

A World of

*Across the globe,
Rutgers students with a
taste for adventure
are expanding their
horizons in the
Study Abroad program.*

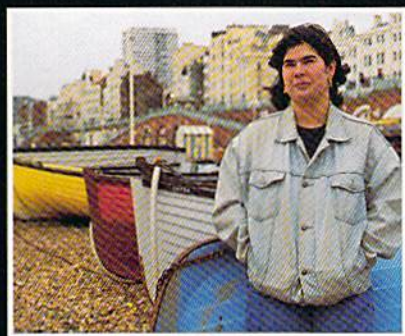


*Story by Bill Glovin
Photographs by
Nick Romanenko*



*On weekends,
Heema Shab, who is studying
at the University of
Tours, can break from
schoolwork, take the Bullet Train
from Tours to Paris,
and enjoy the Louvre
(background photo) as well
as the other cultural
attractions of
the City of Lights.*

Experience



For Lynn Ritter, who is studying in England, a popular day-trip destination is Brighton Beach, which is a quick bus ride from the University of Sussex.



In Tours, Mark Desierto and Michelle Inciong socialize at the local cafes of the city, only a short stroll from the University of Tours campus.



Tracy Abernathy (RC'96) in her dorm room at the University of Tours

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 "People here look at me as a person, not as a black person."



Douglas Harris (UC'96) and Joseph Miscione (Eng'96) on the London Tube

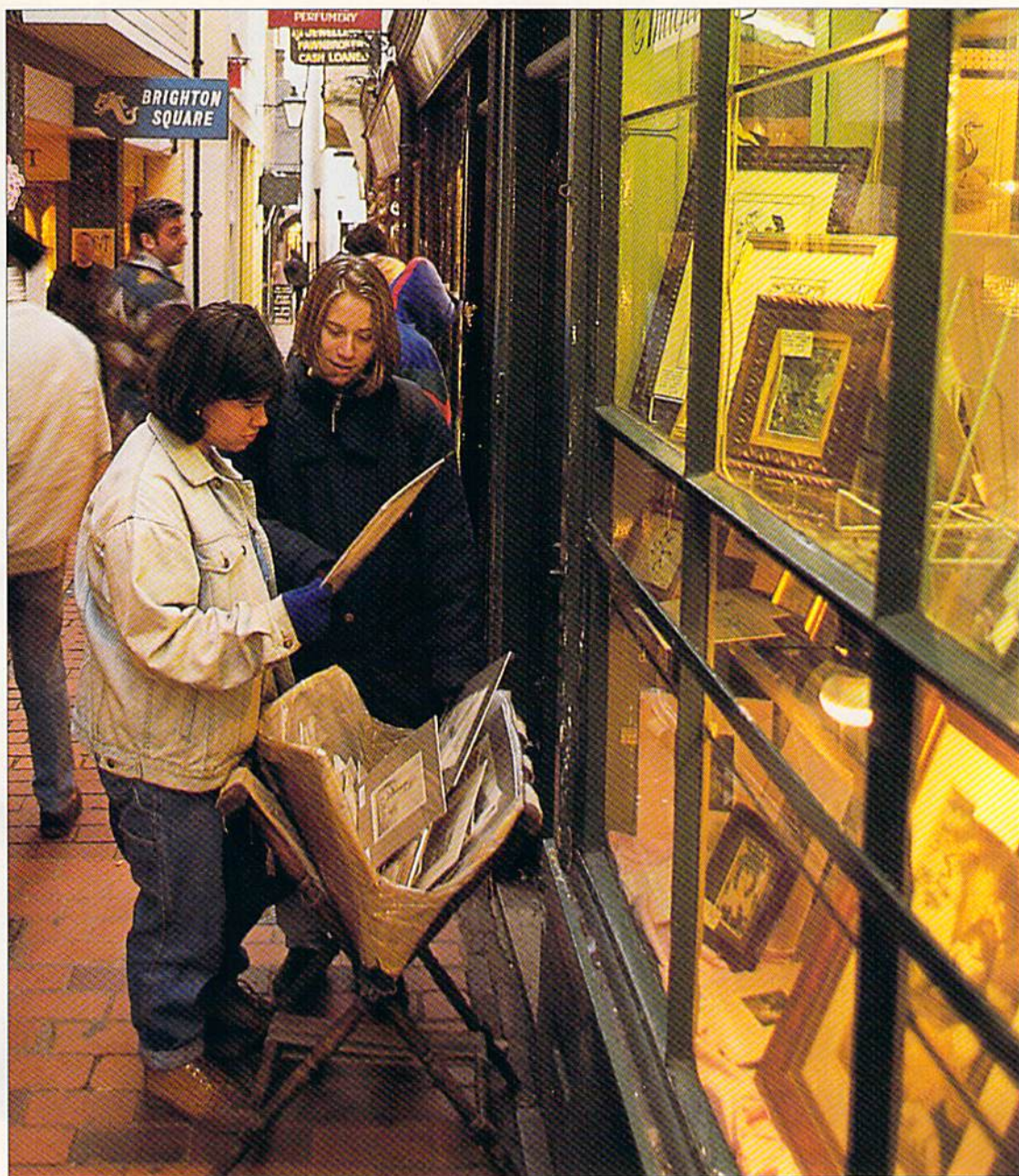
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 "Our classmates in England think that if you're tall and an American, you must be a great basketball player."

