

BADGERS BEYOND ABROAD

alumni interview series

Kristina Nielsen

India

Life After Study Abroad

When I left India after my study abroad program in 2011-2012, I knew one thing: that I had to come back. After I returned from Varanasi, I took one year to finish my BA, then I was back to India on the next plane. During my year back in Wisconsin, I applied to a masters program at one of India's top universities: Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. I have just finished my first semester of my masters program in the Department of Linguistics here. In the past year, I've made new friends, explored all of Delhi's nooks and crannies and enjoyed life to the fullest. Every day is an adventure!

Impact on Life, Goals & Career

If I had not studied in India, it is safe to say that I would not be living in India right now. Before I discovered the UW in India program, I had not even thought about going to India. I was studying linguistics, but not really interested in South Asian linguistics. After my year in India, all of that changed. I was able to try designing and conducting a field project of my own. I fell in love with the people, places and languages of India to the point where I knew that I wanted to make India a part of my life and career plans. Now I am on my way to getting my PhD in South Asian Linguistics. My Hindi has benefited from my time in India. I've gained experience that will make me stand out when I apply to PhD programs.

Beyond my career goals, my year abroad taught me about life. India is the kind of place where poverty cannot be swept under the carpet. In the U.S., people of middle class backgrounds live an extremely sheltered life, usually not experiencing any suffering. Poverty to me before going to Varanasi was an idea. It was a picture of a starving child on the ad for some NGO. After going to India, I was forced to see poverty on a daily basis. This opened my eyes to the humanity that exists even in the slums. The kinds of lessons that I learned when I was taken out of my element and put into India will stay with me for the rest of my life.

A Favorite Memory from Abroad

My favorite memory from when I studied abroad would have to be a concert, held in a temple, that I went to in Varanasi. It was a week long traditional Indian concert. I attended with my best friend who plays classical Indian flute. One night in particular we stayed out until 7 A.M. listening to music. Some of the best musicians of the genre were there. This night we were able somehow to convince the temple owners to let us listen from the roof. Afterwards we took a bike ride to the Ganges and drank chai. It was one of the most peaceful moments of my life.

Advice for Returning Students

Don't let your global adventures stop with study abroad. Many of my friends get home and then think, "Hey that's it! I studied abroad, now it's back to the real world." Then they never think about living abroad again. It doesn't have to be that way. The "real world" is huge and full of experiences. If you are dedicated you can find a way to keep exploring it for your entire life.

Interview from December 2013



Kristina enjoying a traditional treat in India.

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