

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

### An experience of self-discovery

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Destination: Université de Lausanne, Switzerland

Fabiana Fianco takes us straight into a gastronomic experience with chocolate and Gruyère cheese, on a campus where professors remember students' names.

I'm sitting on a chair waiting for the Welcome day to start. With my right hand, I'm holding the best hot chocolate of my life; with the left one, I'm swallowing a massive croissant filled with Gruyere, as if I didn't already eat in one week all the cheese Switzerland produces in about one year. In the meantime, I try to focus on what is going on around me. Surrounded by dozens of international students speaking languages I didn't even know existed, a group of professors is showing a video introducing us to our new life in Lausanne. All I can see is that the sun is shining, the campus is amazing, sport is free, interviewed students are strangely happy and satisfied, professors remember student's names and the overall academic atmosphere is rather peaceful and relaxed. Wait, I might be missing something, because it can't be possible and I'm seriously beginning to think we are definitely watching one of those videos imitating tourist advertisements. And the craziest thing is that one week later, I realize the video is surprisingly telling the truth.

These are actually the first memories I am able to collect when going back to the beginning of my journey in Lausanne. I'm pretty sure they correspond to the moment I started to feel excited about my mobility, realizing I managed to be in a wonderful place. But let's rewind a little bit, just to give you an idea of my attitude before leaving. When I first heard about international mobility, saying that I was sceptical is an understatement. I've always thought that going abroad during your academic studies was a sort of compulsory experience, something necessary for your career, whether you really wanted to do it or not. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself to move to Switzerland for six months, I wanted to use this time to focus on exams and improve my speaking skills. Actually, I was just considering a small portion of the whole experience, something that only matters to a certain extent. I guess at the beginning I just needed some time to understand that I was missing the point and that I had to enjoy what I was about to undertake.

Studying abroad deeply changes who you are, pushing you beyond your limits and turning your entire vision of the world upside down. It simply challenges your beliefs and your values by questioning the way you have always behaved. I learned to feel more comfortable with new people and that I was more open than I thought. This is why more than anything else, I took time to discover some parts of me I wasn't even aware of and had the chance to express myself in another language, which I found quite tough at the beginning. Even though I study languages and literatures, it is only while being in Lausanne that I realized for the very first time that speaking a foreign language also implies changing the way you express yourself about who you are. When I spoke French, I felt very polite and elegant, which is far from how I sound while speaking Italian! But I'm pretty sure this feeling faded once I was able to master all the rude expressions some Swiss friends diligently taught me.

Anyway, I feel I'm not the same anymore. It is, as if my mind completely reinvigorated, enabling me to change for the better. During the past six months, I've met incredible people, passionate about what they were doing and deeply inspiring. Going to Switzerland gave me the opportunity to see how many chances one may have in the future, only by stepping out of their comfort zone for a little while. I think Mark Twain was right when he said that 'broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all of one's lifetime' (*The Innocents Abroad*). Of course, saying it is easy would be lying to all those students planning to spend some time abroad. At the beginning you feel pretty lost and confused, and no matter how motivated you are, you will always ask yourself why the hell you did it, why you couldn't just stay at home without messing up your life, even if for six months. But the most amazing thing is that when the end of the mobility approaches, you will also ask yourself why you didn't do that earlier.

After these extraordinary six months abroad, I learned more about myself and other people than ever before. What would I say to my old self before leaving? Be brave, make mistakes, do crazy things you've never thought you would do, meet new cultures, fight for what you really want, be passionate and ambitious. There is much more outside your comfort zone than you imagine. And most of all, coming back home can be the starting point of a new amazing departure. It's only while leaving that I realized how much I felt like already being at home. And this is the best of all rewards.