

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

Getting lost

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Destination: King's College London, UK

Bianca Valente describes a nightmare bike ride in London, a city which makes her feel 'so dead and alive at the same time'.

October 2016. My Erasmus year has just started and I feel like a child discovering the world for the first time. I had already been far from home for a long time, I was sixteen at that time and an ocean was separating me from my lovely Sicily. So, for this reason, I felt pretty confident and I knew what to expect, the moody days, the up and downs, that childish curiosity mixed with the worst homesickness. Well, I was wrong. Every time you leave home is different. This time was different. It was me, alone more than ever.

8.788 million people.

When I read that number I hardly manage to imagine them in reality. This city crushes you like you were a little, infinitesimal, ant. It is a paradoxical place, it makes me feel so dead and alive at the same time. London is like this, there is a thin, almost imperceptible line between loving it and hating it. It easily shows the cruellest of the truths: that we are all little and vulnerable. At the same time, however, it bumps into you with its insatiable energy. It makes you realize that you can be anyone, no matter what weird, unusual or utopian idea you might have, the world has a place for you. This is a feeling so strange and peculiar that I have never felt before. It is as exciting as devastating. After all, we have only one existence and every door we open is at the same time thousands that remain closed.

Day by day I meet so many people, so many amazing stories, so much variety that sometimes I feel lost. I am lost, actually, I have to admit it. I am lost in the beauty that travelling brings. In the curiosity of trying new roads. With regard to 'trying new roads', there is one anecdote that I want to share. It was (surprisingly) a warm Sunday a couple of weeks ago and I decided to join a friend to a street market not too far from the student accommodation where I am living so I took my brand new shining red bike and I hit the road, looking at google maps sometimes. After almost fifteen minutes of my ride, my phone decides to suddenly die so I started to ask

for directions at every crossing. The worst part was not asking for directions, my English was not that horrible, even if I didn't fully understand native speakers, and I still don't. No, it was actually discovering after ten minutes that I was frantically riding on an underground motorway that crosses the river. Exactly the opposite way to where I was supposed to go. Maybe it was the left-hand traffic, the confusion of the first weeks in London, or just my very inexistent sense of direction. Now, some weeks after, I cannot stop laughing when I think about it, but back then I was totally shaking. The whole cue of cars started obsessively to honk the horn at me and to furiously shout something indistinguishable and I knew that I couldn't just stop in the middle of the way so at first I tried to ride as fast as I could. I felt I was the obstacle to the whole frenetic flow of the city so after a while I just stopped and went on the sidewalk, dragging the bike all the way. The tunnel seriously seemed without an end but almost two hours later I manage to come back home, totally tired but happy to be still alive.

When I think about that episode I realize that the whole experience of travelling can be exemplified by that crazy afternoon. Living in a foreign country it is always a way to get completely lost, to reach some underground tunnels of yourself that you would have never thought of having. At the same time, it makes you experience something so challenging that it is inevitable to learn from it and to grow up, finding yourself again or maybe for the first time.