2007. This is a photo of an overnight bus trip from Guilin to Hong Kong. I thought it was interesting because it was the first time I ever travel on a bus that you actually slept on overnight. It was interesting. If you look at the size of the people over there you can see it is a bit uncomfortable, the Chinese are small. Us being Americans, European descent, we are crammed

in this little bus, we had to throw our legs over the back of the seat, kind of spread around to be comfortable. I thought it was an interesting concept for traveling. It was nice to recline and pass the time away. It was pretty cool for long road trips rather than traveling in uncomfortable seats. Even though it was small, it was still pretty comfortable once you got situated. It was a great way to see the country side and just relax.

Transportation is a huge issue on these trips. It is usually tight, sweaty, tends to be uncomfortable and at times can be scary. I thought about this when I saw Greg Mortenson, when he was talking about being worried about going to Pakistan with the terrorist. He said not really, what I worry about is dying in a traffic accident which is far more dangerous than being killed by terrorist or anything else going on. I was reflecting back on that and that is right. This will be my forth international trip and twice on trips we had close calls. In China we flew around a corner when we were coming back from the Dragons Backbone with all the terraces. There was another time in Africa that these guys were just passing by us blindly around corners, going fast. Then we came across an accident not long after it had happened. That is what tends to worry me more. It can be kind of crazy but at the same time I think it is amazing in contrast to America how traffic kind of flows. There are no traffic lights, few stop signs, traffic just moves and you get into a flow and it just kind of works out. Even though people drive aggressive, they let you in, it seems to just work out. I come back here and I have a hard time adjusting. I don't want to stop at the stop sign or stop light. I look and no one is coming, I just want to keep on going. More like it is everywhere else we have been around the world.

Even though there is a risk involved with transportation, I would much rather rely on them than on me to rent a car and worry about it myself. Because they know the roads, the signals and even though they tend to drive fast or what would appear at time reckless, I think it's much safer than if I got in there and tried to do it. I would be putting myself at more risk. That is what they do; they go and drive in these conditions all the time. I would probably be causing accidents because I would be driving more conservative and

be worried about it. To the locals, they have been doing it all their lives so it is second nature.



This a picture of a couple of bushels of bananas that were cut off. They were set up against the wall. I liked it because it was a contrast between the yellow background and the green bananas. I think we both shot that photo. It just caught my eye and I wanted to capture it. I reminded me that hey I am really in the Caribbean. That was the first time I had ever been down there. I always thought of it being full of the vibrant colors. And then the contrast that I had never seen bananas outside the store. I thought oh here is where they come from. They get wacked off a tree and get sold. It was a wake up, you're down here in the Caribbean and it's going to be a different experience. I am used to buying bananas as three or four or five or six and they are all yellow and pretty much ready to go. I am looking at these bananas and thinking wow, I always thought bananas grew in these little pods

on a tree as opposed to a hundred on these multi tiered bushels. I thought that I am glad I am not out in the field whacking these bananas off and carrying them.

The food is much fresher when traveling, it tastes better. I really noticed it on our China trip, the second day our when we were out on the Everest Base camp trek, we stopped for lunch along the trail. We wanted some chips or french-fries. We were waiting and wondering what was taking so long and the guy was out in the field picking the potatoes. He comes back in, cleans them off, fries them up and it's the best. It was from field to mouth. When I go to McDonalds and get some French-fries, I think about the potatoes being in Idaho a month ago, they were trucked, they were flash frozen, then sat in a freezer, then cooked up. These other ones were bang right away. The same thing when we were in Mexico, everything was really fresh and my girlfriend had noticed that everything is really good and fresh. It was all right out of the fields. I also found out that in Europe it is the same way, people shop each day. We were talking about why cabinets are so small. They don't need it because the go to the market every day or every other day. It goes from the field, it is in the market for a day or two and then it is in your belly. In America, it is not, it is trucked all over the place. Even thought the food is more expensive, it really tastes better. Part of that is that they tend to grow more organic and it tends to be much fresher. There is very little time between when the crop is picked from the field and the time it goes to market and to your stomach. It was the same in Jamaica, the fruits were from there and they tasted so good. I don't think they used near the same amount of pesticides and herbicides or all the other stuff that tends to taint it.

I never really thought about food like this before I traveled. I just never thought about it much. I never had an outside experience, so I thought the way we did food was the same all over the world. When you go away and have that different experience, you understand that is not the case. There are other ways to do things. Wow this is different, better or it could be worse. I think it is really good to get out because if you don't have a different perspective, you think everything is like the US. In reality you would be gravely mistaken.



These were four boys in their uniforms in the afternoon in Montego Bay, Jamaica. They were coming home from school, you could tell because so many kids were walking around. I thought it was interesting, since I teach school, how education is perceived and how the children perceive education and the way they are about it in the United States as opposed to other places around the world. I believe everywhere I have

been so far, with the exception of the United States, all the kids wear uniforms. Sometimes that may sound like so what if they wear uniforms. To me there is something about it. I can't put my finger on it. You want to make a greater amount of equality between the students from a social stand point. One problem is with gangs and gang representation, so it causes friction. Other times it is socio-economic where some kid had \$150 pair of shoes and some other kid has some sandals on because they can't afford anything else. Then you get these comparisons between the students. Uniforms tend to make students more equal so we can focus more on education instead that we are all different. Lets focus on the common of goal of learning and not have so many distractions in the classroom. Sometimes it may not sound like much but those kinds of things matter. Kids look at other kids, they make comments, and kids pick on other kids based on what they wear. If you can remove that it tends to take one of the distractions away. It takes one of the problems out of the classroom. There is also an expense standpoint also, that they are not buying high dollar tennis shoes and pants. Here is a standard uniform; it is affordable to most people. It just makes sense to do that.

At times in the States I thought we should go to uniforms. I would like it because I wouldn't have to get up in the morning and wonder what I am going to wear today. There is also a sense of community and commonality. We are all on the same team, we all wear the same uniform. We are all working together as a community, in this case, a learning community.

Some other thing to consider is that in the States we all get free education and in many parts of the developing world you have to pay for school. There could be in certain ways a status associated with the uniform, saying that I come from a family that is well off enough to send me to school. I don't know if that is good thing or a bad thing. Part of me

says anything worth having is worth paying for. But at the same time how do you deal with kids that are smart enough to go to school but can't afford it financially. There is public school in Jamaica but you have to pay for it, even after kindergarten. If you went to public school you had to pay. There were some schools with higher tuition or less. That wasn't the case in Africa, usually you received the first years free but if you went to high school you ended up paying for it yourself. The school that we went to in Nepal I think those students had to pay as well. It was a private school but they do have public schools too. It is just like here in the States. Now that I think about it, it seems like the private schools in the States tend to have uniforms.

I don't think it would work in the US because we are too independent. It is part of our psyche to just stand on your own two feet. You're the commander of your own ship. In most places in the world it is much more communal with the idea of working together. Here in the States you are much more your own person, you don't need to rely on anybody else. It is just kind of woven into who we are as Americans. The uniform can symbolize a lot more, between community and individuality.



This is when we are in Lhasa in front of the Potala Palace. I thought it was funny. We were the only westerners there or there were very few. We saw lots of other Chinese and Japanese and folks of oriental background. I thought this was so funny because it was kind of the opposite feel. My friend is standing there with all these guys. They all wanted him to be in the picture with them. They were like hey look at the

token white guy. We were like a novelty to them, that is what I felt like. I just thought it was like the flip side of culture, we are in their country to see exotic cultures and then they see us as exotic. We were the token foreigners in their pictures just like they were the foreigners in our pictures. I thought the contrast was really funny. What it says to me is that even though we have all these differences we are still so similar to everyone else. It's like we are all just wearing different color suits, we are all very similar on the inside and with the stuff that we do but based on where we live, we are set apart culturally. But deep down we are a lot more similar than different. That is why I chose this photo because it tends to get pointed out during travel, the fact that we are so similar. When we traveled to Jamaica we were able to have more depth conversational wise and I really learned about their culture, especially about what mass tourism does to their culture. What does a resort do to their culture? You can have this conversation and find out that the problems they face, they are very similar to what we are struggling with in our own country. They are losing jobs just like Americans are losing jobs to the Chinese. People are losing out because of this trade and interconnectedness that we have. In many ways you see how interwoven we are and when we have an economic crisis in one place it

effects the whole interwoven globe. They all want the same thing, they want to work, have food, have a place to live, and they have dreams, goals and aspirations.

At the same time that I see that they want many things, they are also happy to do with less than what we have as Americans. They want more but at the same time they seem to be ok with where they are at in life. They really just want basic necessities and there idea of it is different than mine. A basic necessity to some Americans is I need my Audi S4 to get me to work and back and most Chinese would be happy with a bicycle. We still have the same wants; maybe it is just a different level of the same wants. It kind of varies.

They are happy with a small TV but I may want a 52 inch plasma screen with a Blue Ray player to be happy because that is what has been drained in my brain from marketers and corporate America. It tells me if I don't have this I won't be satisfied. Chicks won't dig me as much. That is what we are about in this country, materialism. You know it when you walk down the street or you drive around and you see all this wealth in America.

When we are in Kampala, Uganda or Jinja, the kids are all running up the street, happy and go lucky and they don't have much. They just sit outside their house and say how is it going. They live in dirt floor shacks and after talking with them, they say things are good. I have a roof over my head. In America, people say they need a bigger house, they have to keep up with the Joneses. There is a different psychology piece to that and I don't know why that is and if I reflect back on it over the last 20 years. We have become much more in need of immediate gratification than other cultures and people. We have become much more materialistic and less, I don't know if friendly is the right word, it just tends to be more about me, me, me. It doesn't feel like it used to be that way. I am looking at what people's expectations are and even my expectations are when buying a car and having a house when I graduated from school and working the last twenty years as opposed to when I see my students graduate from high school and what they are driving and the stuff that they get and their expectations. I read an article that said kids expected higher wages, expected to get promoted faster than people two decades before them. I asked myself why this is. These people are 19 years old and expect to be managers and making the big money. Before, they were happy with entry level positions and making a few grand and making their way up. Now they think it is owed to them. More people in our society think things are owed to them rather than I have to work and earn it. They think because I showed up and never missed a day of college class that I should get an A in that class even though I did C's on my test because I was there every day and I took notes. That says a lot to me about who we are as a culture as opposed to if you talk and look at the way other people in the world value education and work and what they expect. There is a vast difference. We are lazy. Americans are lazy.

I am not saying other cultures are not lazy or workaholics, but lately there is this kind of piece that we have slowly worked away from, the hard protestant work ethic. That was jammed into my brain, work hard, save and use your savings productively. That is what you did; you worked hard, played hard, you saved your money and lived within your means. If you didn't have the means then you didn't buy it.

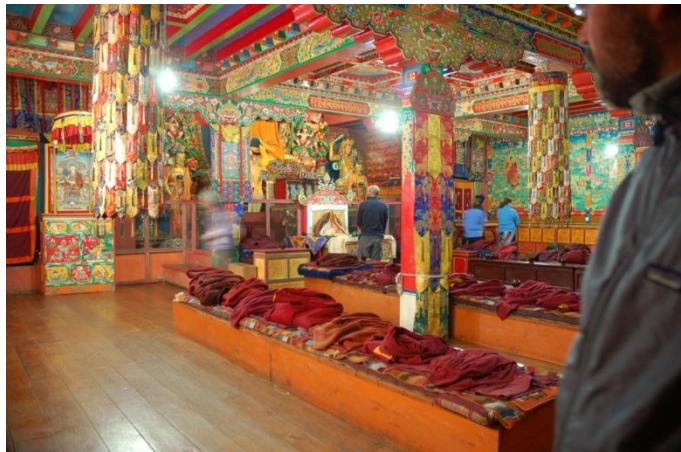
Happiness and fulfillment in the American culture tends to be equated with having stuff. Right. In other cultures, because they don't necessarily have the money, I think they

define happiness differently. Happiness to them is community, family, even if there is no money, they will have that piece of fulfillment because they have these relationships, they have these connections. In America I don't necessarily think that is the case. We go back to being individuals and if I don't have this whatever or I can't buy this, I am not as happy even though I may have family and friends because that is the way we kind of think about things. It goes back to this core materialism. I think it has become much more prevalent and much more rampant in this country than what it used to be. I don't think that is the case abroad even though people have desires but their wants are much more basic. How about a refrigerator or a washing machine? In our country, we already have a washing machine but now you want the new front loader with steam. Why am I not content with this other machine? I don't know why that is. I don't believe it is like this in other countries that we see around the world when we travel.

Everyone abroad is always waving, talking and seem happy but here in America everyone seems grumbly, saying what are you looking at. I have never been in another country and have someone say to me, "What are you looking at punk." I get that in the U. S. if I look at someone in the street or they may ask if I want to fight. I don't know what that is about. It is bizarre.

When we came back from Africa, I specifically remember I was outside of this little place where I was renting a place at Plateau Valley. About three years ago. I had this feeling about being connected with the world that I had never felt before. There was this pure sense of euphoric satisfactions that I had never had before. I just felt connected as opposed the feeling that this world is a really big place and all this stuff is strange. The world doesn't really feel big anymore or exotic. As we travel around I feel more connected, more natural, as if it is an extension. Even thought I am getting on a plane and flying 7000 miles around the world where the people are different, cultures are different, things will be different on certain levels but on the fundamental levels we are all still the same. We have dreams, we have ambitions, we have goals, we are working for stuff, and we have different political views. But it always seems like you can find common grounds when you talk with people and common interests. So there is this connection whether I live here or am talking to someone 8000 miles away, you realize that you have these similarities, you just feel more connected. We are all interwoven and connected together even though we don't do things the same way or wear the same clothes. We may not believe in all the same ideas but I think there are a lot of common beliefs that we do have regardless of where we are at in the world. After all these trips I feel so much more connected, I come back and it is so cool, it becomes more like you are going home when you are traveling, going to see people you haven't seen in a long time, going to have some great experiences. It is like going and having fun with some friends you haven't seen in awhile. Let's share and connect.

This is a picture of a Buddhist monastery in Tangboche, on the third or fourth day of the Everest trek in Nepal. It is the third or fourth largest monastery in Nepal. We could see Mt. Amadabla right outside. It was the first time I had ever been in a place of worship besides a Christian church. It was interesting to watch the monks pray and see the difference and contrast between cultures, the colors, the vibrant and symbolic colors and



what they mean. They had different processes and practices. I just sat there and listened to them pray.

Again if we look at the interconnectedness, they believe in a higher being or higher entities and so do we. They have their prayers and chants just like we do. They have their place of worship, it is elegant with important colors and symbols and so do we. Even though the religions are different with their different gods and

operational standpoints, there are these fundamental core pieces that are the same. Again we are the same, we believe in a higher power, we have our customs and practices, we have things that connect us to a higher spirit and they do to. Again even though it is different exteriorly, underneath or inside we are much more similar. Because the way that we are interconnected with one another.

Sometimes I feel a little guilty, like I shouldn't be taking pictures in this place. Is it disrespectful to this religion or culture, then at the same time, as a teacher and an educator, how do I bring this back so people can see? I just think it is important to bring these photos back and talk about these differences, especially with kids and other people. I haven't been as in depth as I wanted to. I always do a slide show but ultimately over time I want to develop specific lessons around the traveling experiences. I want to integrate my travels more with international studies. Showing slide shows is a good way to do that and then talk about those experiences and use those discussions as a spring board into other activities. Maybe things like food and dress, I am still feeling it out as we go along.