Rutgers' College of Engineering students Vincent Lai and Joseph Miscione aren't bothered by the rain as they walk uncovered across Tower Bridge in London. By the time they reach the warm, dry pub on the other side of the Thames, they're soaked. Like true Brits, the two ignore their dampness as they reflect on their experiences as American students in England. "The British are much more formal than Americans," says Lai, "and very proud." Adds Miscione: "At the same time, they're friendlier and more inclined to socialize and try to get to know you."

Lai, Miscione, and two other Rutgers students, Douglas Harris and Lev Zaks, deliberate long into the afternoon on the differences between British and American culture as well as on what they've learned inside and outside the classroom as participants in Rutgers Study Abroad. They are among hundreds of Rutgers students who have gone overseas and had their lives temporarily—and sometimes permanently—transformed by life in a foreign culture. "Most students say that Study Abroad was the best undergraduate experience they ever had," says Seth A. Gopin, program director and assistant dean in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences–New Brunswick. "It provides more than instruction; it's a total education. Study Abroad puts the world in perspective, from both a scholastic and cultural point of view."

More students than ever expect overseas study to be part of their college experience. The Institute for International Education reports that the number of study abroad students has risen steadily over the past 10 years. In their most recent count, 71,000 students were attending school abroad. The Rutgers program, which was founded 29 years ago for French language majors, enrolls about 150 students in their junior year and offers study in eight countries. About 50 of the students enrolled in the Rutgers program come from other universities, and about 150 Rutgers students study abroad through other programs. Rutgers faculty members serve one-year terms as program directors in each country.

"We are one of the few programs that arranges



Brighton—located on the English Channel—is a few minutes by car from the University of Sussex and is a major shopping destination for Ritter (left) and Bernstein.

But no matter how hard they shop, some of the things they miss most from America aren't to be found in any store in Brighton. Their parents, visiting later in the year, have promised to supply them with bagels, knishes, and corned beef and pastrami.

total integration into a local university," says Gopin. "Most programs teach American students as a group, either by bringing faculty members overseas or hiring local teachers. These students are often isolated from the local culture; it's like being on an island. Rutgers has its students integrate fully by requiring that they take regular classes and live on campus in dormitories."

*Carrie Bernstein (DC'96)
and Lynn Ritter (RC'96) in the
narrow lanes of Brighton*

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"We've learned much more out
of the classroom than in it."

England is the most popular destination because of the common language, but classes in Ireland and Israel are also taught in English. To study in France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and Spain, applicants must have at least two years of college-level language. Following orientation at Rutgers, students spend six weeks in a preliminary program before starting classes at a host university. The cost of the program



is generally about \$3,000 more than in-state tuition at Rutgers College. Financial aid and student loans are applicable.

In Lewes, England, where Robert S. Boikess directs Study

Abroad in Britain, the professor of chemistry points out that the program gives students an edge with prospective employers and graduate school admissions as well as in the international marketplace. "The program is something that students

*Mark Desierto (RC'96)
on the terrace of
Chaillot Palace in Paris*



"At home, kids approach school like it's their last chance to go crazy and party. In France, there's a much more serious tone."

remember and use in good stead for the rest of their lives."

But the commitment to study abroad takes guts. While Miscione quips that it was hard leaving his dog Bogie behind, his fellow stu-

dents say they feel the absence of family and friends. Then there are the nonessential but familiar comforts of American culture that they miss: pizza delivery, cable television, shopping malls. The different approach to education, however,

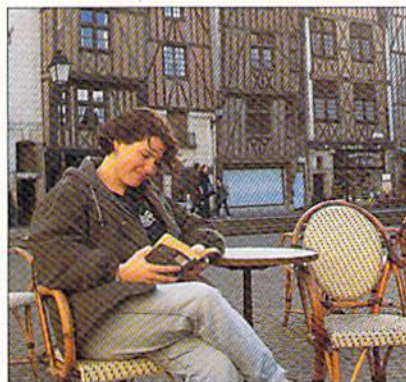


causes the most angst for students studying in England and France. "It's a system where there's no syllabus and you're expected to find the material that will help you learn on your own," says Zaks, a Rutgers College computer science major at Reading University. Carrie Bernstein, an exercise science major at the University of Sussex, adds, "There's a lot of work, and it often feels like an independent study."

Study Abroad students find that dormitories are quieter and classes less conversational than they are at home. "French students do less socializing and more studying in their rooms, where it's usually lights out at 10:30," says Michelle Inciong, a Douglass College student majoring in French and political science. "Also, libraries close at 6 p.m., so you had better make efficient use of your time. They don't cater to you like they do at an American university."

