

Portfolio

As a student of international politics, I believe international exposure to be just as valuable as a degree. When one acquires knowledge in a theoretical manner, it is equally important to also “learn” in a practical manner – see the world and speak to its people. Think, experiment and explore.

This portfolio is aimed at displaying my experience and lessons learnt throughout my travels of 2024, where I travelled the Mediterranean for 5 months. I have many other international experiences, such as learning German up until B2, my high school exchange to Poland, family travels in Africa and Europe, working with tourists in wine sales and multiple foreign friends visiting me in South Africa. I decided focusing on my 2024 travels would be a great benchmark for organizing my thought structure and keeping my journey cohesive – for now.

As the wizard Gandalf told a humble hobbit, feared of leaving his homely hollow: “The world isn’t in your books and maps, it’s out there.”

Erasmus summer school at Venice International University

In 2024 I had the opportunity of travelling to Italy as an Erasmus exchange student to partake in the Summer Sessions (summer school) at Venice International University. I partook in a course on [politics, gender and media representation](#) for a month. This was my first time traveling internationally as an adult and it changed my outlook on the world forever. I quickly realised that South Africans are relatively far more open and approachable people than my peers at VIU – mostly being from France, Italy, Japan and Korea. It seemed to me that so many people dressed confidently, but lacked an element of human interaction and ability of self-exposure and being vulnerable about who you are. I made life long friends in Bordeaux, Osaka and Padova.

Throughout this month I started conducting my own informal studies of the people and places around me. Being the observant person that I am, I made notes of the things I learnt every day. Many of these thoughts occurred to me as I was looking over the lazely drifting waters of Venice, often in my solitary moments, escaping the tourists and heat of the ancient city that has seen so much of the world. Here is the list of things I theorized and observed:

As there are only a small group of people apart of my culture in South Africa (i.e. Caucasian and of European decent), we are a far closer-knit community. This, along with

the hardships of our country have led us to become extremely competitive. The result of this was physically bigger, harder working and more driven individuals.

As the resources of various countries differ and the markets they have access to, so does the materials and goods they have access to. Therefore, different communities and groups across the world attach different value to different things. For example, my class mates from Japan and Korea all had very advanced technological devices they use in class and in daily life – like laptops, tablets, cell phones, headphones etc. This is because it is relatively economically cheaper and plays a socially bigger role in their daily life than in South Africa, for example. In turn, us South Africans have access to better quality food and more meat in South Africa, as our markets are agriculturally strong. We were having the toughest time of everyone adapting to the pastas and olives diet. With concept can also be loosely applied to Germany with their car industry, for example.

I also quickly came to realize the advantages of living in such a diverse society such as South Africa can have. As South Africans, we have inherited a great deal toleration for people who think, do and live differently than us (stemming from cultural toleration). This made the South Africans on this exchange far more capable and prone to swiftly forming intimate bonds with students from vastly different backgrounds.

While I was staying on VIU campus, there was a weekly tech-house (electronic dance music) event held on the campus grounds. I was very surprised by this, as it brought all the young locals together and it was fascinating to interact with these people – who also love this type of music! That night I met one of the organizers at this event and we became really good friends. His name was Marco and I thought this to be a metaphor for my travels and interactions with people from around the globe. Some days later, he invited me and some other exchange students to attend their secret party on a hidden beach with only locals – it was a true experience! Through the difference in attitude they had towards us, I could tell how draining it must be for them to constantly have to share their living space with tourists and strangers. As soon as you are invited into their community, it felt just like home.

My friend Marco helped me set up an opportunity where I could take photos for the music event – [compilation here](#). Today, we still keep in touch and Marco uses my photos for some of his song covers – check it out [here](#).

On one of our last days in Venice, we were getting bored of tourist attractions so started hunting down some interesting places to explore. This brought us to an abandoned WW2 bunker near the coast. I found this ironic and we thought it to serve as a metaphor – the wonderful world seen by tourists has an underlying and almost forgotten horror. This greatness of Europe, came at a cost of much war – [see photos here](#).

I carry my old analogue camera with my everywhere – [see my photos of Venice here](#).

Volunteering at Garda Lake, Northern Italy

After my time in Venice, I departed to Lake Garda where I volunteered at a [kite surfing school](#) and [hotel](#) for two months. I worked 6 hours every day and received meals, accommodation, countless water sport opportunities and countless life lessons. I stayed in an old Italian loft. I shared the staff house with eight other people from Ukraine, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Germany, Guatemala and Poland. We shared meals, work spaces, stories and life experiences.