Some of my students are interested in the places I have gone. They will start asking me where haven't you been or I will hear the students say, wow you have been there. It was something vicarious, even though they hadn't been there, they knew someone who had and it made this connective piece for the students. I thought it was kind of interesting because after awhile they would expect me to know everything about everywhere and everyone. They would say things like, "What is it like in Papua New Guinea" and I would say, I don't know, I haven't been there yet. The students start to ask where I am going each summer and they think it is really cool. Then questions will come up and it raises interest. Some of them have questions and some of them don't.

I did a slide show on Jamaica and some kids were really interested. They would ask me if I was going to travel more and other kids would just fade out, texting on their cell phones and such. Some people would think that was disrespectful, but I didn't see it that way. I think you are at where you're at. If the slide show doesn't have an interest for you, then that is cool, they just don't have an interest in it because they are not there. But some of the kids really enjoyed it and I felt like I did my job. I just want to get a few kids

interested, like I am planting seeds, and then those ideas can spread. These kids that I have talked to about other cultures, then hopefully they will talk about that with someone else. Then it multiplies outward, but it does take time to do that.

The way the OP travels is different than other traveling, does anyone else in the country do independent style travel with student because I don't think so, I haven't ever seen it. Everyone else in the world travels like this. When we traveled, we brought a lonely planet book and just took off. We would just jump on a bus, get off and find a place to stay. I think it is so much more rewarding. When I come back I feel really confident, like I can go anywhere and do anything. If I want to pick up and fly around the world it is not that big of deal anymore. I still get a little tense, like thinking about going to Egypt, I am a little on edge about that but I know I will get there and things will work out. Stuff will just flow, decisions will happen and things will just go. I think it is good to have that experience because if you get over that little bit of fear then it is not that big of deal because you are not going to get eaten by the monster. It is no big deal. I am a little stressed but I will deal with it and move on. I think it is good for all these students and especially myself to be reacquainted with overcoming fear and being able to figure things out.

I also find myself being part of a larger group, outside the normal group of travelers, I feel like I am part of a larger community of travelers. We meet people along the way, other independent travelers and you realize we are all in the same boat and we were all out looking for the same thing. To have adventures, to have authentic experiences, to be connected, to broaden your horizons and to look at life and live life in a different fashion. It is much different than working 50 weeks of the year and then flying to some resort and having no other connection with anybody outside the resort.

You get to interact with the culture, for example when we were sitting on the bus in China, going to Dali from Lijiang, we took out our phrase books and the local would teach us how to count in Chinese on the bus. We would just show them the book and start learning. Where else are you going to get that experience or learn how to say things? Like in the open markets, learning how to haggle and deal with people. Having those interactions, we are so up close and personal. When we were in that Chinese restaurant in Lhasa, they didn't speak a lick of English; the menu was not in English either. We just took out the phrase book and learned the words for chicken and noodle. You definitely get close and personal with the culture. Our trips are much more different than someone going to Jamaica and staying at Sandals Resort and never leaving. In my mind how can you ever say you went to Jamaica, that experience could have been Miami, Florida because you never actually got out, so where is your international trip or experience. Sometimes those resorts will frighten you and say not to go out because the locals will rob you and rip you off, or rape you or whatever. Another example is the Fromers Travel books, which cater towards Sandals type tourist, the book said not to go downtown Montego Bay, heck we hung out downtown for hours. It was not a big deal.

In certain ways I feel safer in foreign countries than I do my own, especially in bigger cities. I remember being on a New York City subway and not trusting anybody and being

really scared. I was worried about getting mugged, looking in the shadows. Compared to when we were in Kingston, Jamaica, one of the most dangerous cities in the world, it seemed like no big deal walking around there. It is so weird. I worry about stuff more in America than I do when I international travel. We go to all the cities, and not to say that something couldn't happen, it's just different, I tend to be more at ease overseas and I don't know why that is.

I think some of it is a feel that you develop over time; you just develop this experienced gut. The more that we travel, the more that I kind of get that. I think about the feelings I get, does it have a good vibe or not. You can't really put your finger on it but there is something inside telling you that, based on all these experiences, that this is ok, it has good energy about it. I think it takes travel to get that gut instinct about places and you get that much more when you travel independent because you are making your own decisions and becoming self reliant, relying on your own decisions, whereas if you travel with a travel company, somebody else is always making the decisions for you. So you don't get that experience, you don't get that learned gut, that learned energy, that learned sensation that you do when you do it by yourself. That is part of it also, you can look back on your experiences and feel confident. In other types of travel you don't get that, so you are missing out. If you went everywhere in the world with a packaged tour, someone always picking you up at the airport and doing everything for you, how would you learn how to go some place. Especially if you didn't have the money for a packaged tour and you had to do it yourself. Through these trips you really learn how to travel independently. Some trips are defiantly harder than others but for the most part I would not hesitate in going most places in the world. Obviously there are a few places I would steer away from but most places I feel comfortable just grabbing my girlfriend and going. As we get ready for the trip to the Middle East, many people are surprised that we are going there. I say I am going to places like Syria and people ask me if it is safe. I tell them not to believe everything you hear in the news. I tell them we are not going to the Syrian and Iraq border. From what I have read, Syria is one of the safest places in the world. In the Middle East, crime and theft is very low and the people are very open and friendly. I am really excited to see what their perception is of Americans and how we will be received and how they interact with us.



This is sunrise in Guilin, China. I thought this was cool for a couple of reasons. I had always seen pictures of these karst limestone formations. Just to be there gave me a great feel. And then you're always looking for the money shot. The biggest thing was that it was six o'clock in the morning and we are on this terrace looking out and there are all these older Chinese, 50's and 60's, out there with their music on doing

calisthenics. Where do you see that in America? I don't get up and go to the gym at the crack of dawn and if I do it is just a few young guys before they go to work. There were people all over doing tai chi, doing some yoga and other exercise for at least half an hour or more. Then they go off and start their day. I just thought it was interesting, how important it is to have a mission in life to keep the body fit. By keeping their body strong, it helps keeps their minds strong. It gives them a purpose. We just don't do that in this country. I thought how amazing is this place to exercise. Who the hell would want to be on a stair master? I want to be out looking at that sunrise when I am doing my exercise rather than looking at a wall or whatever picture is in the gym. It is amazing that they get out there and do this stuff, while people in America spend all their exercise time in gyms. All the older people I know don't necessarily get out and exercise the way these Chinese elder were doing. They may go for a walk but they are not exercising like those Chinese. It was just a feeling being there looking at those karst formations, it was green, humid and it had a different vibe to it. Certain places like this do have a different vibe. It is very fulfilling. There are certain places that you go that you really feel fulfilled. I really felt satisfied and there wasn't a material piece that went along with that. It wasn't like I bought this big screen TV and was happy with the picture. When I am in my rocking chair in my 90's I will have these moments to keep me warm and satisfied with my life experiences. It is all about the experiences, those are the only things you take with you, your experiences and your education. Nothing else matters, these things can never be taken away from you. If you have the experiences, they will always be with you.

There is something about international travel that is very satisfying. I get a rush or a buzz. I joked about this before; I don't do drugs because I do international travel. It is a whole lot cheaper and I don't have to worry about getting thrown in jail. It is true, when I travel;

I get a buzz, something inside. I don't know how to explain it.



This picture was from our Nepal trek, this is Nuptse, right next to Mt. Everest. Of all the places I have been to in the world thus far, if I had to pick one, that Everest trek, there was just something about it. It just felt so good. I was just so amazed. We were at 18,000 feet and looking at these peaks that are way above you. You think about the fact that you are 4000 feet higher than the peaks in Colorado and the grandeur, magnitude and the deepness of the blue sky, the contrast between the mountains, and the cool air, and the psychological aspect of being half way around the world in the Himalayas. It is just wow! I think about that trip all the time. God I would love to go back and climb a bigger peak, hang out there and do a bigger trek. The simplicity of the living, being isolated but also being connected is amazing. I think it

was Tangboche, that I could have gotten connected on the internet and emailed my girlfriend, skyped my parents and stuff like that. We were five days up the trail, twenty or thirty miles in and it was remote, but in certain ways we were no more than a click away. It is amazing how technology works. Your remote in many ways but yet you are so close to home in a different way. I think about how it would have been fifty years ago, when Sir Edmund Hillary was there. They would need to send a letter but now it so easy to connect, like whey you found out you were going to have a daughter at 18,000 feet, 12,000 miles away. You made a simple phone call and you found out just like that. I also think about walking in the footsteps of old climbers and being just as amazed as they were. It was hard to wrap my mind around the grandeur of the scenery, with the glaciers, the mountain peaks and the effort of getting there and all the stuff that goes along with that.

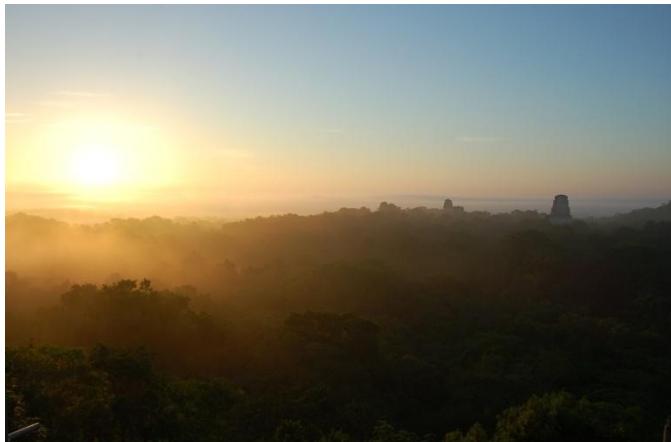
The amazing thing about this trek is that we hadn't even planned it. I thought we were going to boat the Sun Kosi River. I didn't know about this until I was at the airport and I got an email from you saying that we were going trekking. The monsoons are coming in late so we are going to boot the rafting trip and do the Everest trek instead. I hadn't brought my trekking pack but I just made do with my day pack and called it good. That is why it is really cool. When you travel on the fly, you are not locked into anything, so when something comes along, you don't miss out on opportunities. You can just get up and do what you want, rather than having pre arranged and paid for something in advance and not being able to get a refund. You have to be able to take advantage of opportunities when the window opens. You have to be able to get on this train or bus and be able to leave tomorrow to make things happen. I love the way doors open and opportunities present themselves when you are traveling. Plus we have the OP luck. I swear there is something about it. Everything always works out. It seems like it works out more so on OP trips than other trips that I have been on. I have been on other trips where I have had more problems but on OP trips everything just seems to flow. The group dynamics have always been good. The unstructured, unplanned trip is the way to go but it can be hard for some people to deal with. Like my girlfriend likes to plan everything, when we were in France, we had to buy train tickets in advance. I don't like getting sucked back into planning everything out. I understand there is a certain amount of importance to planning, like you need to get your Syrian visas in advance because you can't get them at the border and you don't want to totally rely on OP luck to get 16 people past the border. So there is some pre-planning that needs to be done, but outside of getting some money and a plane ticket, how much do you really need to plan. Most people have to have a plan or they get frustrated. I was talking with my mother and she wanted to know where I was going to be and on what days. I just told her that I would be in Cairo a couple days, the Sinai for a week, Jordan for a week, Syria for a week and so on. Outside of that I can't be any more specific because I don't know. We have a rough idea of what we want to see and the rest of it will just present itself along the way. What good does it do to plan because you don't know till you get there? For a lot of people that is a very unique and unconventional idea, especially for Americans, because we are organizers and planners, wanting everything all mapped out. But it doesn't need to be that way. Things will work out anyway.

Now I tend to be a little more free flow than I was before. I still worry about stuff and I think it is just part of my nature. I am fighting genetics. My parents are planners, so are my grandparents and I see that in them and I see it in myself. It still comes out, but now I have become much more relaxed about things, and more cognizant about how I can stress about things I can't do anything about. For example I am still afraid of flying. I don't know why. It is completely irrational from what I have read and everything. It is bizarre. In many ways ignorance is bliss but now that I have this knowledge I start to put things together in my head. When I am on a plane I start to wonder if the guy working on this plane is getting along with his wife or if he slept good and messed up somehow with repairs and it will cause some kind of problem. Did the pilot drink and is he getting along with his wife. All this random shit just goes through my brain. Then I counterbalance everything with facts like on any given day worldwide there are 9000 take-offs and landings. How many accidents do you hear on the news? I ask myself what the probability of me dying in a plane crash. I have a much greater chance of dying in Grand Junction, getting hit while riding my bicycle. I think about all this stuff in my head but it really doesn't matter because what matters is this moment and this point right now. Things are all good.



This is that place between Katmandu and Lhasa, where we got stuck because they were doing roadwork. It was the first day on our land cruiser trek. It is just right across the border in China. I don't know why I picked this picture, I thought it was kind of cool because if you look at it up close. This is how we see ourselves because it is all in focus but as the prayer wheels drift off, they become blurrier,

but still all the stuff here is the same, but we can still see stuff in the future but we haven't gotten their yet so it is blurry. We can't focus on it but we know certain aspects are ahead in the future whether they are life or travel or whatever it might be. If we start looking into the future, I don't know what is going to happen 20 years from now but I know what is going to happen tomorrow. Today I am Grand Junction, tomorrow I am flying to Paris, and then I will be in Africa, so you kind of have an idea. There is this path in front of you, this path called life but you do not know how it is going to turn out and you don't know where it is going to end and along the way the wheels spin and you have various rides. Some good, some bad but it is all about learning, emotion, and trust and trusting your instincts and knowing your own truths, and knowing that all these things are going to work out for my best good. If I die tomorrow in a plane crash then I guess my job here is done and if I don't, my job here must continue. So what is that? In my case it is to educate youth and to help with new ideas and concepts based on my experiences. This could be information that could help my students one day.



This is sunrise at Tikal, Guatemala. I had wanted to go to Tikal for a long time. There was just something about it, a mystique. There are also other cool Mayan ruins but for me there was something about the mystique of Tikal and Guatemala. I just remember wanting to go there. We got up at 2 o'clock in the morning; I only had a few hours of sleep. It was a 2 hour bus ride from Flores

to the park and then a half hour hike. I remember sitting there watching the sun rise, thinking this moment is so cool. You could hear the monkeys screaming, the mist was rolling in, it was cool, you could see the birds and I wondered what this would be like every day. Like if I was a Mayan and what my life would be like if I was living here. What would I do on the daily bases? It was a time and a period of reflection and pontificating about what things might be, asking myself why am I here, what is my goal, what am I going to do next year, what is my purpose in life. It was a really reflective time, just being there and looking out at the beauty and watching how the sun came up and how it changed. I was taking a photo every few minutes and I thought about how life is not in focus some time and then it comes into focus.

I thought about the movie *Apocalypto*, how the historical Mayans had similar lives. They got up, did work, had families, they had dreams, goals and aspirations. People came, went, died, war, famine, all the stuff we face today. The Mayans faced the same things a thousand years ago. Power, structure and struggle, monuments to god are just like we have today. The core fundamental pieces don't change, they are the same. Religion, politics, hierarchy, institutions, economics and all that stuff is the same.