In both England and France, the visiting students have found

misconceptions about Americans. "Can you believe that people are always asking me if I own a gun?" says Lai, who found that many of the British assume that all Americans are as violent as the heroes of Hollywood films. Mark Desierito, a Rutgers College student majoring in French literature, agrees: "The French loved *Pulp Fiction*. They see director Quentin Tarantino as the quintessential American." The popularity of basketball in Europe caught the students by surprise. When 6-foot, 2-inch Miscione was recruited for the City University in London basketball team, he warned his classmates that his skills were minimal, but they were convinced that his American roots gave him



*Elizabeth Gladstone (DC'96)
at a popular cafe in Tours*



"I wanted to open myself up and break some habits I developed living in one culture."



*Susan Nelson (RC'96)
at Luxembourg Gardens in Paris*



"French students are open; yet there's something that keeps us from being really good friends."



*Vincent Lai (Eng'96)
near Parliament in London*



"This was that rare opportunity to do something really special."



*Lev Zaks (RC'96)
near Tower Bridge in London*

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“The English people have been very friendly but are formal in a way that’s hard to explain.”



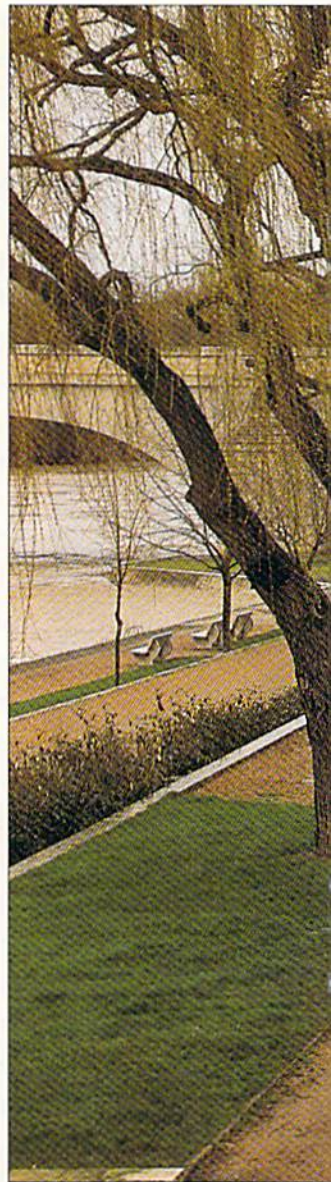
*Pamela Stern (DC'96)
on the Left Bank of the Seine*

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“Back home, the feeling is, ‘Don’t leave home without your American Express card,’ and in France, it’s more like, ‘Don’t leave home without your Chanel No. 5.’ ”

an advantage. Heema Shah, a Rutgers College student majoring in business and French, points out that posters of American basketball stars are common in Tours dormitories and quips, “They may love basketball, but they don’t seem to play it very well.”

Students take advantage of weekends and breaks to travel through the host country and Europe. Elizabeth Gladstone, a Douglass College student majoring in French and anthropology, says, “I wanted to open myself up and break some habits I developed living in one culture. I’ve seen France, Italy, and Greece.” Desierto, who says he has “a thirst for adventure,” has traveled to Budapest, Zurich, Prague, Amsterdam, and Vienna in the three months he’s been in France. He’s only sorry that Study Abroad isn’t offered to seniors; if it were, he’d be back this year.

But there’s also plenty to be learned by just staying on campus. The Tours region—about one hour south of Paris by the Bullet Train—has given Tracy Abernathy, a Rutgers College student majoring in political science and French literature, a new perspective on race. “There may be some class distinction, but I do not feel racism in France like I do in the United States. People here look at me as a person, not a black person; and an interracial couple is not even an issue.” Lynn Ritter, a Rutgers College history major, while studying at the University of Sussex, gained a new appreciation for American politics. “I thought things were screwed up back





Michelle Inciong, walking on the University of Tours campus, has pondered French and American differences. "Because they find us too casual, outspoken, and arrogant, we view them as snobs," she says. "Friendliness, which is part of our culture, is considered superficial here. But if you need help, or have a problem with the language, the French will be much more patient if you show some humility."

home until I saw what goes on in Parliament and in neighboring countries. I've learned much more out of the classroom than in it."

All Study Abroad students get a dose of homesickness from time to time. "We occasionally gather for 'American Night,' where we refuse to speak French and drink plenty of Coke," says Gladstone. Pamela Stern, a Douglass College student, was so excited to return home last Christmas that she staged a phony delivery and surprised her parents by pop-

*Michelle Inciong (DC'96)
on the University of Tours campus*

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"Libraries close at 6 p.m. so you had better make efficient use of your time. They don't cater to you like they do at an American university."

ping out of a large package. Still, Stern is convinced that she and France fit hand in glove: She plans to study law and eventually settle in Paris. "The architecture, the history, the art, the way of life—France has everything I'm interested in," she says. "Students should realize that Study Abroad is a marvelous opportunity. My advice is: Go for it while you have the chance." □

Bill Glovin is the senior editor of Rutgers Magazine.