

Through My Eyes: A Journey of Culture and Self-Discovery

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the author's transformative journey of cultural exchange in China and the personal growth that followed. Through firsthand experiences of navigating language barriers, adapting to new customs, and building relationships across cultures, the chapter examines how immersion challenges assumptions and deepens understanding of humanity. It traces the evolution from curiosity to cultural empathy, showing how lessons of patience, resilience, and humility emerge through discomfort and connection.

SEEING A NEW WORLD THROUGH MY EYES

If you ever feel that you may not know something about someone, I urge you to look outside of yourself and honestly try to see where someone is coming from and how they grew up. I have come to understand the truth of these words after studying abroad.

As you read along, I will introduce you to a world through my eyes and my lens. These are some of the questions I asked myself when deciding if I should take a big step and travel all the way to the other side of the world and start my journey of exploration, self-discovery, and uncovering mysteries of a world that I am not too familiar with based on where I was born and grew up. I am from New Jersey, a state in the United States of America. This is where I grew up and where my eyes

started to develop. I realized that where you are born is where your perspective on life comes from, and if you never dare to venture outside of the world you come from, you will miss out on what the world as a whole truly has to offer.

Throughout this chapter, I will take your hand and share the journey and life lessons I learned on studying abroad and I hope it can inspire you to do the same. I will go over who I was before the study abroad trip and the many experiences and places I went to. We will go through why I chose to take such a massive step and participate in cultural exchange. In the past, I have tried to encourage individuals to engage in cultural exchange as well. Still, I understand that leaving your home and world to enter another world can be highly challenging for most people. As I go through this chapter, I will talk about my early encounters and first impressions. These are the most important details to determine if you like something or not. Afterward, I will go into much greater detail about what changed me and how I became a better and more enriched individual. I will talk about all the people I met, from good encounters to bad and even awkward encounters as well. I will talk about all the challenges, how I see diversity and culture differently, and finally, what I take forward now that I have experienced everything up until now. After I do this, I will share with you everything I have experienced so that you can see through my eyes what I saw, and you can learn and take from my experiences into your own life.

I believe it is essential for people to see all aspects of a culture because nothing in this world is perfect, but it doesn't have to be. I think that is what makes life so beautiful.

THE MAKING OF ME: ROOTS, CHOICES, AND A DIFFERENT PATH

My journey to the point of going on a cultural exchange with my university is very different from that of most students. I was born in the United States of America, but my mother and father were immigrants from a very small Island called Haiti. I grew up in America, and although I was American, I did not know much about American deep culture and deep values when it comes to family, and even the lessons taught by grandparents who lived in America prior. The culture I am most familiar with is from my family's country, but that is not to say that growing up in American culture, I did not know much about it. I understand our native culture from my parents and grandparents, rooted in my family's country, Haiti. This is how I grew up with the culture from back home; that is where my foundation for different cultures comes from. I come from a catholic school background, and I was fortunate that I met people from many different cultures in my school. I met people from Spanish, Indian, Korean, and Chinese cultures. Throughout my high

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