So much of what we concentrate on in America is difference, instead of seeing things as the same, way much more than we should. For example, when we are looking at differences, you have African Americans, Italian Americans, Native Americans, and I just think that we are all Americans. Why do we need this label, this branding? Who cares? We are Americans. I don't know why we tend to want to focus on differences rather than our commonalities. I try to focus on similarities but so often we have difference pointed out to us like labeling people. I saw this one video on Tibet and afterwards you just wanted to nuke the Chinese but then I caught myself, remembering my time there and realized it was just the government and not the people. You sometimes get drawn into these feeling of difference but then you think back on your travels and realize that most people did not feel any hate towards the Tibetans, they were just people trying to get by.

Americans tend to be xenophobic. At the gym some guy was raging on the Afghans and saying something negative about Islam. He said we should just kill them all. He said they are all terrorist. Then I started to talk to him about the situation over there and he came

away from the conversation changed. He just didn't have any real information about the area other than what he saw on TV.

I now have the ability to catch myself because I have been there and experienced other cultures and places. I can reflect back on those experiences and remember what it was like, as opposed to people that have never been out of the country. If you just question people about their hatred towards other cultures, they can never really come up with a good reason. They are really superfluous. They lack a perspective of another culture. I think about some of my students that are openly racist. I would love to get them on one of these trips. They would definitely be outside their comfort zone and I would definitely like seeing it.

This was on day three on our way to Lhasa. This was where we stopped and visited that family with all the solar panels, a Tibetan family. They invited us into their home, offered us tea. We just kind of hung out. It was this really weird experience to me because it was so surreal. We communicated completely with hand signals. They didn't speak English

and we couldn't speak Tibetan, but yet we hung out together and got things across. We smiled at each other. It was interesting looking at the stuff that they had. They were just so friendly. They didn't know anything about us; they just invited us into their home. It was a totally random experience that I would have never really thought about doing. I really like the traditional dress, the yak dung stuck to the building for burning for fuel and

cooking their food. I thought it was really interesting having that cultural experience and their openness. It just happened.



This was in Lijiang at night, we were playing with our cameras, doing some night shots. This is what I think about when I think about traditional China, the colors and the reds, the upturned corners of the buildings and the spiritual significance of that. It was just cool. It had a really warm feel to it. The gold and the lighting, I was just thinking how lucky I was to be there at that moment and time. It was great to be able to take a photo and come back

and reflect on it. I got a satisfaction feel. I have been there and done that and it was really cool. I don't know why I picked this picture, I have just always liked it. I just remember being there and I felt like I had stepped back a few centuries. This place we stayed at had

this much older feel; more like China was a couple hundred years ago. Then you would go across the street and be in modern China with sky scrapers, buses, and all the noise of the city. In the old part of Lijiang, it was all walking, paper lights, and crooked streets. We found this paper factory that had been making paper for centuries in the same spot, using the same processes. There was a strong connection with the past. This picture kind of reminds me that the past and the present always live side by side.



There was no other way to get the beer up to high camp.

I just think that I am so glad I won life's lottery, and that I live in America, a white male American. What are the chances? We have 6.2 billion people and 300 million Americans. If you split it out and say it is a fifty percent chance to be one of the 150 million American males. How have we not won the lottery compared to everybody else? One in 47 million is like winning the power ball. We have all won the lottery in a certain way.



When I show my students these photos, they can't believe it. They are just amazed like I was. They say they would never do something like that. I don't know if I could actually

This picture, all I got to say is holy shit. This is when we were in Nepal. The porters there carry up to a hundred kilos, or roughly 220 pounds, on their back. I could not imagine it. I don't know how many cases of beer are here but at least 20 or more cases. On that trek you got to see the porters and see what they did. They did a ton of work to get everything back there and for a few dollars. We saw porters everyday humping in the supplies. You could see how the weight had affected some of their bodies over time. Some were permanently bent over, like an inverted L. These porters were so tough, hiking with all this gear at high altitudes. This is how everything got in there.

You think about here in the US, you have a big diesel truck hauling the beer around, then the guy takes a hand cart down the ramp right into the cooler. In Nepal these guys had to trek supplies 20 to 40 miles.

Again I am back at Tikal and I just can't believe I am here. I read Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* and it talked about the Mayans. It got me thinking about why do some societies succeed and some fail. I am thinking about our society and what conclusion can I draw about the US. Some of this stuff is going through my mind while I am at Tikal, the rise to greatness through social control, religion and a belief in an afterlife. The guys on top of the religious social ladder were sharp; they used the knowledge of the solar eclipse to enhance their religious significance for more power and authority. It is the same thing today. You got our government officials doing the same thing. Like the terror alert, living in fear of a terror warning. It is the same thing, it all goes back to fear and how we control our fear and how fear controls us and whether we are able to control it. I am now better at controlling my fear. I am getting on plane tomorrow, again!

In closing I would say international travel, especially this style, with its connectedness, and this ability to be up close and personal, is very rewarding and satisfying. I just feel much more confident. I feel like I can go anywhere and do anything and it is not big deal. Sometime when you are traveling it is hard, tough, uncomfortable, and dirty and then you look at a situation you are in back home; I think that it is no big deal compared to traveling. Travel gives you a perspective, a basis for comparison.

If I were to sum it all up it would be about interconnectedness. I feel more connected, I feel more satisfied and I feel like the world is a smaller place. You remove some of the fear because you remove the unknown because you have been there. We are all afraid of the unknown and if I can make it be known then I have nothing to be afraid of.

Appendix J: Mike's Interview



This picture is of Flores, Guatemala. We had just spent all day on a bus, it had broken down once, and now we are in Flores. There was no money in town or any of the ATM machines because the government was putting new money into the ATM's over the weekend. Being on a lake in the middle of Guatemala is something I am not used to. The bus ride from Chetumal, Mexico to Flores, Guatemala was a nice long

bus ride through some beautiful country. We checked out Belize City for little bit and then we broke down on the side of the road, so it was a good time to get out of the bus and walk around. There wasn't much out there except for a little store.

We use public transportation to get around everywhere; it is always available and inexpensive. We use trains, buses, boats, really anything that's available. Foreign countries seem to have public transportation dialed in fairly well. In Mexico the buses run on a regular schedule, generally on time. There is some planning but not much with our style of travel. Public transportation works out well because there is always a bus going somewhere. No matter where you want to go you can probably get there in a day or two without too much hassle. It is surprisingly easy to move around, even our groups of ten to fifteen people. If for some reason we can't all go at one time, then we can split up and take different buses. However, there seems to plenty of room on the public transportation or it seems like they will make room. They are always willing to help us out to get where we want to go.

I really liked the scene in this picture, the boats, and the archway leading to this small community on an island in the middle of this lake. It was Christmas Eve when we arrive in Flores and there are Christmas lights all over town. It was great to spend Christmas in Guatemala without all the snow.



This is a picture of Lago De Atitlan; we are heading from the town of Panajachel to the Sunday market at Chichicastenango. This place is very exotic, Panajachel sets at the edge of the lake with towering volcanoes, a huge lake and lush landscape. Panajachel is where we spent New Year's Eve; it is kind of touristy but still quaint and laid back. There were fireworks till 6:00 am. Panajachel has

not one resort, only small hostels and hotels. No one in our group wanted to end up in a resort type place but for many tourists they wouldn't know how to get to a place like Panajachel. It is a little more difficult to get there because you have to make all your own arrangements through public transportation. Many people would never go there unless it was with some kind of organized tour.

It is a big world out there with lots of things to see and do. With our style of backpacker travel if you see something you want to do, you simple go do it; we are not constrained by an itinerary. If you have already made up your mind what you are going to do, then it makes it much more difficult to cancel plans or change them. Most people are so concerned with time that they want an itinerary to help plan out every hour what they will be doing. It may feel safer to many tourists because you know what to expect and what you will get out of the experience with the money you spent. If you have no itinerary, you kind of hop around and don't know what to expect. Not knowing what to expect is exciting, it really adds to the sense of adventure and that you are traveling somewhere. It gives you a lot of freedom. You're not stuck in one place, you have freedom of movement and to do what you want. It is really nice without an itinerary. I think a lot of people don't know how to travel without an itinerary, but once they learn, it makes total sense.

I have done the all inclusive thing before and it's not nearly as fun. I did it down in Mexico in Playa del Carmen a couple months before our trip to Central America. I did it with my family for about five days. A big difference in the ILA trips in that we travel for at least a month. When you have more time, you have more freedom to move around and explore other places. Or if you do like a place you could stay there for a long time, if you really liked it, you could stay there for your whole trip. Having more time gives you freedom to choose what you do. When I meet other travelers they seem to be traveling for longer periods of time, from two weeks to two months. It seems like other people, other than Americans, take more time off to travel and travel for greater lengths of time. Many times we will meet people traveling for a whole year. Everyone could travel for a year but for a lot of people it is just not reality and they don't really need to travel for that long. The problem with going less than two weeks is you don't really push yourself or get to know an area. I think a month is a pretty good length for traveling. For sure you should go for at least a month.

On our five day resort stay we barely even saw the culture; in fact the resort discouraged the guest from leaving the resort or going out on their own. They said it was dangerous. When we wanted to rent a van and check out some of the smaller ruins and sites that the resort tour buses didn't go to, the resort people discouraged it. They said it would be much better to stay with our tours. I think a lot of it is safety for their patrons; they don't want anything negative to reflect on the resort. However, now that I think about it, it is probably not about safety, the resort could probably care less about our safety, it was more about spending money with them and doing their tours as opposed to letting money go to the local economy.

We travel to mainly developing nations and they rely a lot on tourism dollars. I see a lot of people from developing nations throwing their money at resort that encourage unlimited growth. They build, build, build, so they can sell, sell, sell. These resorts are very devastating to the local people. Like Cancun and Playa del Carmen was once full of mangrove forests and swamps and lush ecological habitats. Now there are only resorts. The locals can't go out and fish anymore; the locals have lost their old ways and are forced to work at the resorts. They are displaced many times. It is kind of like servitude. As a backpacker my money goes more towards the local economy. It is easier to make choices about where your money goes to because you get to interact with the locals that own the shops. Like the Native Sons dive center on Roatan, Honduras, the locals that we dove with. My money will go a lot further for the local people. I think this is something to be very conscious of. Most people don't even think about where there money goes, they just think if they spend the money in the foreign country that it will stay in the country. A lot of people don't realize where there money goes.

This is the Sunday indigenous market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. This is a guy selling some beans in a huge market. This kind of ties in with buying from the locals. It is

all local driven market. You would be hard pressed to find an American corporation with a booth at this market. I thought it was really cool. Everyone is selling something different. That is this local's lively hood, right there in those baskets. He is a bean farmer that comes to the market once a week. Indigenous markets are so colorful and full of life. It is so compact; the locals all know each other. It is a much different mentality than our American supermarkets and Wal-Mart. These markets are not structures under some corporation; they are not getting paid by the hour. The market is part of their lively hood.



The markets are very community oriented. In America we have lost a sense of community, we have a sense of place, but not really of community. We don't really rely on other people. In the market it seems like everyone is helping each other out, it does not seem as competitive. It just seems more open, less hostile. It seems like old town America. In our

American towns it seems that old downtown areas have a hard time making it but in developing countries, the markets seem to be thriving. I think in some parts of America the downtowns are coming back, but in a lot of parts of America the old downtowns are getting run down. It comes back to the community thing, if you don't have a strong community behind your downtown, then there will be no thriving downtown.

The thing about local markets is that the people selling their items are the ones who actually produce it. It is not some box that got sent to their store to sell even though they don't know anything about the product. This market person knows exactly what these beans would be good for. This guy could probably answer any question about his product. At a market you have a much better sense of where the product came from, in America, you would be lucky to find out where something was packaged. Americans are so disconnected from their food and what we buy. It can be a little disconcerting when you don't know where your food is coming from. If you had some bad beans you could go and talk to this guy at the market but in America all you can do is talk to the manager who is several steps removed from the product. It is very difficult in America to buy local food. You can buy some but it is very hard to get all your food locally. These indigenous people probably get ninety percent of their food from local sources. The local restaurants probably use local ingredients too. The meat seems to be local too; you see a lot of small ranchers along the roads when you travel. You never see anything huge, just big enough to support the local community.

This is a trash canal somewhere near Rivas, Nicaragua. We took a bus to this town to buy some hammocks from some local hammock makers. I had never seen anything quite this

foul. To me it is disgusting. There were probably kids down the way splashing around in it. Most of this trash will get drained into some lake or river and eventually into the ocean. There are unfiltered liquids, sewage, plastic bags, and plastic Coke bottles. Then there is the perfect cement walls and floor of the canal that will channelize and contain all the trash. We have canals in the Grand Junction but you would never see a canal that looked like this full of trash. Maybe in poorer parts of our country I have seen some trash but never anything like this picture. It seems like all this trash is pretty fresh so I am sure it gets filled up all the time. We have the same trash; we can just move it around a lot easier. The trash in this picture kind of reflects what our culture has pushed on other people, convincing people they need a plastic bag to take an item home, you need this plastic Coke bottle even though it does you good when you are done with it, and it feels like we as Americans are part of the problem.

In fact we created the problem. The sad thing is that most Coke bottles were glass and usually recycled but now everything seems to be plastic. It is so sad because there is litter everywhere, even outside major tourist attractions like Tulum. The trash is just there, no trying to cover it up. This canal perpetuates litter because it shows me that it is ok to throw trash in this canal.

It is kind of like us Americans being disconnected from food, it is the same with our trash. We simply put our trash into a trash bin and some guy picks it up once a week and then it's gone. It costs very little money and you really don't have to do anything to get



rid of your trash. We have the infrastructure to get rid of trash and they don't in Nicaragua. A lot of it is education too, even with our advanced infrastructure; people in the States still throw their trash everywhere. That is why we have highway cleanup crews. It is the concept of out of sight, out of mind.

These ILA trips show me what I could be living in if I did not have all the services here. I would not want that canal in my backyard. It is the 'not in my backyard' principle. It is nice to have things out of sight but then it is out of your mind and that is not good. Traveling makes you aware of what we produce and consume because we can see the packaging laying in the streets and canals. It seems like more awareness is spreading about trash and a big green movement is introducing products that are less reliant on petroleum. However, I don't think these companies are really green, they just want to make more money and now consumers are demanding more green products. It is important to remember that all these products are consumer driver, if people don't buy them then companies want make them. If people start making conscious decisions about what they buy, we can make a difference as individuals.

It does seem like we are on a different track now, a more green track. Now being green is the cool thing to do. You are doing something good without really doing anything. Now you can go to the store and make a simple choice like plastic, paper or no bag. How easy is this, you can so easily pick the right choice and do something great for your country and keep stuff out of your landfill. You can feel good about it without actually having to do anything about it. You don't have to get your hands dirty. These are some pretty easy changes. However, if all the supermarkets stopped carrying bags, I think people would really be upset. Americans are not ready for real change. Now we are not really forced to do anything, we don't have to make any hard choices. Vitamin cottage has now done away with bags but the people who shop there are middle class and educated. It makes it a lot easier to make greener decisions if you are educated about the issues and have the means to buy greener products. However, just because you have the means and education, it does not mean people are making greener decisions.



