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## Traveling Abroad with Parents

*When Family Visits, More Emotion Erupts than Expected*

By Claire Zulkey  
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I know that I am bound to my Villa vow of always saying that my time just outside of Florence is an experience in itself that I'll never forget and that it's beautiful and that I'm already sad about leaving and [insert more cheesy study-abroad propaganda here], but sometimes I need to get the hell out of here and go explore more of Europe. I could say that I take weekend trips to "learn" things, or at the very least find material for new columns, but in actuality I'm just looking for excuses to forget my Italian and to find new delicious and fattening foods to try.

So far this year I've buzzed off to London (where I was excited to hear people speak English, or at least their version of it), Switzerland for skiing, Prague, Munich and Salzburg. The first two trips were with some of my girls and full of hijinks like drunken debauchery, sketchy transportation situations, illegal campaign financing and other unmentionables. The last couple trips I took this month with my parents. Ugggh, parents. You know, getting up at 5 a.m., trudging through museums and having no fun whatsoever, having dinner at 4 p.m. and going to bed by 8 p.m., all while wearing embarrassing sensible shoes.

No, I kid you, even though my dad would probably like the opportunity to go to bed at 8 p.m. These trips with my parents turned out to be some of the best weekends I've had this semester. On a materialistic level, it's pretty much the same as when your parents come visit you at Georgetown: they bring you goodies, they let you stay in their nice hotels, and they feed you like the whole time without them you've been eating army rationed food.

When I first came to our hotel room in the U Krále Karla in Prague, I almost had a heart attack at the luxury of it all. Running water ... that you can drink? A carpet on the floor?? No curfew??? And then I realized that, oh yeah, these are the kind of hotels that normal, wage-earning people usually go to, as opposed to students, who, as long as the price is right, will settle for a gutter as long as it's not full of too many worms. Unless it's free, because in that case, worm-gutter ho! By the time I found out that our Hilton in Munich had NBC that broadcasted Late Night with Conan O'Brien, I was so deliriously happy that I was foaming at the mouth.

I also forgot what it's like to go out to dinner with family. I think I gained 10

pounds, and each and every one is precious in its own way, as they were all gained at nice restaurants and washed down with beer that my folks picked out for me. I knew that I was fully back in "parental mode" when I was ordering things based on the eternal method of pointing at a menu and whining, "Will I like this?" (Which everyone knows is infallible, because even if you end up getting something that you don't like, somebody, such as your father, will eat it for you.)

But, of course, it's not all dinner and hotels and magazines and gum and candy and ooooooh ... It's fun to go someplace new with the people in your life who care the least about how cool you are, and thus to just slip comfortably into tourist mode (except when my mom, trying to take a picture, gives me smile coaching ..." No, more teeth. No, that's too much teeth. Just try opening your mouth a little. No, not like that ...") It's comforting to get that parental pick-me-up of how proud they can be of you (and even comforting to get that "loving" criticism, such as, "You know, I still don't like that earring you have in the top of your ear.")

Most people I know who have met up with their parents while they are abroad agree with me that it is a much more emotional experience than they bargained for. After they leave, you miss their presence a lot more and a lot more quickly than you thought you would. Maybe it's the suddenness of knowing that it's going to be a long time before you see them again. Or maybe it's that enforced feeling of getting older and being on your own more. You more quickly regret fighting about petty things and foresee the next time when you're sick and don't have anyone to make you soup or, at the very least, say, "Oh, it's no big deal, take two Advil and get up and go to school."

For most of us who are abroad, the experience is a gift from our parents, who were at one point drunk enough to decide that it would be a good idea to let you flit off to God-knows-where and do God-knows-what with some kind of weird foreigners and OH MY GOD WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?! But after you have calmed them down sufficiently by, of course, having them call you, because you don't want to spend too much money on your cell phone by making an outgoing call, you both realize that it was incredibly generous of them to let you do this thing. Having them see you in action is gratifying for both parties involved, especially if the pictures come out nice.

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