My job involved mainly hotel and kite gear repair work, teaching e-foil lessons and safety boat driving. I already learned these skills in SA and could simply apply them here. I worked with German tourists every day – improving my German greatly. My boss was an absolute legend! A very professional business owner that knows the industry of action sports well (as an ex-pro snowboarder). He was my first ever real boss figure and told me a great deal about being professional in your own way, while still keeping your cool – the German way! He really taught me to embrace my own style, vibe and persona. This I learnt was really evident in Western society. I theorized that living in Africa we do not have the time and space in our society to dedicate to such individual level development, as we daily batter with problems of safety and resource deficiency. It was really freeing, emotional and needed. I learnt a lot about myself.

During my time at the lake, I would cycle to work every day. Over the course of two months of morning cycles, I reflected on my life. I remember thinking one morning about my place in the world – so far from the town where I have lived all 22 years of my life. All on my own, in an amazing position that I alone organized for myself. For the first time I have decided where I wanted to go and got there. No expectations, no commitments. And I made a success out of it. It was truly an overwhelming and empowering feeling. I still believe that lake to have a magical effect on people.

Over the two months of working there, I became best friends with a Ukrainian refugee called Rusty and a German-Guatemalan kite surfer called Ludwig. We became inseparable and did much exploring and water sports together – [see video I made here](#). From my Ukrainian friend I learned the most. He told me about his situation, how he fled and what he did to not fall into a depressive slump. He is the most hard-working person I have ever met and I saw great things in him, as he told me of his dream of one day rebuilding Ukraine as an architect. He also told me about the beauty of his life in Ukraine before the war. The more we shared stories, the more we realised it was exactly the same as my life in Africa. We faced similar economic and social challenges. It was interesting for me to have this connection with a European, as he had a hard life Russian dominated Ukraine and grew up in a harder environment than regular Europeans, like me. His drive to explore and see the world left me in awe. He left the safety of care units and social aid in Germany to explore the world – sleeping on beaches and park benches.

See my film photos of Garda [here](#).

While at Garda I took a week off to visit a colleague of my father in Southern Germany. He had meetings in Switzerland every day, so we drove most of the time. I experienced the Swiss country side and Basel. I experienced how they are absolutely fortified in their mountainous realm – through control of world finances and socio-military programs. They truly mastered their environment. The way the various sectors of their society were integrated was very interesting to me. Find my photos of Switzerland [here](#).

Friends in Bordeaux

As summer was ending and the facilities at Garda were closing down, I left for Bordeaux where I met up with my girlfriend who was traveling from Lisbon. There we visited and stayed with my friends I made in VIU. I found Bordeaux to be very similar to Stellenbosch in the way that it was a university living space with many students, markets and busy night life. I encountered many social problems that the French are faced with and gained a deeper understanding of their place in the European society. I was truly immersed in their culture, filled with feminism, oysters, wine and industrial techno music. It will always cherish my memories there and wish to return one day. See my film photos [here](#).

Volunteering in Albania

After my Schengen visa expired my girlfriend and I flew to Albania. Here we spent just under two months traveling and volunteering at an eco-campsite in the south of Albania at [Gjipe beach](#). We lived with 35 other backpackers from around the world – England, Wales, Germany, Ireland, Columbia, Brazil, Turkey, Australia, New Zealand and North – and other South Americans. We lived in tents and took turns for days to cook, clean and harvest olives. My girlfriend and I became best friends with everyone there and bonded very much with people from other English-speaking countries. I learned a lot from them and only then realised how big SA's colonial British past had a lasting impact on our society. We were far more similar to the British, New Zealanders and Australians than I thought. I also learned a great amount from our boss, Mariglen, who was a true Albanian – keeps to himself, direct, hard-working, logical and funny when he needs to be. With my family in SA also being farmers, I had a great deal of questions to ask him. The people there have been living the way they do for centuries. They are very grounded, humble and nature-orientated, yet proud, people. He taught me that even silence has a meaning. He was one of the most open-minded people I have ever met and taught me a lot about having a balance between fun and working, and that you need to do what you love, despite what the norms are. He combined his love for the environment with his passion for construction – and built his dream life. See my photos [here](#).

Conclusion

Through my travels in 2024 I have met a great deal of wonderful people from all walks of life. I saw but a tiny bit of the world and this gave me a great deal of perception of my own place in it. I was reminded how fortunate I am with my life and everyone in it – because what

you have and fail to appreciate every day, is someone else's biggest dream. This time abroad did not only improve my understanding of the world, but more importantly it helped me realise more who I want to be in this life.