One thing you notice about other countries is the overwhelming display of religion. For a lot of Americans it can be overwhelming. In America you can see churches on corners but it is not nearly as in your face as Buddhism. These foreign countries are also steeped in history and tradition, something our country doesn't really have because it is so young. This is a shrine in an extremely old temple in Angkor Wat in Cambodia. This place wasn't just a place for living but also a place to connect to the spiritual side. Religion is not something you really make fun of like you do in the U.S. In America it feels like you have to be invited to go to a church, they can be daunting places. In these other countries they are out in the street having services or the churches are open air.

When I ask them questions about their religion, they do not look at me funny or make me feel weird for visiting their place of worship. I love that it is such an old place and many of the same traditions are going on today. America is such a young nation of all different races, ethnicities, religions that we really don't have a clear sense of where we came from or who we are as a whole people. We don't have one major religion overall. I think all the differences really divide us. It divides us across the world as well. What I have learned from travel is that religions are pretty much based on the same principles. Christians have their ten commandments, the Buddhist have their precepts, all religions seem to have the golden rule of 'do unto others as you would like done to you.' Religions are not so different; some may worship a few more gods.

One other thing about this picture is the architecture and how old the building is. The architecture seems to stick around in these places and these old buildings seem to last forever. Americans are kind of a tear down society. I think the only thing standing around a thousand years from now will be the thing we don't want standing around like dams. The things that will be standing will be things that show our dominance over nature rather than our harmony with it. Tulum and Angkor Wat seemed to meld with the natural surroundings in a kind of permanent way, in a positive way. It seems other cultures build with nature rather than against it, using natural features of the Earth, locally found materials. That is something Americans don't really have is a locally produced house that utilized the natural features of the environment. Our houses tend to be the same all across America.

When you travel you realize that even though different cultures do different things, the basic principles of cultures are similar. The people and ideas are similar, they just have a different way of doing the same thing. For example transportation is different, it is far easier to go a thousand miles on a bus in a foreign country than it is to go 300 miles in America. Ideas and concepts are the same, the people are the same, they just do things a little different than us. At the root people will be people. The scary thing is that these other cultures may start to live like us. For example in India, the car company Tata is now making cars for under a thousand dollars. The Indian people look at us as an example and want to own a car as well. We all own cars, if they have the means, why shouldn't they. The problem is that there are just not enough resources for a billion more drivers on the planet.

What Americans need to do is look and learn from other cultures, we need a change in mindset. Instead of trying to be happy by keeping up with our neighbors we should learn to be happy in other ways. Travel taught me to really appreciate the things I do have. When you grow in a place like the US where we have everything imaginable, it is hard to remember how nice it is to have some of the things we have. It also makes you realize that you don't need a lot of the things we do have. Bringing ideas from foreign countries back to America sounds great but it is hard to change us. Here for example each person in a home has their own room, has their own car. It is hard to really change that. The America bubble is large and hard to pop. However, I can say that I put less than 1200 miles a year on my car because I bike most places. It is just a lot less stressful to ride my bike. The problem now is that I am living in Denver and I feel forced to drive around

everywhere. There are a few places to ride my bike but it is practically impossible to ride my bike to work and it would take over an hour to use public transportation. We are so spread out in the US, we have created a commuting mentality and some even think it is a good thing. We have created the ultimate transportation system for cars. Our transportation system is totally unsustainable and at this point it would take a fundamental mind shift to change that.

It seems that we are at a tipping point now that gas is creeping up in price. There are already new projects for high speed trains, commuter light rail systems. If we really wanted to we could build a high speed train across the US tomorrow. We did it before, why can't we do it again. Our culture is very reactive rather than proactive. It is far easier to be reactive, not cheaper, but mentally easier.



fryers taking up a lot of space, just a simple push cart and a lady cooking. It makes so much sense to have street carts but it is hard in the US with all our cars. It is easier to put up a fast food place. I think people here wouldn't trust food from the street. They would think it was unsanitary, especially if they saw a fly on the food and nothing refrigerated. Just look at those eggs unrefrigerated. Most Americans don't even know you don't have

to refrigerate eggs, we just grew up doing it, so that is what we do. Eggs last forever, you do not need to refrigerate them. I am sure they know most the people that eat there every day which is kind of like a built in quality assurance.



I like this photo because it represents the history in the places we traveled. This was a very old temple in Laos. You get a real sense of history in these places, where they have been. Their art work and temples

really give you a sense of their culture. Their buildings never look out of place; they fit into the culture so well. The history is in your face, maybe not for the locals, but for me.



This picture is from the Baja. I put this in to represent the skills that you learn from travel, like learning how to get around in other countries, then taking it to the next level when you are out there on your own, especially with sea kayaking. All these skill sets teach you how to deal with stress. It is all basically the same, if you tip your sea kayak over in the ocean or are looking for a place to stay in a foreign city; you need to learn how to deal with situations as they come along without totally breaking down. You go to these foreign lands, totally surrounded by these different people, and it can get pretty stressful. You can get scared when you are in foreign places but in most cases there is no need to be afraid. All these skills you learn on an ILA travel experience teach you how to deal with stressful situations and not freak out. You learn how to find your calm and use it to your advantage. Ten years ago I would have been reluctant to take the public bus somewhere

when I could just drive and know exactly where I was going. I would think about sitting next to people I didn't know. Now those kinds of things would never bug me. Now when I need to get somewhere I just get there. If there are any problems along the way, it doesn't really matter because I can always find my way out of any situation. I don't need an iPhone to help me get around.



This is from our trip to the Baja. This trip is probably one of the coolest things I have ever done. It seems that when you are on an ILA trip and traveling like this, it is easier to build relationships. Everyone is together and out of their element, and you have to learn to rely on the people in your group. It is really nice to make connections with people. The personal aspect of international travel is huge too because it tends

to push your limits, push you out of your skin, making you feel awkward. When you travel in a group, you are forced to deal with your comfort zone within the group and you learn to rely on the group to help you through stressful situations. When you're out

traveling, it is really nice to have someone there to relate it with, someone you can talk to about your new experiences. You can get multiple viewpoints from the people in the group. It helps you figure out your own ideas and how they relate to other people. Maybe they're good, maybe they're bad. Travel is a way to grow personally and it can really help you with your own relationships where ever you are.

Rarely are you ever placed in a situation where you are with people all day for a whole month. You learn how to deal with people a lot better. Everyone has their own opinions, some of them might be wrong to you, but your with these people and it's better to make friends with them rather than be against them. You are forced to look for the similarities with people rather than focusing on the differences. If you can't deal with people, it can be hard to get along in the world. You learn how to make people comfortable with yourself so you can get what you want out of the members in the group and they can get the same from you. Everyone is happy, you are not using people, you are living symbiotically. Otherwise you are just wasting time and energy.

Another skill is bartering. I think this is a very valuable skill. Being are able to go back and forth with someone, finding the limits of what you can do and say. You learn how to push and receive. Sometimes the group can push you to do something you would have never wanted to do but then you do it and feel better about yourself. It is good to have people around to push you. The group can allow you to explore sides about yourself that you never knew you had.



I picked this picture because every culture has their vises. Beer is always prevalent anywhere you go in the world. Beer seems to always be there. I love to try other culture's beer. Most people around the world drink and this is a way for me to see what other cultures are about. It is just different in every country; they have their own unique beer. You could show this picture to anyone in the world and they would recognize it as a beer. It is just one of those things that can help you connect with other people. Just buy someone a beer and you can get to know someone really easily.

Traveling really helps you in your own life, helping your inner relationships and outer relationships. It helps you seek out what you want to do in life. You get to see how the rest of the world lives and you can base your life on this new knowledge. You don't

have to shift your whole life. I guess I am trying to say that travel makes you more aware. You have a good time and learn a lot without actually opening a book, you just assimilate your knew knowledge. There are no text books, you go out and learn through trial and error. The more I think about travel and the more people I meet, I really think travel is important because people can really get stuck in their daily lives. Some people get stuck

on things that are so petty, it just doesn't matter. People need to go out and explore their world. We live in a day and age where you can, travel is cheap and easy so why not. I think these Outdoor Program trips are very assessable and help get people interested in other cultures. You certainly don't have any trouble filling up these ISLA trips. I think you could have three ISLA trips going at one time and they would still all be filled up. Ultimately you never know what is going to happen in life, these trips simulate that reality and help you embrace it.

Appendix K: Janice's Interview



The first photo is of me getting onto the plane, it was my first international trip ever so I was really excited, a picture of true joy and happiness. It was about the unknowing and the possibilities of what may come. We were going to Thailand and my image of Thailand was a classic picture of Thai architecture and I thought everything was going to be really small and tiny. I did not picture it was going to be like America is so many ways, like a regular city. I am expecting to be swept

back in time a thousand years. That was my preliminary impression. Of course it ended up being much different, much more modern than I thought it was going to be.

The second picture is of a tuk tuk on a rainy day. It is an artistic photo that captures a



unique experience that you can't have in America. I didn't even know about tuk tuks, I am not even sure if I knew how we were going to get around. Driving in a tuk tuk can be a scary and exhilarating experience, but you have to remember is that these tuk tuk drivers do this for a living and everyone gets around in tuk tuks so it must be somewhat safe. Tuk tuks for me represented freedom. You could just flow in and out of traffic, no one followed any traffic lights. In the

States I always feel so confined by rules. I didn't know how many rules we followed until I took a tuk tuk ride. It was totally freeing. The tuk tuk drivers are so friendly, in fact it seems like all the Thai people were friendly. You get into the tuk tuk and you get this supper warm feeling and you are going to go on a crazy adventure, there is so much to look at out the open windows.

You cannot have this kind of experience in America because all our traffic laws would never allow this free flowing, fly-by-the-seat-of-you-pants kind of ride. You would get a traffic ticket. We are limited in the United States. It is a unique experience because you are not being repressed. I feel like when I am driving in the US that someone is out to get me all the time, that some cop is just waiting to pull me over for any number of rules that I may be breaking. For the first time in my life I felt like I could just go where I wanted and no one was out to get me.

Transportation was a huge part of this trip. I had used a bus when I was younger but I had never been on so much public transportation. I had never been on a train, tuk tuk, and long international flights. This was the first time in my life that I totally relied on public transportation for a whole month. I was so surprised at how nice and reliable the public transportation was for getting around; it was all so cozy, updated and comfortable. I think I had this impression it was going to be miserable but it ended up being way better than anything in the U.S.

The third picture is the red light district of Bangkok. My idea of the red light district was



totally different than reality. I thought it was going to be very nasty and seedy, but it ended up being really cool. It had outdoor shopping selling everything, there were cool bars and of course there were young women everywhere trying to get our attention. I was surprised at how young the girls were, I was expecting them to be older. I didn't know if I was going to enjoy this kind of place, it is repressive towards women and such.

However, I wanted to learn about this

aspect of Thailand, again we do not have anything like this in the US, it is unique. The biggest shock was how the red light district was more like a Saturday Market that accommodated almost anyone. So a bunch of the girls from the group went to a bar and danced and listened to reggae music all night long. They were playing a song that I knew from the States. It was one of the most fun moments of my life, just dancing and being in Thailand.

The lead singer in the band was a man but dressed like a women. That happened a lot in Thailand, lots of cross dressing, I could never tell if the women were actually women or she males. I really could not pick out the guys from the girls, they all looked really pretty. It was like being in San Francisco, where no one notices gay people, in Bangkok no one noticed girly men. It was just part of the culture. I didn't even think it was a big deal either. It was so different but in a good way. I just wanted to know how they did their makeup and lipstick.



This is an elephant painting a picture just outside of Chang Mai. Again this was one of my favorite days; there were a lot of favorite days. It was a favorite day because it involved elephants, the jungle, national parks and learning how to drive a moped for the first time. We just stumbled upon this elephant refuge. We never planned the day, we just went touring around the country side, exploring where ever we wanted. I remember being

shocked because I ended up being the only girl in the group to ride my own moped. So I had to keep up with all the guys which was really scary, fun and frustrating. I had to learn how to negotiate Thai traffic, getting sandwiched several times; I thought I would die at least five times. This seemed to be a reoccurring theme on the ISLA trips, especially when we were in India. But we were really never in any danger, it just seemed like it because everything was so new. Then you would get through the experience and you would be so proud of yourself. I would think, yes, I lived through that, I did it. Oh my God, I rode a moped for the first time, I did it. At some points I really got frustrated with the gear shifting, I even pulled off into a ditch and started crying and thought that this really sucks. But then I got better as the day went on and even had someone jump on the back with me. Then as I got better, my rebel side came out and I just had a blast.

I really wanted to push myself and be part of the group. There is always this inner competition to challenge yourself on an ILA trip, same as in India when we trekked through the Himalayas. I didn't want to be the last one to show up somewhere. There was a drive to see how good you could be at doing new things.

We ended up going to this elephant orphanage, we rode some elephants, watched them play soccer and paint pictures. I was concerned about the elephants, how they were treated. I later learned that it was a place for abandoned elephants and that the elephants were treated nicely. All the Thai trainers seemed so happy to be working with the elephants. It was amazing to see that elephants can paint pictures, they are so intelligent. I really wanted to buy a picture but I was really budgeting my money.

On this trip I really learned how to budget and evaluate where my money went. I knew that if I bought the picture it was the same as 4 nights lodging. I found myself really watching my money. I became really good at bargaining, which is a huge part of the culture in Thailand and other parts of the world. I learned that it was rude if you did not bargain, but at the same time I felt like I was being a jerk because I would be bargaining over fifty cents. I would have to remind myself that it was only fifty cents. I became very conscious of what I was buying and how much I was spending. I became conscious of every penny I spent, it was kind of a challenge to see how little money I could spend and still maintain myself. I only had a thousand dollars to last a month. I saw you bargaining and stretching out your dollar, so I just started learning how to budget and bargain. It was my first experience really watching where my money went. I really learned how to stretch my dollar.

Bargaining and shopping allowed me to dive into their culture. I did not want to offend anyone with the bargaining because they were so friendly. That is one thing that really sticks out for me was how friendly the Thai people were towards us. They seemed like they were always happy. There seemed to be no stress going on in Thailand. I am sure a lot of it had to do with saving face but at the same time I really feel like it is an integral part of their culture to not worry all the time about these superficial things that Americans worry about. I don't think the Thai people spend their days thinking about how they can accumulate more stuff, like how can we get a new car or motorcycle. They don't spend

their day stressing over material things. Other things are important to them like hanging out with their family and friends and having fun, relaxing and being part of a community. I gained a lot of insight into Thai culture by observing them in their businesses like small family owned stores and restaurants. Like when we were in Phuket, when you enter a store you see the whole family together hanging out all day. The family is together a lot more with relatives and everyone contributing, even the kids. It is not like child labor, they are just part of the family wanting to help out. Their culture is very different in that regard, here you do not see children working in a restaurant or store even if they are family owned.

I also observed their religion, especially by visiting Buddhist temples. In Thailand the Buddha feels alive with literally thousands of statues of the Buddha on every street. It is like he is alive, whereas in the Christian faith, Jesus is dead and lives through the people. In Thailand it felt like Buddha was alive and there to stay and a part of everyday life. Their Buddhist religion dominated the architecture, much different than in the US where you have a few churches here and there. I realized how spiritual everyone appeared and that their religion was respected and practiced widely by most people. Just look at the size of some of the Buddha statues, some were almost the length of a football field.



