“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page.”
-Saint Augustine

Travel has the potential to open our eyes to unfamiliar wonders and a developing world. Whether it is a breathtaking view or a life changing meal, oftentimes what happens on our journeys outside of the comfort of our homes becomes some of our strongest, most treasured memories. Even if you cannot singlehandedly travel the entire world, perhaps you can gain a taste of doing so by reading about others’ expeditions. With this issue, we aspire to give our community a chance to share its wealth of global perspectives and experiences.

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and photos to bring this issue to life, and a special thank you to Josh Weinstein for the incredible cover art. We hope that this inspires you to never stop exploring.

Happy travels,
Julia, Jess, and the Focus team
Eating My Way Through Europe

By STEFAN SULTAN ’15

“Let me tell you,” my partner said, “I am not a gluoton — I am an explorer of food.” Following this philosophy, in the following vignettes I will take you from the child of the Alps to the beaches of the Adriatic, as we explore six different European cities and towns through seven different meals.

A Moveable Feast

It was my first day in Paris. The seemingly endless rain was over and I was walking down the streets, stomach first. Our first stop was a small corner bakery in the 16th arrondissement, and I, wanting no time in between, simply put my gear tucked away on a side table. Snacking the menu, my heart skipped a beat, for the very first page was a crepe with heblokon (in my opinion, the king of the cheeses), bacon, and potatoes. The crepe itself was absolute perfection. The bacon was crispy, the potatoes were waxy, and the cheese was warm and gooey. While traditional French food was delicious, I was in Paris and what I would order was not the same. Yet there is always the hope I would be able to go back to that restaurant. Unfortunately, this was the case with this sandwich. This was the very first meal on my way to a Tunisian restaurant, where I indulged in a spicy lamb soup and some juicy meat fresh off the grill. After spending the day eating my way through Paris, I finally took my first bite and realized the mistake I was about to make. It was only later on, after eating the best sandwich I have ever had, that I did not realize this at first, and was simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had. But I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had. But I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had.

In the Land of Truffles

I was looking for the perfect menu where truffles line the windy, cobblestone streets of small hilltop towns. The parsley on the menu was a slight distraction, but Elida really did seem that way. As I walked down the streets of Rovinj and Motovun, Croatia, I would see stalla filled with truffles, truffle oil, truffle honey, and of course, truffle sauce. On top of the menu was a complete lack of options. The bacon was crispy, the potatoes were waxy, and the cheese was warm and gooey. While traditional French food was delicious, I was in Paris and what I would order was not the same again. Yet there is always the hope I would be able to go back to that restaurant. Unfortunately, this was the case with this sandwich. This was the very first meal on my way to a Tunisian restaurant, where I indulged in a spicy lamb soup and some juicy meat fresh off the grill. After spending the day eating my way through Paris, I finally took my first bite and realized the mistake I was about to make. It was only later on, after eating the best sandwich I have ever had, that I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had. But I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had.

Figs on a Beach

I sat under the cool shade of the arched olive tree as the water splashed down on the small pebble beach. The cool waves of the Adriatic lapped the shore as I looked out at the shades of blue that spread on the horizon. This was the perfect marriage to that restaurant. The bacon was crispy, the potatoes were waxy, and the cheese was warm and gooey. While traditional French food was delicious, I was in Paris and what I would order was not the same again. Yet there is always the hope I would be able to go back to that restaurant. Unfortunately, this was the case with this sandwich. This was the very first meal on my way to a Tunisian restaurant, where I indulged in a spicy lamb soup and some juicy meat fresh off the grill. After spending the day eating my way through Paris, I finally took my first bite and realized the mistake I was about to make. It was only later on, after eating the best sandwich I have ever had, that I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had. But I did not realize this at first, and was, simply put, the best sandwich that I have ever had.

Eating in a Winter Wonderland

As the gondola was slowly making its way down the snowy peaks of the Swiss Alps, I couldn’t look away from the mountains below me. It had been snowing since the night before and the whole world was covered in a thick blanket of shimmering white. From my perch in the gondola, the view was breathtaking. I broke off a piece of cheese, succulent dried figs, and pitch black Croatian olives. Though simple, the meal was nothing but divine.

