



# SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

Summer 2013



**“I was looking for something a little less traditional. I didn’t want to go to the European ‘hotspots’.”**

*Lauren Weiland studied the transition from communist rule to a capitalist society in Central Eastern Europe. The six week program included a two week field study to Germany, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.*

Why did I choose this particular study abroad option? I was looking for something a little less traditional. I didn’t want to go to the European “hotspots”. While I hope to one day see Paris and London, I can do that on a honeymoon or my next trip to Europe. When was I ever going to pick Krakow, Poland as my European destination? First of all, my knowledge of these places was very limited. The only solid facts I knew about this area of the world came from my high school history classes about Nazi Germany and their occupation of the neighboring countries.



Berlin Wall with the Whole Group

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Prague is absolutely beautiful, as though it has been frozen in time. I would say it is comparable to the beauty of Venice or Florence in Italy. It tends to be overlooked by European travelers, so there is this “hidden gem” feel to the city. Austria is just a short drive through the Swiss Alps from the Czech Republic. The scenery is so surreal; it is hard to believe this storybook beauty is the reality of life for the people populating this area.

While in the luxurious city of Vienna, we went on a tour of the United Nations Headquarters and to a Mozart concert. This talented classical composer adopted this musical mecca as his home.

I am very thankful I choose this program and had the chance to visit Auschwitz and Birkenau, the German Bundestag, the baths in Budapest and the Skoda Auto Museum and Factory. The world is a big place and this study tour definitely did a great job of opening my eyes to the modern nature of Eastern Europe.



United Nations in Vienna

**“You will make friends to last a lifetime. I guarantee you will enjoy this study abroad program.”**

Ever since I came home, I am constantly asked what was my favorite part of the experience. I hate this question, because I cannot seem to put my finger on just one. I literally saw nine different countries during my study abroad program. Each country brought a different cultural experience. I visited so many life changing sites it amazes me! This experience of a life time definitely changed me. I am a better world citizen because of my time over seas.



Vrijthof Square, Maastricht

After the two week study tour, we stayed in Maastricht, The Netherlands for three weeks to digest all we saw. We studied the mechanisms involved in the transformation from a communist system to

one of a more capitalistic nature. The class itself was very interesting. It drew on the various sights and places we visited. It also helped to explain why each place “felt” the way it did. Hungary was very laid back while Austria had a very high society feel. History tends to explain why countries so close together are unique.

During the three week course we highlighted some of the reasons leading to these differences. To further capitalize on the cultural differences, we watched movies produced in each country which depicted life in the days from WW II all the way up to the present. I really enjoyed seeing the differences between neighboring cultures.

Maastricht was the perfect place for our study of the Eastern European countries. It is a quiet, quaint city about 20 minutes by train south of Amsterdam. The Netherlands is a country similar to most Western nations.

Perhaps the greatest difference is the language and friendliness of the Dutch people. The Dutch are very comfortable with college students and enjoy being helpful to visitors. They actively ride bicycles everywhere, so if you want to absorb as much of the culture as possible, I recommend renting a bike for your stay. While you are studying in Maastricht, there will be students from all over Europe studying with you. You will get a flavor of the customs of citizens from Italy, Poland, Scotland, you name it and they will be there. Everyone stays in the Guesthouse at Maastricht University. You will make friends to last a lifetime. I guarantee you will enjoy this study abroad program.

It is astonishing just how modern the Eastern World is currently. The days of communism and socialism have definitely left their marks on the area, but they are no longer suppressing the economies or the people.

Since this experience, I have a more worldly view when talking about life. I also have a better understanding of just how lucky I am to be an American. I can't tell you what my favorite part of the experience was, but I can tell you that I would do it again in a heart beat. If you have the opportunity to study abroad, take it. I recommend this program because you will assimilate in many different cultures. We are unique individuals, yet we share a surprising amount of similarities.



Skoda Auto Museum

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Guesthouse at Maastricht University