This is a picture of Phuket, we finally made it to the beach and we are relaxing after some hard traveling. We had finally reached one of our goals of getting to a tropical beach. Coming from rainy Portland, OR, I was really excited to get to a nice tropical beach. We were all just so excited to be there. There was a sense of accomplishment after a fourteen hour bus ride and traveling all through Cambodia and Laos, we finally made it, could finally jump into that warm

tropical water and just relax. I think most Americans could relate to hanging out on a tropical beach or at least they would want to have the opportunity to do so. When I tell people about this trip, everyone always says they wish they could go on a trip like that. It is sad because most Americans think they could never travel overseas and explore an exotic land like I did. I know that because I used to feel the same way till I did this ILA trip. All you need is a plane ticket and a thousand dollars and just go. You can go for a whole month. I was working as a waitress and saving that kind of money was not hard for me. If I could do it then I really think most people could do it if they really believed it was possible. It ended up being cheaper to be in Thailand than in my own home. I never knew how easy it could be before I went on this trip with the OP. I now think I could go anywhere and live on a budget and make travel a reality. Just go and you will figure it all out when you get there. You do not have to do the expensive all inclusive tour, just go and figure it out on your own. I guarantee you will find someplace to sleep, it always just works out.



The next picture is of one of us scuba diving, near the island of Ko Phi Phi. I had never been scuba diving and I ended up getting certified. It was so much cheaper and more fun to get dive certified while in Thailand, you don't spend any time in a pool as you would in the US, instead you do all your diving in the ocean. On our first day of class we simply walked right into the ocean and got to dive our first time out. It was amazing.



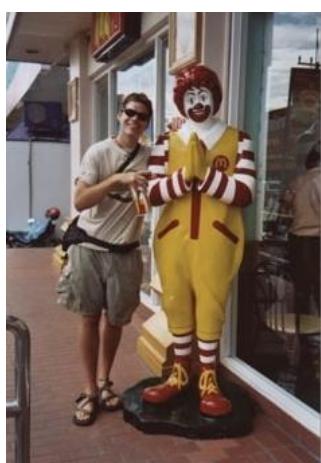
This picture is where all the Thai style boats are beached in a little bay. The island was so small; you could walk from one end to the other in ten minutes. There were no automobiles on the island which is one of the things that made it so awesome. The only motorized items were the little boats that would bring you to the island, nothing big; the boats could carry about ten people at a time. I loved being able to walk everywhere we needed, like little restaurants and shops,

and beaches. I met so many different people from all parts of the world. However, we hardly saw any Americans on the island or on the whole trip, it is just not a part of the American culture. To Europeans, Australians, Israelis and many other cultures in the world travel is a rite of passage. It is expected for you to travel, to help you realize who you want to be, to gain a global mindset, to become an adult; it is a coming of age. In American it is just not important for us to travel and gain those perspectives, which is sad because these kinds of trips are huge eye openers. We need to realize that the American way is not the only way. The problem is that most Americans do not know that, there is no way they could. I don't care how many movies you watch or magazines you read, you will never really know what another culture is about until you go there and experience it. You must be in the situation, be a player in the game to really understand another culture. For example a person would not understand the classic Indian side to side head bob just by watching a movie but after spending a month in India you will never forget this aspect of the culture.

I think that on a scale from one to ten that the importance of travel is a ten. We only see the world through our own culture but it is so important to emerge yourself in other cultures to gain a different perspective. I felt like these ISLA experiences gave me the opportunity to immerse myself into other cultures. For example when I think of American freedom I think about having the freedom to make money. That is what I associated freedom with, the freedom to make money to own as much stuff as you want. That is American freedom. When I am traveling I get a sense of freedom that makes me feel like I can do what I want. Like simple things like being able to go through an intersection

even though it is red. I mean I am not stupid I can see if there are any cars coming but as Americans we do not have the basic freedom to cruise through an intersection till the green light says we can. I remember a French exchange student in high school saying how Americans had no freedom. I was really offended by her statement but now I know what she was talking about. Now I one hundred percent agree with her, I feel like I have to leave the United States to feel totally free. Here in the US I feel like the people who have lots of money get to have all the freedom. In Oregon I have been kicked off the public beaches at night so many times but here in Thailand they would never kick us off the beach. I feel like the U.S. is very repressive.

We stayed in a small cabana that had a bed and simple bathroom for about five dollars a night. It was only a two minute walk to the beach. There were a few really nice places to stay, not big resorts or anything like that but there were some nicer places to stay. The majority of the accommodations on the island were just small cabana style shelters. They were clean but you would also get a few ants as well. I didn't really care because we were barely in our hotel room. It was just a place to sleep. For Americans the hotel where you stay is a huge part of the vacation. A big question for Americans is where are we going to stay and what is the room like. On an ISLA trip we don't really care because we hardly spend any time in the room. You don't have to have the perfect place with marble tops and such. That was not a goal of the trip. It is not about bragging about some resort you spent lots of money to stay in rather it is about the incredible places and cultures you experienced. You get to brag about the adventures you had. That is a big difference between a normal resort vacation and an ILA backpacker style adventure.



The next picture is of my boyfriend with a statue of Ronald McDonald in a common Thai gesture, with the palms touching each other in a Namaste pose. This is a good picture to show that America does have an influence on developing countries. You do find American influences; it is definitely part of their culture. It is something an American would notice right away. But when you look closer the Thai people have transformed the McDonalds to fit into their own culture. The statue of Ronald McDonald is not doing an American thing; he is instead fitting into the Thai culture. The menu was different too; you could get a burger but also had things like fish, noodles and Asian style food.

The other things I noticed about American influence was American music. There was so much American music everywhere. I saw Thai people buying American music in stores, it wasn't just in touristy areas. All the CDs were copies. All their music and movies are copied and you can buy anything you want on the streets.

This picture is of a little girl at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. She spoke perfect English and was selling us jewelry. Everybody loved her. She had this way of connecting with the travelers. I think she was able to connect with westerners because she was around them all the time; she even had a Brittany Spears t-shirt on. She spoke such good English, like



many people in the cities and in India, it is amazing how you can get around just know English. It seems like there is always someone around that knows English. That was really surprising to me. That is another part of our culture that is influencing the world. I really thought about how much kids have to work in developing countries in order to help their families. Sometimes it seemed ok but at other times it seems bad. We knew not to give money to the street kids because they were usually just money collectors for other people and would never actually use the money we gave to them. I became very aware of where my money was going, I didn't want to contribute to keeping these kids on the street.

One thing I learned from travel is that you can stretch your money and make it go a long way. It is your choice to do with your money what you want to. That was an important thing I learned on this trip. If I want my money to go to a good cause, I can do that. If I want to save my money for a trip, I can do that. These ILA trips defiantly bring that awareness, that you can really get a lot out of your money if you try. I also learned that a lot of money enters Thailand through tourism dollars. I feel like we as travelers are contributing to their lives when we go there.



The last picture is of me diving. I am underwater and I am pointing at a big sea urchin. Actually the urchin is an invasive species. This was one of my favorite things on the trip. This is something that I would not have done in the US because it is so expensive. In Thailand it only cost me \$150 to get fully certified as an open water diver with PADI in some of the best diving waters in the world. I could never imagine the coral reef being any better. It was so incredible. It was

amazing. We saw all kinds of tropical fish. It was simply amazing experience. I love the ocean and anything that has to do with the ocean. I had a big fear of diving, a fear of being under water. I was able to face that fear and I have come a long way. I was terrified at first and my instructor was very irritated with me while I was training. It was nerve racking but I knew once I got used to it I knew it would be great and pure fun. It was hard at first but then it just became fun and I was able to reap the benefits of the training. You are underwater and it is so silent. You are with the fish, there is nothing like it. You are in a whole another world.

It seems like I talked a lot about fears. I am also fearful of small spaces and when we went caving I was able to face that fear as well. By facing all these fears, my confidence

lever just boosted into the air. When I came back home, I had this repertoire of amazing experiences, things that I overcame, and this overwhelming sense of accomplishment. I ended up with this huge list of adventures that I could be proud of. I did that. I ended up traveling again with the OP to India and had similar experiences. Now I have all these experience under my belt and feel so confident that I can do anything.

The main thing I learned from the ILA experience is that there are so many different ways to live and that you don't have to live in a repressive state. I learned that we have too many rules in the US and that we are very restrictive. We really are not that free. I feel we are free to make money but I don't feel we are free to explore. Unless of course you have lots of money, then perhaps you are free to explore. Most people in the US are repressed because they don't have a lot of money. Most people think if you want to go scuba diving then it will cost thousands of dollars to go to a place like Hawaii and get certified. This kind of thinking keeps Americans from exploring, that you have to be wealthy to travel. The reality that I have learned is that you don't have to be wealthy to explore. I broke past the repressive thinking of the typical American and now I know that you don't have to be confined by all our imaginary limitations. I no longer let my fears and rules of the US keep me from my dreams. I now want to go out and explore the world. This is what the ILA experience has taught me, to get out and explore and let all my senses come alive, to become alive. Most importantly I have learned to bring that knowledge back home and explore every day of my life. On the trips I intentionally tried new things every day and now back home I do the same thing. I have expanded my interest and what I am capable of doing.

Appendix L: Richard's Interview



This is the first ILA trip for me and the first time I ever went outside the U.S. It is in Torres Del Paine on Christmas morning. It is one of those days I will always remember and a group I will always remember. Many of us were friends before we left, it was a special day being Christmas, we had a good night the day before and it was such a classic hike to get here. We are at the southern tip of Chile and the towers of Paine are behind us. We are on the classic W hike in the national park.

This being my first trip, I had never been away from home that often and if I was away from home, it was with other family. This is day twelve into the trip and I remember the day before was the first time that I had thought about my parents. I almost forgot about them, actually I did forget about them for about two weeks. I didn't think about them a single time. I didn't call them or email them. The day before this hike I remembered that I had parents. I was just so overwhelmed with everything. At this point we were just seeing the mountains and just being in a group so I hadn't really been immersed into the culture at this point because we were in the backcountry, but is still got me hooked on travel. It was this trek that we are on right here in this picture.

I had always seen picture of Torres Del Paine and I wanted to go see them and I was just getting involved with the outdoor program and just starting to lead trips. When this trip came up, I asked my parents and wanted to see what they would say and they thought it would be a great idea. It surprised me and I just decided to go. I didn't have the money so I put it all on my credit card, but it was fine.



This picture is from the same trek in Torres Del Paine, it is me bending down with my head in the river, just drinking out of it. It was crazy to me that you could see where the water was coming from only a mile away from the glacier. The water was ice cold, crystal clear blue water and you can drink right out of the stream. I remember they had a sign at Fitzroy National Park and it said that the water was ok to drink from the stream. You do not need to filter it. I thought that was

really crazy. Here in America you are always supposed to filter your water. Actually after this trip I started not filtering my water, so now here in America I do not filter my water

and I have not had a problem yet. Who knows down the road what will happen? It was just so easy and more convenient to dip your water bottle in the stream and drink it. Before this point I had never been anyplace so pristine. This picture represents how pristine it is in Patagonia. We were away from people; there was a really low density in the Patagonia area. This picture represents how clean it is down there. You can eat off the ground, drink right out of the river, you can see the source. The day before this picture I saw my first glacier. It was on the summer solstice in the southern hemisphere, winter solstice at home and we are looking at glaciers. Somehow it was so fitting. It was perfect weather with fog and rain, with calving ice bergs floating down the river going into the lakes. We had a layover day and hiked up the valley.

At this point I couldn't believe this trip was real, I mean those peaks were ten thousand feet straight up. They were only a mile away and ten thousand feet straight up.

Everything was surreal at this point in the trip. It was only two weeks into the trip and I had already seen my first ice berg, had the best hamburger of my life, best beer down there and saw the southern stars which I was very excited to see. I saw the Southern Cross over the ocean. At this point nothing seemed real. Nothing else mattered at all. I was just being.

I was not looking to outside sources to complete me or to make me happy. I was not looking to the future to make me happy. I was just happy with what I had at that moment. When you travel it forces you to be in the moment. Here it is easy to be in the moment because you are away from the people.



This is Fitzroy. This is the most beautiful, awe inspiring, perfect twenty minutes of my life, ever. We saw it from a distance when we were driving in the bus. We wanted to get closer to it so we hiked for a few days to get closer. It was all cloudy and we were sitting at the base of Fitzroy for about three hours, not able to see anything. Everything was covered in clouds, but you could tell something was looming right above us but you didn't know what it was. Every once in awhile a

little break in the clouds would go and we would get a glimpse, but we really didn't know that we were only see the tiny spires next to Fitzroy. The small spires would pop out for a second and you would be amazed because you thought you saw Fitzroy. We finally gave up in it clearing up so we started hiking to the next camp. So we left and we were hiking along the trail to get to the next camp and then the clouds just opened up. It was like water that was let go and all the clouds in front just disappeared. The thing that we thought was Fitzroy was just a little bump on the side but then the real Fitzroy came out for twenty minutes. The clouds were moving and alive. For the first ten minutes I did not even take a picture, I simply forgot, I was just staring and wondering. I did not say a

single thing. Then finally I took some photos because I wanted to remember it. Ten minutes later the clouds came in and rolled over the towers like a waterfall. It looked like water just filling up a giant bucket and then it just disappeared. That was twenty minutes of... I don't know. I just can't explain it to anyone. It was perfect. That twenty minutes was everything. This is the image of life for me.



So now we are in India and this is the first picture I took in India. This is at two in the morning. I got dropped off and I was completely in shock. At this point I had been up for twenty hours already and it was over one hundred degrees. When we landed at 12:30 am, it was one hundred and five degrees and I thought there was no way the read out could be right, but it was. I thought oh my god what did I get myself into. I was already missing people back home and I was trying to find the

hotel where everyone was staying. All I saw was cows walking around and trash. This was after I was dropped off by a taxi and I had to walk past these cows and I didn't know what to do. I thought the cows might trample me or something. There was just dirt, trash, people lying in the middle of the street. Everywhere there were people sleeping, unclothed, just dirtiness. I had no idea what I was in for. It was completely different than the Patagonia trip. The India trip ended up being way harder but way more rewarding. India itself is harder; everyone there wants something from you. You always have to be on top of it. You don't seem tired during the day but when the day is over you are just completely emotionally and physically exhausted from the day, even if you just relaxed that day, it was still exhausting. On the second month of the trip I was by myself and that was the first time I had ever completely traveled alone. That was the hardest month of my life.

I had decided to stay in India for four months, doing the first six weeks with the ISLA group and then the rest of the trip alone. I wanted to go to Nepal and Tibet. I ended up coming home early. I didn't go on this trip to find myself or do soul searching but it ended up being kind of soul searching. I wanted to know that I could do it on my own. I wanted to be out there and see what traveling alone was all about. Once I got there and traveled on my own, I did not want to do it anymore. At that time I really wanted to share it with somebody, like my girlfriend back at home. So I decided to come home early and changed my plane ticket, but I couldn't change my ticket, so I just bought a new ticket. That really put me in the hole quite a bit, but it didn't matter.