Bu-Taiwan’na Go Back: Jesse Gros’ Introduction to Taiwan

By ETHAN BRODDUS ’18

Over the years, some of the students here in our community have enjoyed finding amazing places. Recently, I had a chance to speak with someone who went to a very culturally different country off the coast of China. Jesse Gros (8), a NSLI-Y scholar returning from Taiwan, had the opportunity to go to Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, a small country off the coast of China and below the Korean in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. “It was amazing. I learned a lot about the culture of this country had offered. Taipei sits next to the Elephant Mountain, where you can do an awesome activity of activities. He said, “I went on the hills of the mountain and went in a gondola. It was very pretty.” Apart from it’s large rain forest, the city in general is ripe for exploration. “You can literally go anywhere,” Jesse said. “You always can find something exciting to do, or something to explore.” However the one down side, Jesse said, is that the currency there is thirty to the dollar. Although this may be bad for the Taiwanese economy, consumers from the United States and many other countries are going to be able to purchase goods cheaply.

When asked about the culture in Taiwan, he said, “It was unique to see how everyone worked together.” This was the one thing that surprised Jesse about the culture. Apart from the constant smell in the air from the markets and the pushing and shoving to get to refer first, there is a sense of togetherness and community that not many other countries have.
Winter in the Promised Land

By TALIA ROSENBERG '17

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Seasonal story of a trip to Israel in the winter

“...and the amazing shopping, we also had the chance to spend time in the amazing city of Jerusalem. Our time at the Western Wall was incredible. We spent during a weekday to put our notes in the cracks and experience the silent worship of the Jewish men and women. Then, we were at Yad Vashem, a Friday night when the hall was singing and dancing and it was incredible! Also while in Jerusalem we went to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum. It is extremely moving. There are all of us going to the airport. The rabbi bringing us on the trip had apparently grown up with a childhood friend with the American Israeli Anthem, the Hatikvah. We burst through the rest of the tunnel and, when we reached the City of David Tunnel Tour and were directly in the pre-sunrise darkness, the lights of our van were visible. Just as I thought my views could not be surpassed, the sun beamed regular daylight. Though the sky was still gray, the sun's rays flashed into my vision and melted over the frosty air. We floated in the silence of dawn and once we were 400 hundred feet above the ground, the view of the summit was overwhelming for my eleven-year self. We visited the pyramids and the Sphinx on our way to the hottest days of the entire vacation. We took many photos and posed for even more, with sweat dripping down our faces. I received another lecture about how they built the pyramids and how the slaves in Egypt had to carry these giant blocks up to the top, but how impressive it was. The entire time my parents were talking all I could think about was, “It is about 200 degrees out here. Can we wait for the history lesson until we are inside somewhere?” My dad and I had a chance to go under one of the pyramids and into the tomb, which was incredible (especially since it was colder), but my mother did not go due to her claustrophobia.

As I took my last step onto the snowy ridge of Mount Kilimanjaro, I felt the ache of being near the surface of another world. There was no step too high to take, I had reached the summit of the volcano. At nineteen thousand feet above the ground, we were officially at the highest point in Africa after having walked for five days uphill through blazing sunshine, pouring rain, and the snow that had arrived the evening of our summit attempt. The smile that was on my face under the many layers of sweaters and coats gave away how incredibly excited I was to have achieved this goal after an eight hour push to the summit that started an hour before midnight. My heart beat fast, and I felt a second wind of energy. I later learned that this euphoric feeling is well known among the climbing community - it’s appropriately called the ‘climber’s high.’

But what about the climb? When I found myself on Mount Adams, a twelve-thousand foot mountain just outside of Portland, Oregon, whose reputation far exceeded in comparison to the highly acclaimed Kilimanjaro. A training climb in preparation for the Mount Ruiner summit I would attempt the following week, hiking Mt. Adams was something we discounted as “easy.” I made naive assumptions about its difficulty based solely on a number, its elevation, with the Kilimanjaro summit still fresh in my mind. Little did I know how lucky I had been at that time.

The minute my climbing group set foot on the mountain’s south glacier, crampons on our feet and ice axes in our hands, a torrential downpour began. As we headed up into the cold, thin air, the rain turned to snow, with winds up to fifty miles an hour hitting our faces. By the halfway point, we were caught in the middle of a blizzard with less than three feet of visibility in front of us. With no sense of direction and a signal that the weather would only worsen overnight, we were faced with a dilemma, and coiled together, waiting for their daily bread. At the end of a stormy night, we had to put aside our urge to summit and head back down to our tent. The choice was a hard one, no doubt, but I learned an important lesson in that moment: Climbing is definitely about strength and endurance, but ultimately the mountain is in control of whether the climber reaches the top. Sometimes you get to rejoice in a summit success, and other times you have to turn around; however that’s not the point of the sport. The real fun is found in the process, bonding with fellow climbers, and getting to explore the most untouched parts of the world.

It’s the Climb

By NATE GUERRA ‘16

Lions and Elephants and Zebras, Oh My!

