

## SE04EP03

### Embracing Discovery Abroad

Leanne Castro

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: On today's episode we talk to Leanne Castro, an FSU graduate who studied in London in 2014. Leanne talks about an overwhelming sense of togetherness throughout her time abroad, the lifelong sense of adventure it fostered, and the time she had a surprising encounter with a celebrity. Let's go to our conversation now.

H: Hey, how are you doing today?

Leanne (L): Hey I'm great how are you?

H: Doing so well, can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

L: Yes okay so my name is Leanne Castro. I studied English literature at Florida State and I did a semester abroad in the Spring of my junior years that would have been, Spring 2014. And now I'm living in New York, as of pretty recently, getting ready to go to grad school.

Z: Awesome and where did you study abroad?

L: I did London, yeah.

Z: So can you tell us some of the highlights from your experience in London? Like some of your favorite classes and excursions you took while you were there.

L: Yeah definitely, I loved all the excursions. I think my semester we did Bath which was really fun and they took us to Scotland and then I opted into one of those like optional excursions in Wales where you get to go cliff jumping which was terrifying and I don't know if I would like make that decision again just 'cause I'm like more cautious now that I'm not a teenager but it was so fun at the time. And yeah I loved that, I loved all the sightseeing that we got to do like seeing the famous bridges, and Harry Potter World thing that they took us two on one of our first days is also amazing. Yeah I loved, 10 out of 10, all of the excursions were great!

H: I'm like still laughing about the thought of like the different decisions we would make now based on like when we were teenagers - I think that's hilarious because I absolutely feel the same. So London is fairly well known for its celebrity sightings, did you run into anyone famous during your time there?

L: Oh my gosh, Yes, this is like one of my favorite London stories just because it's so ridiculous. So one of the first things that you do in London or one of the excursions you get taken on on like the first or second day is to Harry Potter World, the studios where the movies were filmed. Which is obviously really exciting, super nostalgic, and you get to like see the wands and get sorted by the sorting hat and just feel like you're at Hogwarts, so it's amazing to be like 'I'm in England, what do I associate with England? Harry

Potter!' So that was one of the first things we did and then this whole group of us is just like wandering around afterwards, after the Harry Potter Studio tour in London and we're walking down the street we see this like fiery head of red hair and we're like there's no way like we're just thinking that that has to be Rupert Grint because we were at Harry Potter World but we get closer and closer and we're like 'Oh my god, no that's really him!' And so this group of 30 loud, American, teens descends on this poor man who really is Rupert Grint and were like 'Oh my god, Ron can we please take a picture with you?' and he was so kind. He had the patience to let us all stand there, and first of all not call him by his actual name, and let us all get our picture taken. So that was like absolutely incredible.

H: Absolutely like peak London experience, it sounds like.

L: So London!

Z: Yeah and on the same day that you had gone to Harry Potter world, that's so amazing.

L: Exactly the timing was unreal. It felt it felt surreal, actually.

Z: I'm sure. Okay, well shifting a little bit we wanted to ask you if you had to choose one word to describe your study abroad experience what would it be?

L: Yeah I always think about the togetherness that I experienced during that time. First of all the way that the program is structured, it really facilitates togetherness. I mean you're living with like two or three people in your room and then four or five people in your flat so you're always together in that sense. And then also like the program itself just really promotes doing things together. There's like weekly pizza nights, there's a daily breakfast you can go to, so you're with people all of the time. You always have that choice. And then as with anything study abroad it's also what you make of it. So our group was like super social, which I'm really thankful for. We had this Facebook group that all 100 of us, from all our various schools, were part of so if you wanted to literally never spend the second alone in London that was totally an option. We would be like 'Hey I'm going to the grocery store, that's maybe 5 feet away, who wants to come?' and someone would be like 'Me!' or it could be like 'Oh I'm going to this concert in a couple weeks, who wants to come?' and people will be like, 'Yeah me!' So it's just like you're getting to be with people constantly and having this really unique experience together which I think is so special. Like London itself is amazing, and I think would be amazing in most circumstances, but to get to experience something with people it just really enhances it. So yeah, I think of being together.

H: Did you know anyone that you studied abroad with, or did you just meet all those people once you got there?

L: I met everyone once I got there. Yeah no so I went totally by myself, I think everyone on the program did, for the most part I'm thinking about it. Yeah but in hindsight it doesn't even feel like I went alone because the friendships you form are so immediate and so lasting. I mean the people I met abroad, to this day, are people that I talk to everyday, they've been some of my , some of them are my closest friends and I see them all the time. So it's weird to think that there was a time when we didn't know each other but yes technically before Spring of 2014, didn't know any of them.

H: That's great, that's awesome. How would you say that study abroad influenced your life after you graduated?