In this picture I have no luggage, the airlines lost my luggage. I had nothing. My luggage got lost with the Ukrainian Airlines and they ended up going through my luggage and taking a bunch of stuff out. So I didn't have a lot of things. A week later we were in Shimla and I left to go get my lost luggage and that was really the first time I had been on my own. I left and got my luggage in New Delhi and I met back up with you guys in a

couple of days. New Delhi was such a trip and overload to begin with and I didn't know what to expect when I went back alone. Luckily the monsoons had hit and it wasn't as hot, so it was fine. I went back and got my luggage and realized I had a bunch of stuff missing. On the way back to meet up with you guys I felt kind of sick. It wasn't anything big, I just wasn't feeling that good. On the bus ride I bought some lychee fruit and it was the first time I had ever had lychee fruit. Still to this day it is the most favorite food I have ever had and I haven't had since that bus ride. It was going out of season, everywhere I went I looked for it and I could never find it again. So I have still not had it yet. After that point lychee fruit became my favorite food on the planet. It is so delicious. On the bus ride it was so weird. I wanted to save the lychee fruit because it was so good but I ended up eating them all in the first ten minutes on the bus. I remember thinking how cool it was and then I looked out the window and there was this trashy looking Indian kid walking by and he was wearing a John Elway football jersey. That was really weird. It was so weird, Indians don't even know what American football is and the kid probably doesn't know who John Elway is but somehow he got the shirt. This event showed me a lot of things, that the shirt was probably made in India, it showed how small the world is and how connected everything is. Sometimes you see things like this when you are traveling and it really makes you think.

Usually when I meet someone that knows someone I know, that shows me how close we are, how small the world is. When I saw that, it didn't show me how small the world was but just how everything is connected. There is Coca Cola and McDonalds, but somehow I just never expected to see a John Elway jersey but I did. It is just another connected piece. An Indian person would probably come to the States and see things that we are

wearing and know what it is as well. On the bus ride to Shimla, we rode past the untouchables. There was an hour while on the bus that I could see people living in huts made out of cow manure. The only thing they had to do all day was sit and watch the trains go by. There were people going to the bathroom next to the train tracks. People were lined up just watching trains go by, that was their life. I didn't get any pictures because I was just so amazed. I don't know why I didn't take any pictures. This is a picture that I found that



reminds me of that day. The people in this picture are so much better off than the untouchables, they live in the city, they have clothes and things, but they are still poor and they still beg. They live off scraps. These happen to be kids that are begging in Agra. This girl is probably forced to do this by her parents. She is making money for her parents, she doesn't keep this money. She gives the money to somebody. But they are still so beautiful; they are beautiful children, their eyes and their hair. They look dirty but still in their smile you can see the life in them, the passion. You can see that they are the same as us; they just live a different lifestyle. They don't know how we live and we don't

know how they live. We think it is crazy that they are living like that. Even so we are still so the same.

We are the same in the sense that we are all human beings but also in other areas like religion. I went to the Kashmir region while there was a seize fire and this area is very Muslim. They allowed buses to go there so I decided to go, not even thinking about how dangerous it could be. This area was very Muslim, so you see all these different religions and how they don't mend very well. Being in Leh, I talked to one India guy. You always hear about Tibet and how the Chinese are doing horrible things to Tibet and how you feel bad about the Tibetan people. But this Indian guy gave a different perspective of the Tibetan people. He said the Tibetan people came in and expected the Indian people to accommodate them, they expect everything from the rest of the world and from India. So you see resentment for everyone everywhere. The people don't blend very well but you can still have a conversation with these people. The simple fact that we spoke the same language, you have so much in common. You have no idea of who they are or how they grew up or how they live but you still have so much in common and you can find things to talk about. It is crazy that you can find things to talk about with people that live on the other side of the world and worship a completely different religion and have a completely different belief system.

Some of the things I found in common were the love of food, the love for the mountains, and love of having self pride. There was a lot of self pride in the Buddhist culture. You see a lot of obedience in a lot of different cultures. I defiantly saw obedience in the Muslim culture, like the women were obedient to the men, they lived by this code. They did it this way just because they were told to live this way. That is what they believed. You can think it is as crazy as you want but you have to remember those people don't know what America is like either. They don't know how Americans live over here but the women were still strong willed. Even though you couldn't see the women, I sense the women still made that choice to be obedient. The women were still out on their own shopping and doing all these things. It is hard to explain, I just didn't have any perspective to look at these women and judge them. I couldn't see their face, couldn't see their eyes, it was just this clothed person that you still had something in common with. We just had a connection, for some reason there was a connection. It's weird. The people were so different but I still felt a connection with them.

We saw a lot of these kids, I remember playing hacky sack one time, and they stopped begging and just watched us. They would smile and laugh, those kids know what fun is, they know what love is, they know what enjoying is and you see that. Then they remember what they are supposed to be doing, when they are done watching you play hacky sack and done laughing, they continue to beg. Then they ask you for something. One thing that I learned is that nobody there does anything for you for free, they always want something. There is not a single person that I met in India that just did something for me to be nice, they always wanted something. Leh was a little different. I had some good conversations with some Buddhist and they didn't really ask for much in return. Down south in New Delhi and Srinagar everybody always wanted something.



This is McLeod Ganj, this is my favorite place that we visited. When we were in New Delhi, like the second or third night, I was really feeling alone, away and disconnected. There were so many people, you just couldn't be alone or be with yourself. There are so many other things going on. I felt so disconnected with everyone else. I thought about my parents and I remember looking up, while I was in Delhi, and seeing Orion's belt and it was the exact same as back home. That

moment made the connection for me, that it's the same. It's the same sun that we see, the same moon that we see, the same stars that we see, that moment connected everything for me. It gave me a way to connect with other people. I could say, just look at the moon tonight, and that would help me. Here in McLeod Ganj, the first night we got there, the clouds rolled in from the monsoons. I remember seeing stars and then the clouds hit. We were camping on the balcony of a hotel in our sleeping bags out in the open air and I woke up to a sound. It was thunder. I remember looking up for an hour and watching lightning light up the sky every half a second. After the thunder left, it was completely silent but the whole sky was lighting up in every different direction, sometime ten different lighting strikes in one second. Just everywhere, all different colors. It was just an incredible moment for me. A lot happened here actually. That night I wrote in my journal how that lightning storm represented to me people finding themselves. Every once in awhile I go back and read that. You have to put yourself in positions to see those things and once you see those things, you become really open to these moments and really see them. I noticed some people that only watched for a minute and then they went back to sleep. I didn't understand how they could do that. It was incredible. I didn't understand how they could just go back to sleep with that amazing light show going on, but then again, they didn't think of it the same way as I did. So I saw it differently. It impacted me more and I was ok with that. I just sat there and kept watching it and I wrote a bunch in my journal. That was a big night for me.

The next day I went to the Dalai Lama's house and nobody else went because we were supposed to get those little tickets to go. You were supposed to go somewhere and get tickets or some kind of pass to get in. I just went anyway to see if I could get in anyway. They just let me in and I was sitting there, surrounded by all the monks chanting. You could hear the deep base in there chants all around you. Then everyone started chanting together and bowing and I looked over and the Dalai Lama was walking right by me. I got on my knees. I didn't know what I was doing so I put my hands together like I was praying because that was what the monks were doing. I bowed to him and he stopped in front of me and bowed back and smiled at me. When that moment happened, it was like an out of body experience. There was absolutely nothing going on inside of me. I was completely happy. I didn't even think, oh my god this is the Dalai Lama. I didn't think that I can't wait to tell people about this, this is so crazy. I was just happy. Then he continued walking on and the Dalai Lama went up and started reading. Ten minutes later

it hit me and I was like holy cow. That was insane and I stayed there for half the day. Just listening to the chanting, to the Dalai Lama speaking and then we went out and did other things. Then the whole group went back the next day and saw the Dalai Lama. It was cool.

It was amazing because the Dalai Lama wasn't even supposed to be in McLeod Ganj. We had gotten there and somebody mentioned that the Dalai Lama was doing some teaching. I thought wow, the Dalai Lama is talking. We looked into it and we had to have permits, but the place was closed so we couldn't get them. So then I just decided to go any way and see what happens. It was so easy for me; I just thought to myself that I am going to go. I thought what is the worst thing that is going to happen. They will just say no, you need a badge. I haven't always been so open to just going into situations blind. Being there in that moment, with the lightening storm the night before showed me that you have to put yourself in position for things to happen and if you don't try, then things will not happen for you. After this experience I just thought to myself, what is there to lose? The worst thing that would happen to me is that I wouldn't get in and I would have to go and drink tea. At that point I felt like I was ready to be on my own.

This place was a special place for me. We went on that hike and I remember the forest being so powerful. You could feel the energy in the forest. It was crazy, almost scary. You could just feel, I felt connected to people back home. I just don't know how to explain it. I came back to this place after visiting Srinagar and Kashmir. I was just ready to come home. I had a week left and wanted to kill some time so I went back to McLeod Ganj. Everyone says that the Dalai Lama lives in Dharamsala but he actually lives in McLeod Ganj. So I didn't spend any time in Dharamsala, except to get a taxi ride to McLeod Ganj.



This picture was the road, the infamous road that goes from Manali to Leh. A two day bus ride, 360 miles, two 18 hour days at ten miles an hour. The scariest road I have ever been on, super steep. I thought I had a picture where I looked down and the tires were gone and you couldn't see the road. It looked like we were close to tipping over the edge. It was a one lane road but huge semi trucks were passing each other. It was so terrifying, but it was beautiful at the same time. At the bottom of the thousand foot drop there would be an old tanker truck that had fallen off and rolled down there. The road went up over three passes. It is the second highest road in the world. It was at 17,800 feet. I remember we hiked a hundred feet higher than the bus just to say the highest point we had been was not on a bus. This was the first time we really saw the Himalayas. They didn't look

that much different than mountains here except the bottom of the valleys were at 14,000 feet. So they were 20,000 foot peaks. So they were big but they were not that big. We were on such a high plateau anyway. So there was about 6000 feet of vertical relief. At this point in the trip we are in a completely different world. To me the trip was split into two parts, the southern part and the part going to Leh and this is our journey into Leh. We had gone to the Taj Mahal and we were in Delhi for a few days, Shimla, Manali and all those places and that was one part and the next part was we went into Leh. We left the billions of people in the Hindu culture and headed into the small population of Leh where nothing lived. There weren't even weeds. There was nothing there unless it was irrigated. It was the Tibetan population. It was a completely different world. This was our journey into that. It was so desolate. If anything happened out there, there was nothing you could do. In the back of your mind there is always that chance the bus might go over. Some people didn't sit next to the window because they didn't want to see over the edge and that was probably nice but I always sat next to the window to take pictures. Now that I think about it. I really didn't think about the road. There were a couple times that we were passing and I literally saw the road disappear under the bus and that was kind of scary but otherwise it wasn't that bad. It was bad but now that I have done it and if I went back there and did again I would be more scared because I would know what was coming. At that point I didn't really know. Actually the road that went from Leh to Srinagar was just as scary.

It is very different than driving over a snowy pass in Colorado because you don't have control. It is just some guy up there driving a bus. They actually have a lot of practice but at first you do not know that. You are used to the rickshaw drivers and taxi drivers in the city being completely crazy and driving fast and you're terrified of getting into an accident. So you think the bus drivers are the same kind of people and drivers. But then you think about it, those bus drivers don't want to die either so they are going to go slow. They have been driving for so long. They have such great control of that bus. That is what helped me, that the bus drivers don't want to die and do something stupid.

In Chile and Argentina we got around on buses too. There were big long bus rides across Argentina and back to Chile. And once you are in a place, it is all walking. I don't remember taking as many taxis in Argentina and Chile. We took all public transportation. In India we took a lot of rickshaws and we took taxies from the airport in both places. We also took trains and bus rides, but lots of rickshaws when you are in town in India. It was a little hard to get used to all the public transportation, but not that hard. It is even harder to come back to the US and not have that option. Right now I don't have a car because it broke down and you can't get anywhere without my car. If I don't have time to get to work on my bike, I just have to be late. There is nothing I can do about it. In South America and India you can get anywhere you want by public transportation. Of course we get a different rate because we are not locals, but a bus ride is still really cheap. Bus rides across Argentina with big leather seats, watching movies with drinks, were only fifteen dollars for the whole ride. Rickshaw rides were only a quarter to get across Delhi which is pretty cheap for such a big city. In India it is not an option for people to have cars because they don't have the money for them and they can't have a billion people with cars. The traffic jams would just be too big. If all those people had cars, the environment would get worse, road rage would get worse, congestion would get worse

and then they will turn into us. Just like Grand Junction isn't set up for tons of traffic either, but now there are tons of cars. You can be the calmest person in the world but you are still going to get frustrated when you are trying to drive around. Actually not having a car is really nice because I don't have to pay for gas or anything. It is not an option, so I plan ahead. In India, when you have car you are free, it is a status symbol. Stuff in India is not so spread out, like living in New York City, but here in Grand Junction, everything is so spread out that you have to have a car. It would be nice to have a taxi that cost a quarter but that is not realistic. It would be nice to have buses and a train system. Here you are not free without a car. Like I can't go climbing or take my dog out. I would have to run my dog down the street to get to the outdoors. I have a dog because I used to have a car so I could transport my dog. If I hadn't had a car, I would have never got a dog.

I just like to walk. You see so much more and you get to meet people. You also lose a lot of weight even though you eat a lot. You are walking miles and miles every day. In India there are no fat people unless they are affluent, like the guy who owns the hotel. But most people are in shape.



This picture is in Srinagar where the British used to have all the big house boats. When the British left, the house boats were taken over by the locals. When I got there, Srinagar had been closed to foreigners for a long time; it is not somewhere you normally go. I didn't see a single foreigner there, not another white person, I didn't see any tourist, not even Israelis. I stayed in this house boat and none of the locals had seen travelers in a long time either. It was really surprising when they saw me. This is one of the kids that I stayed in the houseboat with. They had two house boats and I stayed in one and they lived in the other. He was fishing in between the two house boats. That is what he did, just played around and fished. The place was pretty run down. The house boats

are pretty nice but they are old and they are not that well kept up. The walkways are obviously old and rotted. You basically stayed on these house boats and the owner would take you to town if you needed. The surrounding countryside is beautiful. It was crazy coming into Kashmir because it is so different. It was a two day bus ride too. We stopped in the city and we were not allowed to go out at night. Once the bus stopped, we went into a hotel, we ate dinner and I decided to sleep on the bus. There was tons of military near the line of control. Huge cannons, AK-47's and military built up everywhere. Then you get into the city and there are military people walking around with AK-47's but they were all nice. I would ask them for directions and they would tell me. They were just protecting their people and themselves. It was a beautiful place. It was pretty crazy. This is the start of me feeling really lonely. This is like the second week of me being alone from the group. I kept going to these places that were really crazy and incredible but at the same time I was always on my guard. I was never able to just be alone and just be with myself. It was hard to be in places like this. It is cool looking back on it but when I was there it was really hard.

This is Haridwar, where the Ganges River comes out of the mountains. This was the hardest place I traveled; it was the hardest city because there were just so many people



there. There was a huge pilgrimage going on, so there was this huge line going way back. It was like that for twenty miles of solid people. They were all dressed up with those big things. Then they would get to the bridge going over the Ganges and then throw all the stuff in the water. It was a kind of sacrifice or offering to whatever they were doing. It was probably a pilgrimage they did once in their life. It was hard because there were so many people and again I didn't see any white people or travelers. These guys

are travelers of course but they are all Indian. I started to realize I needed to get away from the places that are really crowded because I needed to be alone. When I can't be alone, I feel more and more alone. At night you can just sleep but in the day you are so overwhelmed with everything. You can't call home because it is like 3 in the morning so you are just kind of forced to read and try and find things to do.