By ELIZABETH RAPHARLY ‘16
Alec Clothier: Galápagos Islands

Alex Kalman: Tokyo, Japan

FCS Spanish Exchange 2014/2015 (Courtesy of Jess Miller)

Rochelle Ostreff-Weinberg: Turks and Caicos

Michele Zuckman: San Francisco, California

Nickie Lewis: Los Angeles, California

Charlie Blumberg: Patagonia, Chile

FCS Peru Trip 2014: Machu Picchu, Peru (Courtesy of Lisa Bernstein)

Jacob Greenblatt: St. Kitts

Dane Greisiger: Curaçao

Rebecca Miller: Ein Avdat, Israel

Jesse Gross: Taiwan (Courtesy of Ethan Broaddus)

Rebecca Miller: New York, New York

Stefan Sultan: Croatia
Submissions 2014-15

Sam Levitties: Bear Creek, Colorado

Matt Blackman: Venice, Italy

Julia Barr: Sedona, Arizona

Liza Ewen: Noosa Peninsula, Costa Rica

Stefan Sultan: U Bein Bridge, Burma

Austin Margulies: New York, New York

Nadia Taranta: Banff, Canada

FCS French Exchange 2013/2014: Crémeux, France (Courtesy of Noah Silvestry)

Max Sall: Lyon, France

Laura Barr: Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand

Sophie Ritt: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Wendy Simkin: Watkins Glen State Park, New York

Julia Barr: Sedona, Arizona

Anabelle Harden: Switzerland

Stefan Sultan: Croatia
Changing Lives, One Surgery at a Time

BY LIAH HARRIS ’16

Surgicorps International is a non-profit organization with which my family, especially my mother and father, have been involved for over the past several years. My mom uses her career as an anesthesiologist to not only help patients locally, but also globally, something about which she is extremely passionate. With this organization, she travels to third world countries such as Guatemala, Vietnam, and Zambia to provide surgical care to patients who they and my family see as underserved individuals. Just recently she returned from a “medical mission” with Surgicorps in Uganda, and in doing so, was able to finally visit my family while she was there she said, “The need is so great here. We definitely are making a difference.”

One of Surgicorps International’s goals is to make a commitment to go back to countries several years in a row and to hopefully be able to see improvements in patients that they have taken care of in the past. When I asked my mom about what it feels like to return to countries after year after year she said, “It makes my heart smile to see the kids that I took care of in the past come back to the hospital to greet us upon our return, whether it be for the need for an additional surgery or just to smile and show off how much they have recovered in the past year.” Surgicorps strives to see and care for all patients as many as each can and every day in attempt to leave the country knowing that the nation was marked by her recent trip to Uganda. She believes in living life generously and sharing with those less fortunate. As she says, “I leave each country and trip with a sense of fulfillment knowing that those who were blessed to be welcomed into the lives, cultures, traditions, and warmth of strangers is one of the best feelings in the world.”

I used to get upset because my family doesn’t really travel together. We don’t have special holiday pajamas, designated yearly tomato sauce making days and we don’t stay home every winter break. Now I realize that I never wanted special pajamas, I hate tomato sauce and actually prefer going away over winter break. The one thing that formed that without me even noticing is that every year we go to Paris to visit family. It never occurred to me that this wasn’t a typical family experience, since most of my classmates aren’t dual citizens in France and the United States. Dual national-ity isn’t often something that’s apparent when looking at someone, but for me it has always manifested itself in one way: my last name. For non-French-speaking people, the pronunciation of “Guy” seems almost too easy. In fact, whenever I tell someone how to spell my name - somehow there always seems to be a strong hint that it should be spelled “Giu” - I usually clarify by saying, “It’s Guay, as in man.” The truth, however, is that contrary to popular belief, my last name isn’t pronounced “guay.” When I was younger I used to correct people, sometimes to the point of becoming genuinely upset by their completely innocent error, but now even I pronounce it “guay.” On the rare occurrence when someone does use the correct pronunciation, “gaye,” only then is my status as a dual citizen fully acknowledged. I was speechless. We raced to the pool at the bottom of the mountain. It was a 3 mile hike down some steep terrain and then the even worse hike back up to the top. The complaining on the way down did not stop until we began to see the water toppling over through the tops of the trees and feel the mist as it cooled the air. When we arrived at the base of the waterfall, everyone was speechless. We needed to the pool of the falls and began to jump in one at a time. I stood on the left side of the falls. I am always captivated by the view out my window of the lit-up Eiffel Tower dancing at night. •

It’s Not Guy, It’s “Giu”

BY NATASHA GUY ’16

There was, I was whipping my hair as I looked down upon what was, by far the most beautiful sight I’ve ever seen. I was an infant in France, basking in the sun on a beach which is half American and half Canadian territory. Rolling, hush waves were spilled out in front of me, cooing into the deep Pacific, where seals and sea lions were swarmed on rocks popping out from the water. The sky was pristine and the clearest blue one would imagine – it felt like a completely surreal world away, from the constant buzz of technology we face on a day to day basis.

