

## **‘Not better or worse, but different.’**

My dear and curious Reader, buckle your seatbelt because in the next few paragraphs I am going to share with you the story of my study abroad experience. And trust me, my year abroad has been the craziest ride on the biggest roller coaster imaginable.

Summer 2016, I was counting down my last days, hours and minutes until departure and checking of all the necessities I needed: travel documents, boarding pass, many tones of clothes, food and presents. Yes, it did indeed look like I was just going to a developing country without any access to the internet and products necessary for life of a young teenage girl from Slovakia. However, it was Scotland and my new school - Dollar Academy. At that time, I would never have expected that all of this which I am experiencing now would happen. I remember the very first moment of coming to the boarding house and telling myself that this is the biggest disaster of my life - the typical black tea with milk and haggis. Welcome to Scotland, my darling.

I've learned a lot. Understanding. It was literally impossible to understand the unintelligible Scottish accent in the first weeks. I remember sitting in my first class and saying to myself with my red face full of shyness: 'What the hell are you doing here with your miserable and awful level of English, crazy girl?' However, towards the end, the language barrier did not exist and I became a typical Scot having a wee bit of this amazing accent. On the other hand, a much bigger challenge had been looming, understanding other people. It has been a fascinating change to come to the boarding community of 16 girls already having its leaders and not being one of them. Being on the other side of the popularity wall taught me a lot about myself, it taught me to be humble. Relax. I've learned that things don't always turn out the way you planned and you still need to stay calm. Some personal experiences? It was a nice sunny Friday afternoon and I was taking a hot shower, and I suddenly heard something sinister. The fire alarm. Caused by burning paper in the kitchen. Who would plan to run out of the house covered only in a towel into a street full of day pupils and still remain calm? Patience. It's been a challenge spending long nights awake to meet deadlines for my assignments about Slovakia. However, everything was worth the feeling of being so proud of myself. You also need to be extremely patient when your new roommate from Germany decides to watch The Vampire Diaries when you are trying to study. But then you forgive her when she offers you a bribe such as sweets and chocolate.

After one month of total despair, I started adapt to my new surrounding and I found my own routine. For example, my relationships with other girls (and boys) improved. I've learned that the best people I will ever meet are not always the ones who catch my eyes first, sometimes you are loved by the most unexpected people. I seemed to be a really quiet and weak girl and others seemed oppositely loud and popular...that are not for me. And in one moment, I began to feel a bit more welcomed, comfortable and loved. My new sisters, two HMC girls, were so kind to ignore how annoying I can be. I remember sitting in their room after midnight making the list of all the things we are thankful for. I remember hugging my Czech friend for more than four hours while creating the list of the nicest boys in our school - some motivation for us girls - and please believe me when I say that schools in the UK don't suffer from a lack of handsome boys. Nor does Dollar suffer from anything else – we have extremely high standards and quality of teaching compared to my home country. They want to invest their time into your potential. Oxford or Cambridge? I would never have believed in myself that much before. As one man

said: "British teachers do not have two heads and spit fire through their nostrils." Look at me for instance, I am still alive to tell the tale about the first rugby match I've ever seen, and at Murrayfield too! The cold sea in St Andrews, my first ballroom dancing lesson for amateurs, my first Scottish ceilidh dance, almost winning the band night with my own international band, my first journey by plane, go karting, one of the best escape rooms in Edinburgh and far more.

Overall, I would say that living abroad has been definitely far more difficult than I expected and this school year has been a massive split between the worst and the best year of my life. It has not always been about sunshine and roses, however, in the end I can tell you that it has been an eye-opening experience that shaped me in the right way. I've learned that everything is temporary and precious. A year ago, everything was different, I was different. Now looking back, I realise that one year can do a lot to a person. Everything changes while living abroad - your mind, your priorities, the way you view the world, your family and your friends. I came as a small child full of expectation and I am leaving as the strongest woman I could be, full of memories, strength, motivation and dreams.

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