I was going through some kind of shock. I hated India at this point. I didn't want to be there anymore. At this point I had bought my ticket back home and I just wanted to be home. I wanted to waste as much time as I could and as quick as I could because I hated it. I was scared and sad and alone. I knew the things I was doing were really cool but I didn't care because there was no one I could share it with. It was culture shock. I wasn't sad because I could do it on my own. By this point I had figured so many things out that I wanted to share these experiences with someone else. It would make it more meaningful. It is more meaningful when you can share the excitement. By this point I had gone through so much and I had realized that. I didn't think I had anything else to learn, so I decided that I was done. I have gone though my learning, I figured out the things I wanted to learn and I am ready to go. So this place was really hard. While I was here I decided to go back to McLeod Ganj because it was a lot smaller and mellower. So I headed back to McLeod Ganj after this. I learned that being in a group there is comfort and that being alone challenged me to a whole another level. For me it took being here in this city to reach my breaking point.

I felt completely alone, one hundred percent alone and not a single person I could talk to even though I was totally surrounded by people. I used to be religious and being here I studied Buddhism. I saw what the different cultures were like. I remember here at this point I wished that I was Christian again so that I could pray to have somebody to talk to. It was such a crazy thought. I remember I did pray. I just started talking out loud in the hotel room and it helped. Then I took a shower and went to sleep crying, scared and alone. Then the next day I left because I couldn't handle that place anymore. I had never experienced anything like it in my life and I never will again. That was the most alone I could ever imagine being. I remember going to a book store and buying the book *Holy Cow* and it was the same thing for the author. She went there once and hated it and it was the worse experience of her life and she never wanted to go back and then she ended up

meeting an Indian guy and they got married. Now she lives in India and loves it. I thought to myself that I know that is how I will be one day but right now I really hate it. This picture is perfect because it is blurry. I don't remember much of this place. I remember getting off the bus and walking down this crazy street with these untouchables. Tons of naked kids picking through trash, just like what you would see on TV, kids with trash and flies all over them. That is how the people were. They were just looking at me like what are you doing here. It just made me feel like what the hell do I have to complain about ever. These kids were not happy, they did not smile. I am sure they have smiled in their life. It was so overpowering to think that they are not happy. I thought in my mind that they were not happy. They looked miserable, picking through garbage with flies all over their face and nothing else. They were miserable. There were other points, like in Srinagar, I walked past this lady and she was just laying on the ground, just holding one arm out, trying to ask for something. You see them everywhere. I walked by once and then walked back by again and she was dead. Her eyes were open and there were flies all over her face and not moving anymore like she was dead. That lady I think about a lot, especially when I think things are going bad or wrong. I just think of her and realize how lucky I am and so privileged to have a family, friends and all these things that I have and that helps me. There are a lot of things that you see here, a lot of images in my head that were really disturbing. And I can't explain them to anyone else because they haven't seen them. Most people don't have anything to complain about.

I have always been happy and content with myself, I have always been me. Now I have a different perspective. I feel like I have gone out now and started to see other perspectives so that it helps me make more informed decisions. I can't tell anybody else how to live their life. I can't tell anybody how to do things. Everyone needs to go out and find it for themselves. All I can do is give little bits and pieces that may steer them in the right direction, like facilitating them to find things out on their own. This was my process that I went through. I think some people can go through this back home, whether it is in a relationship or a loss of a loved one or something big and traumatic happens. Some people have bad childhoods or in abusive relationships. They go through similar emotions but I was in a position to take all those emotions in and think about them, write about them and break down each emotion and try to figure out where each one was coming from and find the root cause of it and it helped. I don't think a lot of people do that. Some people may go through this but they don't think about it enough to process it until they are forced to. Therapy might force them to do it.

Everyone has the opportunity to go through this but Americans don't use this opportunity wisely. Americans don't learn. I don't think world travel is necessary for this experience that I had but I do think it is necessary to have a different perspective so that they can make better decisions about themselves and their life and how they will treat other people and how they will be informed. They have to experience the rest of the world to know how to treat the rest of the world. You have to know right deciding how to treat somebody else if you do not know them. If you have never seen that or been open to it.

You can't just go to Cancun to experience Mexico, you have to go to Mexico, you have to be there for a long time and see that culture. Some people may go to India and see things like the Taj Mahal but they were not forced into a position where they had to really

think about how they live over there and what drives them. If you only travel for a week, it is just a blur. I think you need a minimal of three weeks to just feel getting immersed and opened to all the new experiences. If you are gone three weeks, you can come home and really feel like you experienced something. After a month, you have gone through the whole cycle and you're really taking things in. A month is a good length of time and it is totally doable. I am still paying some of my credit cards off for these trips but every penny was worth it. This kind of travel is assessable but people don't realize it. Just like rock climbing is assessable but people don't realize it. They think it is too scary or risky or too expensive or too anything to do. This kind of traveling that you do with the Outdoor Program does not appear that assessable and most people will go to a travel agency or do the REI thing where they go and pay for a trek and I don't think that kind of travel is beneficial. I don't think the average person on the street has the means to travel like the OP because they are not setting themselves up to succeed. They set themselves up to fail. After taking an OP ILA trip, then for sure you feel like world travel is assessable to do on your own.

The style of travel we do at the OP is unplanned, you don't have an itinerary. I look though a lonely planet book and read a little bit but other than that I like to just explore without a plan. Like when we went to Chile, we decided to go to Torres del Paine. We simply flew there and just did it. I think backpacker style is the only way to travel because if you are too constricted you are not going to experience things in a meaningful way. You have to have the framework but be willing to work outside it. Like learning, you need to take that structure away, like training wheels. You have to know where you are going to fly into, those are your training wheels, but when you get there, get rid of the training wheels so you have more freedom. We know we are going in a certain direction but we don't know how. By the end of the trip, the training wheels are off. Like in Chile we ended up splitting up and going in different directions. The training wheels were off and then they were gone. We had them for teaching and then they were gone.



This picture was taken on our trek. We got to this pass and it felt great. I had been sick and throwing up but after this point everything was better. It was me overcoming that sickness and overcoming a lot of things to just get there. From this point on in the trip is where I learned the most. After this point is where I started my learning process. I had been sick and then I overcame it. India gave me many gifts. Even in the bad times. I even got sick when I came home, because I got typhoid. I got all kinds of

gifts from India, but even then when I was sick I slowed down and learned how to throw pottery. I started to live more and not worry so much about what the future hold but just being in the now. These trips helped shape who I am today. I now want to start taking people on climbing trips to Southeast Asia and Spain and Argentina. I would do it the same way as the ILA trips, to climb and to teach people to explore the world. As soon as you experience those other cultures, experience traveling with other people, experience

seeing the world, you start to view the world though a similar lens. There becomes a commonality in how you see the world. You begin to see that we are all connected, just like all the prayer flags.

Appendix M: Ken's Interview



This is a photo of Iguazú Falls on the Argentina side. This is one of the things I remember most about this area. When I was younger, my parents took me to Niagara Falls and I thought that was the most epic waterfall in the world. Then I saw this one. It was the most beautiful and largest scale waterfall I have ever seen. I love this place; the amount of water going over the falls was amazing. I kept thinking about how

awesome the ice climbing would be if it froze. We got to go right up to it in a ferry. We did all the catwalks. One was called the devils throat, which was kind of like Niagara Falls except it was a lot tighter and more in a circle. The falls goes around corners and wraps around in endless loops, it is huge. The sheer volume in the devils throat is greater than Niagara Falls.

I started with this photo because is the most memorable point before the climb. It is simply the most beautiful waterfall I have ever seen. This is also my first experience in the jungle and my first trip to South America and I really enjoyed it. There was tons of wildlife.

It was also my first time traveling backpacker style. I had gone to Europe before with my parents and we stayed in fancy hotels. I did get to experience the culture in Spain because I stayed with one of my dad's friends and his family. I also stayed with my mom's family in Germany. In backpacker style travel, I just lived out of my 47 liter pack that I brought with me for traveling before the climb. I just had a few pairs of clothes and that was about it. I had never really experienced that before. My friend on the trip showed me everything, how to travel light and cheaply and I love it. I am going back in 13 days.



These are my tent mates on Aconcagua and I really became good friends with both of them. I had been good friends with one of them but really became good friends with the other one during the trip. This was taken at 16,200 ft at Camp Canada and the first time we went up there I had a big asthma problem and I had to go down. I wanted to turn back but you talked me back into going up.

They stayed with me the entire time. I was moving very slow and they gave me a lot of encouragement. I would have never been able to get to 20,000 feet without those guys. Being in the tent with them, our group dynamics were just awesome. There were no arguments; we got along so well, it was a lot of fun. I would not mind spending another two weeks in a tent with those guys.

This is right before the snow storm blew in and we were in our tent and cooking dinner and all of the sudden we looked in our vestibule and everything was covered in snow. It was just nuking outside. Then we had the most beautiful sunset, everything was just covered in white. That was awesome. At this point we had all twelve people. There were a few of us struggling, me included. It was just so awesome to have all twelve of us up there.

Back in 2007 I had started talking about the OP doing Aconcagua and finally everything came together. I remember in April 2008, you and my friend were going telemark skiing, it was the first time I had ever been telemark skiing. And we were just started talking about this trip, about going to climb Aconcagua. A few weeks later we were planning this South America trip. Things almost fell through because I moved to Jackson Hole, but at the last minute I just bought a plane ticket and went down there. I am glad I did it. I don't really know why I did it. I was reading this book called *Forget Me Not*, it was about the life of Alex Lowe and his relationship with his wife, his climbing and his death in 1999. At some point in that book, I just shut the book and said to myself that I am going to go to South America. I don't know what in that book caused me to do this but I just decided to go. I remember walking up to you and saying I was going to South America with you guys. That is how it happened. I talked to my parents; they helped me out a little bit with my plane ticket. I had to go home for about a month and work that off.



This is at high camp at Cholera, 19,600 feet. That was by far my most favorite camp I had ever been to, just because of all the sheer rock around us. We first went to camp Berlin and it was crammed pack, everyone's tents were on a slope. I got there, I was going up pretty fast with my tent mates, I felt strong that day. I get there and I am looking at all the tents, and all the poor camping choices we have and think that this is going to suck. I

did not want to be there at camp Berlin. So we made the decision to go to the next camp. I got all excited because there was a class four rock move you had to make. Finally I got to touch some rock, because I love rock climbing. We get up there and it is this big amphitheater of rock and crazy formations everywhere. It felt really sheltered and I didn't feel like I was exposed. I didn't feel like I was at 19,000 feet. Obviously I was breathing hard in this environment but I felt at home. I loved it. I spent an entire day there when I

turned around on summit day and I just kind of hung out. I read the entire book of *Into the Wild*, while I was waiting on you guys. It was awesome.

At this point there are only nine people in our group left and we all get up there, everyone is beat. My tent mates were the first ones up there, trying to get everyone's spot laid out for tents. I remember it taking forever to set up the tent, I was carrying these huge rocks to anchor, and that was when I really started to feel the altitude. We finally get our tent set up and at this point my tent mates did not want to eat anything and I was starving, I never lost my appetite on this trip. So I cook me up a meal and some food and we just go to bed, that's about it. We figure out a time to be up and go to bed. I just remember not sleeping at all that night, that anticipation for the summit and being at altitude, you don't sleep. I slept in a negative 25 degree down bag, I slept in my down pants and I had a poly pro layer on, a capilene layer on and a fleece on, a hat, gloves. I had my crampons on my boots, I was ready to go and sure enough at 5:30, one of the team members came over and said it was time to get up. Boom, I snapped out of bed, put my boots on and I was ready to go. We had to get some water boiling for some people, we had a few technical problems but then we started off. When we got to about 20,000 feet, my hands started killing me. I could not feel them from my wrists to my finger tips. I was shaking my hands out forever. Everybody came by me and I told them I had to go down. I didn't want to lose any fingers. I had been in this situation before on Denali, where I had to come down so I am used to prepping my mind, knowing that I have worked so hard for two weeks, that not getting there is not that big of deal for me anymore. I really just enjoy being in the mountains now. The summit is an awesome accomplishment but at the same time I can do without it. I came back down, it took me an hour to warm my hands back up, while I was in my sleeping bag. I finally got all the feeling back. I had a WFR class before this trip and I realized that I had superficial frostbite. I was on the verge of mild frostbite. Today, I am really happy that I made the right decision.

A lot of what you have taught me at the outdoor program is to just assess things. I assessed the situation and I thought I would be back there on Aconcagua; it's just not that big of deal for me. When I was on Denali, I was the one who told the guide that I had to go down. I was having asthma problems and I went down. Some other guides were in the mega mid with me and they listed all my options. Option one was to take some more prednisone and go back up and see how I do. Option two was to stay another day here and go up the next day. Option three was to go down. They never told me that I had to go down. I just told them I know what you guys have to deal with and I am going to go down. They commended me for it. They said they never had anyone that agreed like that. It went down that simply. Most people will fight, bitch and moan and talk about the thousands of dollars they paid to go on this trip. It just is not that big of deal not summiting. When I had the asthma attack, I broke down and cried because I knew I couldn't go to the summit and it sucked. That moment help prepare me for future moments and being able to accept not summiting. I accept hazards that I can't control and I feel confident in climbing, skiing, mountaineering or kayaking that if a trip doesn't go because of the weather or my asthma acts up, I have come to terms with that. When I was in high school I had a huge problem with that in sport, especially in track. Sometimes I would be running 53 second quarter miles and then the next day I would be running 58s,

laying on the ground, holding my chest in pain. It was the most frustrating thing ever. And now it is not a big deal. The other thing is being a guide, you have to set standards for other people and show that it is ok not to get mad about things you can't control. It is how you get other people to follow your path in making good decisions.



This is in Valparaiso, Chile, I don't know exactly where it was but I remember walking around with you and another person in the group one day, seeing the most beautiful murals. They were everywhere, just painted on the walls. This town was just a canvas, it was awesome, I loved this town. It was really crowded. There were hills, houses on top of houses, there would be a greenhouse, a blue house, a pink house, an

orange house all on the same block, right next to each other. It was so cool. This is actually the background on my phone. I love this picture, I don't know why. It just really catches my eye with all the colors in it. All the colors in this picture, you would see a house with the same colors. It was really impressive. This photo brings back memories of just walking around with you, I remember we got some really good street food that day, the shish kabobs, the meat was amazing. We wanted to see how far we could get up in the hills and we got stopped by 15 different people all saying "Muy, muy peligroso." So we said ok and finally at one point this lady said no, walk down with me now or you will get robbed or someone will try and hurt you. I remember at one point there was a group of kids following us with a big stick and that was kind of funny. All three of us were pretty big dudes and they didn't seem to care. A funny point was when we were walking up and a group of Chilean boys tried to say, "I hate your people" but it came out as "I hate your peepee." So I looked down at my crotch and said what. Then one person on our group said, "porque." He was just so condescending about it; it made me laugh pretty hard. It is always funny when one of us acts like a typical American tourist.

A typical American is someone who travels overseas and they hire a tour guide and stay in five star, four star, or a hotel. They don't stay in a hostel. They go out every single night to eat, they don't mingle with the locals, they don't practice leave no trace. If someone is speaking to them in a foreign language, they make no attempt to communicate with the native language. I was the typical American tourist for awhile. An example, if the typical American tourist would have run into the same teenage kids as we did, they would get all paranoid and freaked out and say that I hate Chile and that they never want to come back here again. South America sucks; it is the most dangerous place in the world. And for me when I look back on that, it was one of the funnier moments on the trip. I did not feel threatened at all. To a certain extent you have to be careful with what you do but when I was down there, I love to mess the bums that would come up to me and try and intimidate me. I would stand my ground and they didn't know what to do.