The scene was one of energizing stillness – donkeys and alpacas, led by townspeople, were walking lazily along on the path next to us as the wind rustled in the trees and the rare bald eagle circled over, its piercing eyes watching over the land. From our hotel room, we could see the island at one of its peaks: Friday Harbor in the distance, the luscious and aromatic lavender fields, the alpaca farm, and several home designer-created cabins along the coast. The perfect balance of luxury and raw, undisturbed nature.

When we had first landed in San Juan, I didn’t think it was too much of a wonder just normal town. It was when we were away from the city – that’s when the wonder set in. It was a land for nature lovers, a place where people just came to be happy and at ease with the world. •

Taiwan Impressions

BY ALICE HU ’17

Taiwan is a beautiful island with much to fun to discover. I went there this sum-mer, and before I took off, my grandpa told me to show off how much they have grown in the past that day, the weather was mysterious; half of the sky was cloudy and releasing rain showers, while the other was sunny. This is common in some islands but it was very interesting to actually feel these two different atmosphere at once.

Another thing that I want to men- tion is the Taiwanese food, especially in the night market. The night market is very famous and includes so many kinds of local delicacies. I went to many night markets in Taipei and Tainan. The markets are outdoors and there are always two roads in the market for people to walk on and shop in the stores. An attraction to all in Taiwan, both locals and tourists, the markets are bustling and crowded sometimes. Some people prefer walking while eating at the same time, which is wise because the food varies so much that you can easily try different kinds when you are walking. There are various kinds of food here including fish, sea beans, crabs, noodles, meats, salads and more. Because of the local sauce and cream, the food usually has a special flavor unique to Taiwan cuisine. Moreover, since Taiwan is close to sea and in the tropical zone, the seafood and fruits are fresh, delicious, and indulging.

Some destinations will entice you to return because of their unique specialties, cultures, and personal memories associated with them. Taiwan is that destination for me •

Sloths, Sugarcane, and Speaking Spanish

BY LINDSAY TALEMAL ’16

When my mom first told me she had signed me up for a teen trip to Costa Rica for the summer, it was anything but exciting to me mainly because I thought she was using it as an excuse to get me out of the house. I meant leaving my friends, heading out of the country for my first international flight, and spending a whole month with people I had never met ever. As I got off my flight in Miami to meet the other kids on our journey out of the country, I was nervous about who would be waiting at the gate to my plane. I imagined labels around the necks of 12 kids, all with welcoming hellos. They became my family for the next month.

But we all knew we were in Costa Rica, we soon got into a van on our way to Turrialba. The scenery was very new to me. There were huge mountains, dirt roads, and small shops everywhere. I had prepared half of it as seeing place and things different from the US. That is of course, until I heard McDonalds was common in the area. After we had drove halfway up one of the many mountains sudden the van stopped and we were all told to be very quiet. One of our counselors got out of the vehicle and asked, “Who wants to see a sloth?” For me, being able to see such an animal in the wild, one that is not native to our country and not found in a zoo, was amazing, and is by far one of my favorite memories of the trip. It would upslide as it inched along a telephone wire, and we watched as it made its way into a tree. I was amazed at so much of the wildlife I had the chance to encounter. A viga, a boa constrictor, tarantillas, and tree frogs all on a night walk, monkeys at my breakfast table, many species of birds all overhead, and even not to mention, a lot of different BIG bugs and way too many mosquitoes.

Turrialba proved to be an amazing adventure for us white water rafted, caypped down waterfalls, and even got to enjoy making our own coffee and sugar from fresh sugar cane. After all that fun, the next few days were spent at a school’s that the kids were supposed to go to everyday, they helped the kids with their studies, especially those who could understand our not-so-amazing Spanish, prepared lunch for them, painted the walls of the buildings, and played with them, mainly soccer. After the class day we were told that we would be taking a hike down to a waterfall. Most of us were replied with sighing knowing that I was the only one who knew what going down the trail meant.

The night before we left, I had done my research and was surprised to find that a 3 mile hike down some steep terrain and then the even worse hike back up to the top. The complaining on the way down did not stop until we began to see the water toppling over through the tops of the trees and feel the mist as it cooled the air. When we arrived at the base of the waterfall, everyone was speechless. We needed to the pool of the falls and began to jump in one at a time. I stood on the left side of the falls. I am always captivated by the view out my window of the lit-up Eiffel Tower dancing at night. •