L: Oo I think the influence that it had on my life, it would be impossible to overstate it. The people that I met had such a huge influence on me, to this day as I said. You know, you like meet a certain type of person abroad. So for me, with that meant was people who were down to continue living in a different country and not just visiting. So what that looked like for me was after graduation I was working this marketing job in New Orleans and my heart wasn't really in it, I loved New Orleans but not the job itself, and then one of my closest friends who I met in London was like 'Hey I'm going to teach English in Thailand, you should totally come with me,' and I was like 'uh, yes!' Like that feels once in a lifetime so how about yes? And that really, it served as like a course corrector for my life in that it kind of allowed me to do this thing that I once would have thought of as once in a lifetime which is living abroad but ended up kind of being the default mode for me. Because after Thailand and backpacking Southeast Asia I got the second taste of doing that in adult life and not just in school and I was like 'Oh, this is it for me, forever. I have to do more of this.' And so from there I would spend my years, half of the year in New Orleans doing like kid oriented jobs you know working in schools or as a nanny and then the other half of the year would spend working at a summer camp in Canada. And I did that, yeah for the past three years so it was really awesome in that I was able to live abroad again. And it was really awesome in that it reminded me 'Oh yeah, like I shouldn't be working a marketing job, I should be working with kids,' and now here I am like the master's program I'm about to do is in school psychology, so I'm about to literally devote my life to working with kids which who knows if that would have happened without the people that I met in London.

Z: Absolutely I think that that's something we hear a lot that you know study abroad kind of gives you that that travel bug, if you didn't already have it. And it's awesome that you were able to go to Thailand and spend time in Canada and continue to have that traveling experience in your adult life as well. So you kind of touched on this a little bit but can you talk about how your experiences abroad have changed your career path overtime?

L: Yeah definitely. So I think if I hadn't gone to London and met the friend who then encouraged me to go to Thailand I honestly don't know what I would be doing. I don't know if I would be like honoring this thing that feels really true for me, which is that I should be working with kids. Yeah I think, I think going abroad and meeting people like I met it allowed me to be okay with the fact that I want my life to be a little unconventional. You know, I was working like a very conventional job that just didn't ring true to me but then I was reminded like 'oh yeah I have this whole net of amazing people who will support the things I want to do, even if like it means that my life kind of exists in six month intervals.' You know, so embracing that and leaning into that and being like this is what's making me happy like I'm working as a nanny right now and I love it and like I don't feel a chip on my shoulder about that anymore because I'm like this is true to me and it's what I want to devote my life to and at the end it's only your life so, yeah. I don't know if that answers your question but it was like a huge course corrector for me to not be working something that didn't feel true.

H: Absolutely. I love that that sentiment of like a course corrector. Like not that not that you couldn't have found satisfaction in working a marketing job, if that's what it was for you, but that you had the resources and the ability to kind of reflect and figure out what was actually true for you I just I really love that. And that studying abroad kind of lead you on the path to figure that out. Not that you knew that when you studied abroad but because of that experience it's kind of snowballed from there. If we can use that term in Florida? I don't know, people understand snowballs, right? But yeah I just, I think that that's so cool that it, you didn't know what you wanted to do when you studied abroad, but you found it

because of the experience that you had and that's probably one of the coolest things that you can get out of studying abroad, I would say.

L: Oh totally it was such a ripple effect. I mean it was seven years ago for me and I still think about it every day.

H: So I think you'll have a really great answer for this question, but our final question for you, it's the one we ask everyone that comes on the podcast, but what advice do you have for students who are considering studying abroad?

L: I can't say this emphatically enough, just do it. If you're even considering it and it's an option for you, it's available to you, I mean you just have to do it. Any anxiety that you have I get it, it is very scary to embark on something totally new, especially going from like cozy Tallahassee or wherever you may be. But if you're worried, especially about the social element of it, get out of your head about it you're going to get off the plane and meet a group of like 50 to 100 people immediately who are just as excited as you and you're just running around in this amazing new place having this literally life changing experience together. So first of all just do it in terms of whether or not you're going to study abroad. And then once you do make that decision and you're presented with any decision abroad, also say yes to that. You know it's this very finite and special time in your life and you have all the time in the world to rest afterwards but while you're there you should say yes to things that don't even interest you. Just go because you are there, go because its ending and because it's once in a lifetime yeah just say yes, Just do it.

Z: Wow that's such great advice.

H: I love the sentiment of doing things that you're not interested in because we hear all the time that students find new passions when they're abroad. We've had people on the podcast before who are like, I'm not interested in opera, why would I go to an opera? And then they go to an opera and they're like 'wait I'm interested in opera.' So you just have to experience it, you don't get to do that everywhere and so I love that advice, that's awesome.

L: Exactly.

Z: Well thanks for coming on the podcast today we've had such a good time talking to you and hearing about your story!

L: Thank you so much for having me!

H: Before we disembark, we want to talk about a few ways you can give back to study abroad! If studying abroad changed your life and you're wondering how you can give back, there's lots of things you can do! One option is to become a ProfessionNole Mentor through the FSU Career Center. You can connect and share your professional experience with current students who are also IP alumni. Another way to give back is to share your memories with us! We are always looking for new photos and videos to share. If you would like to share yours, send them to [IP-Media@fsu.edu](mailto:IP-Media@fsu.edu).

Z: If you are interested in supporting International Programs and future study abroad students financially you can make a donation to the IP Scholarship Fund. You can find a link to give at the top of IP's homepage at [international.fsu.edu](http://international.fsu.edu). And finally, if you're interested in giving back in other ways, connect with us at [IP-Alumni@fsu.edu](mailto:IP-Alumni@fsu.edu). You can find links to these resources in the show notes!

H: Thanks for listening, and thanks to Leanne for talking with us!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.

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