The typical American would just coward down. There is the whole thing of fear in our country. That is what we are based on. That is why no one wants to go outside of the tour company and stuff. They would rather take a cruise down to Cancun or Key West.



This is Punta del Diablo, down in Uruguay. This is kind of an interesting day. We got out of our hostel in Buenos Aires after a night of having fun until seven in the morning. We were only three days into our trip at this point. We had to get our fifty pound climbing bags to this hostel up in Palermo. So we hopped on the subway with these huge bags, we had to do this very early in the morning or else it would be impossible with all

the people. That fifty pound bag takes up the space of two Argentineans. We get up to our hostel and we have to hop on the subway back to the bus station. We were going to take a bus to Tigre. We end up finding a train we can take. So we wait for a train and that takes us to this other town. Then we caught another train to Tigre. From there we caught a ferry into Carmelo. We went to Carmelo and then took a four hour bus ride to Monte Video. We hung out in Monte Video for a few days and were talking to a few other backpackers; we had no idea about this place. We were just going to cruise on back to Buenos Aires, maybe go to Rosario or Cordoba. Then these backpackers said to us that we have to go to Punta del Diablo. So we said ok, we would check it out. So we take another four hour bus ride and we arrived at the most beautiful beach ever. We are talking about a town with just a few hundred people, one hostel that wasn't full. We walk into this small supermarket and we go up to the guy at the front and ask him where the hostel is. The guy says don't worry about a hostel; I have a place you can rent. So we go to this guys house, I thought he was just getting something, but it ended up being this huge house with four bedrooms, a fireplace outside, a deck with a beach view, right on the beach. We just rented it for a thousand pesos which wasn't very much. The conversion rate at this point was twenty-four to one.

It was amazing, a thousand pesos for three of us. I couldn't believe it. I loved this place. It was awesome. And we got to this place by bus. I mean public transportation is the way to go. Americans will take a taxi everywhere, to every single place, spending a lot of money, the amount of money I would spend in a day, they would spend on a taxi ride. At times it was kind of a game to see how many different types of public transportation we could do. In Monte Video, we got on the subway again or a bus or another train, or another train. It was quite the journey to get here. It wasn't difficult at all. A lot of people think that subways are such a pain in the butt. Down there public transportation is so easy. The United States has no clue how to do public transportation. The subways are decent in the big cities but as far as buses are concerned, Greyhound needs to revamp everything. They need to have the Tur Bus company come up here and show them how to run things.

In South America, with the public transportation, it is a lot more relaxed feeling, a lot cleaner. Obviously in some parts of South America you will get the old buses, depending on how developed the country is. Obviously the United States is more developed than Argentina and Uruguay but when I would get on the buses down there, they were plush, each seat was comfy, I had plenty of leg room, I could recline pretty far back, they were ‘semi cama’ so I could sleep on them like a bed. I got meals, they had water and coffee available, and they had movies playing. You go on a Greyhound, I have been on Greyhound before, you are usually setting next to some crack addict who has white all around his mouth and asking you for a couple bucks. Another thing in South America, the buses go from point A to point B. One time when we were in Chile we got on one bus that was from point A to Z but that was our mistake. In the US it is always point A to Z no matter what bus you take. If you are going to go from Denver to St. Louis, you are probably going to stop in Limon, Ft. Haze, Wichita, Kansas City, and five other towns and then you will finally get to St. Louis. In South America, you can find direct buses to every place and just go.



The reason I took this picture is because I want people to see and know how much gear we had to bring to go climb. We had these bags the whole time for six weeks. People don't realize how much goes into an expedition. Also, the typical American again would say, “Oh, you went to go climb a mountain, that sounds cool.” No that is a big deal, I just went and climbed the highest peak outside the Himalayas. I had to bring tons

of gear. It was a huge effort just to get down there. People back home would say, I beat level five on Halo, some video game.

I remember walking over to this bus station, I had a sling with my passport, then I put my travel bag in front of me on my chest, then I put my expedition pack on my back that weight loaded in it and then I had my duffle bag that was also loaded slung around my neck. I am just cruising along, walking, sweating, it is so hot. We are only staying a hundred yards from the bus station and I am already sweating. The pink luggage is pretty funny. That style of luggage is what I always used to travel with. That is another thing I would always do and the typical American, I would bring a set of clothes for every single day I was gone. I can't believe I used to do that. Now I wear the same set of clothes for four days, even in Grand Junction. The same as when I travel.

You saw me from the very beginning. I remember coming into your office and talking to you about my Mt. Blanc trip in your tiny office. I was telling you how I wanted to become a guide one day. You got me set up and hooked up. I did a fourteener trip and then the Zion canyoneering trip. Every day I was just hanging out in the outdoor program

and getting to know new people and always learning new things. I don't know what it was, I was still kind of a fraternity boy for a long time, it was a really slow learning curve for me. Going from a fraternity to where I am now was a long time. The only friends I had when I came to Grand Junction were from the outdoor program. I tried to make friends with other people but I couldn't do it because I was trying to get into the outdoors. There are people here that are into the outdoors, like skiers that go to Aspen every weekend. That's great but I can't afford that. I really enjoyed it here. I fit in well. I felt like I clicked really well with everyone one and everything. You know I wasn't really sustainable to begin with, I drove my truck everywhere, I wasn't recycling. I just kind of learned these things as I went along. Then at some point, probably after I left Jackson Hole in 2008 and came back here in October is when everything really clicked for me. I had to learn how to live really cheaply or I was going to be in a world of hurt. I owe a lot of that to the people on the trip, teaching me how to do that. These past few months I feel like I have grown a lot from this trip, like being more sustainable. Every time I go home, my mom still drinks out of bottled water, I watched the movie *Flow*, and I told her about that bottle of water and how it probably comes from tap water in Michigan. She didn't believe me. I bought her a Nalgene water bottle but she doesn't use it. She still drinks bottled water. She says they make the thin plastic now. I would tell her it is not green, it is a waste, you don't need to be doing this. She would say that she cannot drink the tap water. I would tell her there is nothing wrong with the tap water. That is another thing about the typical Americans, they think that everywhere you go that water is bad. No it is not. It is like acclimatization at altitude, you just have to get used to it. I am sure people coming over from a different country have to get used to our water too.

These past few months have really clicked for me. I have a bike now, I had a bike before but I didn't really use it that much, but now I just bought a bike from a friend for twenty bucks and I just ride it everywhere. I haven't driven my truck for a long time, except for the other day when I drove to Ouray so I could sell my ice tools so I could have some more money for this trip coming up. I thought I was not going to be ice climbing for awhile.

That is the other thing too, with traveling. Everything got started with Mt. Blanc and falling in love with the mountains and climbing. Then all this other stuff came in too. But now everything has taken a back seat to traveling because that is the ultimate sport. You can't beat it because you never know what is going to happen next. I guess you can compare it to a first ascent route, you just never know what is going to happen or who you are going to meet or what challenges you are going to come across. It's really appealing to me. I love to climb and I had my heart set on being a climbing guide, I had those opportunities but I passed those up so I could travel. I was climbing really hard, probably four days a week before I bought this plane ticket. I bought this plane ticket a few days ago and now I don't really care if I climb another foot, I just want to get out of here.

I want to get out of here; I want to get away from the English language. My father is Cuban and I have always been looked down upon from his side of the family because I don't know Spanish fluently. It has gotten better; especially this last weekend when I

visited him, they were starting to get a little impressed. I still got a long way to go. If I go down to South America by myself for a few months, I will learn it. I already have the dialect down and I have it in my mind, it's back there, I just got to pick it up. I should be speaking Spanish fluently by the time I get back. I am confident that I will be. I want to make an effort when I am around you to only speak in Spanish. Why not, I am always going to have the English language in there, so why not talk in Spanish.



This is at Nido de Condores, at 18,000 feet. This was the most beautiful sunset I have ever seen. I remember getting up there, that day was really hard for me, setting up the tent was hard, I had to crouch down on all fours. I started having asthma problems again. I told my tent mates, this is another reason I care for them so much, they just told me to go lay down in the tent. This was before we even had the

fly up. I just crawled into my bag and they took care of everything else. The tent mates are like your life and blood. You can't go anywhere without your tent mates. I could not believe I was at 18,000 feet, I had just beat my altitude record by a thousand feet. I was super happy that day. It had been a long day, we had been getting stormed on every day, probably for four days now. It was pretty tough to keep going. At this point we had heard about search and rescue going up the mountain. Some people had already died up there; helicopters were just going up and down searching for people. I remember we had one of the guides, at first he was kind of a jerk to us and I really did not care for, he came to our tent and asked for extra batteries. I gave him two batteries out of my headlamp and I had a stash of ten in my pocket. I thought they were search and rescue, they probably have enough. That stuff was going through my head, the possibility of us getting hurt up there or something happening. It became more of a reality at that point.

This sunset, I had never seen anything like it, not even on Denali. The alpine glow was amazing. I have seen some pretty amazing sunsets in the Tetons and this one just blows everything away.

Another thing that has caught my memory is that we brought a bunch of rest stops up. At this camp, poop was a big problem, no matter where you went; when you went to squat somewhere with your wag bag, there would be a pile of crap already there. I think it was awesome that we brought those wag bags up there. The wag bag or rest stop is essentially a bag that you open up and it has powder in there, it gives you some toilet paper and a wet napkin, and all you do is poop into it and seal it up. You can even reuse it and it allows you to pack out your crap and you leave no trace. I did not see anyone else using them. We took a rest day here, I remember looking out my vestibule while I was making a grilled cheese sandwich and there was this guy taking a poop. He was only fifty feet away, bare ass pointing at me and just taking a dump, not even by any rocks. I thought are you kidding me. I was glad I was up wind, obviously. There are health hazards

associated with this, there is the disgust of having to look at all the poop. You want to talk about bad style, that is the worst thing you can do. It is awesome we brought rest stop bags up there, now the park rangers can hand them out to other climbers. We gave the park rangers over 250 rest stops and they were very happy. We gave them an outdoor program sticker and our OP sticker was the only one to be up on their window. Right in the center, it was awesome to see as we were leaving.



This was on the way down from base camp; we had already climbed the mountain. This was a stream right in the valley at 12,000 feet. I like this picture because I had never seen the contrast like that, with that much sediment coming into a clear runoff. To see it stay divided like that for quite awhile is pretty amazing. That day was brutal, walking down. I had decided to walk in my Chacos to base

camp at 14,000 feet, I didn't want to carry another pair of boots. I try to be very weight conscious when I am mountaineering. On the way down I was hurting, I was really regretting these Chacos sandals. I was going slowly and I didn't think we would ever get back to camp. It was such a slog out. On Denali, the hike out is called the death march, and I thought that this was very much a death march. We went from 14,000 feet all the way down to Penitentes, at 9000 feet. I remember hurting, from doing so much walking in my Chacos, my right ankle began to hurt, I had to limp along the last little bit. I was by myself, it wasn't big deal, morally it just sucked, I just wanted the day to be over with. I was talking to myself, I would find myself looking down at the trail and talking to myself and someone would walk by me and look at me like I was crazy.

The photo kind of represents my path since I moved to Colorado, I am the clear running stream and all the sediment is flowing into me and I haven't completely bonded with it until longer down the line. I think this kind of represents these last few months for me. Everything will eventually mix. I feel that it has mixed somewhat for me, maybe 75 percent now. The stuff from the sediment is about 75 percent of my life now and who I am. I still have that frat boy attitude a lot of times. I think that is what keeps me different from everybody else in the community, the outdoor community. It makes me unique.

This is another picture of Valpariso, I really like this picture because it gives a scale to how big the town is with all the hills rising up and how compact these houses are. There are all these different colors, you can look and see blue, pink, orange, yellow, it is just amazing. Coming back to the US and seeing people with these huge houses and the huge lawns, I ask why you need that. These people just have what they need. They don't have anything more.



They have a roof over their head, probably got a water source, someplace to go to the bathroom, they are within walking distance of anything they need. Valpariso has an amazing public transportation system, they have the small micro buses that can take you everywhere. I know in Santiago, they are all run on propane now and they are trying to get that to Valpo and Vina del Mar. You can take the train that is super easy to use, that

thing is brand new. That wasn't even there the last time you were there, they were working on it. I guess the main thing I am trying to say is that they are happy and don't need extravagant things and that is kind of how I am now. Sometimes I will by kick butt gear but that is related to what I do. It's not something I can go without.

Doing laundry by hand was a new thing for me, eating very little was also new. Right now I weigh 200 pounds, when we were done with the trip I was 178 pounds. I am really looking forward to getting back in shape on this next trip, walking everywhere. I am poor shape right now.



This is the delta with the Buenos Aires skyline in the back, you can barely see it, but that is the main part of the city. This is on our ferry over to Carmelo from Tigre. The reason I took this picture because that ferry was very interesting, I met some people on it that were very cool. So we get on the ferry, I was pretty tired so I took a nap. Then my friend came back over to me with a beer and he said our other friend was talking to two hot

chicks. As soon as he said that I was climbing over him, jumping out there to go talk to those chicks. Their names were Andrea and Laticia, they didn't speak any English so it was basically my friend talking and me doing a little bit of talking, saying this is my name and this is where I am from and that was the extent of that. I would throw a few random words in there to get what I was trying to say across. We just hung out with them for this four hour ferry ride. We just talked and talked and drank beer with them. It was just really cool hanging out with them because I hadn't really met anyone from South America yet. I felt like I kind of bonded with these girls. They were from Uruguay, they lived in Monte Video. So the ferry ride is over and we are getting on the bus to Carmelo and it is pretty late at night. We get into Monte Video at midnight. We are going to be

walking around, trying to find a hostel. They wait for us while we go to the bathroom and take money out of the ATM. This night was a pain for me because my bank was all screwed up. I had to do fourteen transactions to pull enough money out because of the exchange rate. That was a nightmare. They waited for that which I thought was really nice. Then they walked us up to a cab, told the taxi driver where to take us and gave us their phone number and email. We parted ways for a few days. The next day we were emailing back and forth and we ended up meeting up with them. I remember we went roller bladeing on these concrete paths. One of the guys is falling a lot, I could kind of skate because I used to ice skate and my other friend, talk about amazing, this guy was going backwards and doing three sixties. We were like what the hell, we did not expect this from this guy. He had dreadlocks, a straight forward guy, he doesn't care what you think, a fire fighter, a pretty hard core guy and here he is twirling around on roller blades. So we skated with them for awhile and then we walked to this grassy patch area and had a few Patricia beers, probably my favorite beer from Uruguay. I remember when we opened the beer; they poured a little on the ground and said something in Spanish that meant for the country. At the end there is a little bit left and they pour that out as well. I asked them why they poured out the last bit of beer in the bottle and they said, "Los Tiberones" which means sharks. They always poor it out, the backwash, and I thought that was pretty interesting. So now I always do that with my beer now. It is just something I picked up while I was down there.

This travel experience is one of many steps that I have to take to become who I am going to be. This was a big step but it is very small compared to what I still have to do. I am now on my path.