



INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

NAME
YANIN

FROM USA **TO** AUSTRALIA & SLOVAKIA

PROGRAM
STUDY ABROAD

0123456789



Keep Calm and Study Abroad

Just Because it's Uncomfortable, it Doesn't Make it Bad

When it came to the day she was dropped off at the airport, Yanin's concerns that had kept her up at night, turned into tears and nerves. She was leaving familiarity behind in order to study abroad. Actually, Yanin, who has anxiety and depression, found the courage to study abroad, twice.

The first time a scholarship attracted her to spend a summer in Slovakia at the University of Economics in Bratislava. It was a group program with other Americans.

The second time she took on a nine-month global leadership program at a university in Sydney, Australia. While it fit perfectly into her future plans, she found herself on her own once there.

Two very different types of programs; both put her in situations where she was uncomfortable and challenged her to grow.

"I was with a group of people in Slovakia the whole time, and it taught me how to deal with people with different personality traits because you literally couldn't get away from them."

On return from Slovakia, Yanin, who has spent the majority of time in Florida, felt more open to people and their ways of thinking and doing things.

In Australia, she was the only one from her institution and lived among students from other countries. She had arrived earlier than others, which meant she didn't have anyone to connect with in getting set up and integrated into the community.

"I've never felt more scared in my life before I went to Australia and when I first got there, but I don't think a single experience has changed me more and for the better than that experience either. It forced me to get out of my shell a lot. It has changed how I go about my life now."

Since returning, Yanin feels more ready and able to speak up in different situations like class or clubs and to seek out positions or apply for awards she probably wouldn't have before.

What Supported Her Abroad?

- Her home university's study abroad orientations talked about culture shock and this helped her take it one week at a time when feeling homesick and questioning her decision. In Australia, once more students arrived and she became involved, it got better.
- Faculty and staff were always available to consult with on the Slovakia program, though some were more empathic than others. She talked with them about the specific issues that were bothering her or making her anxious. She also could connect with her boyfriend who was on the program.
- In Australia, Yanin was in contact with her therapist back home but it was very difficult because of the time zone changes and expense. She sought out resources at the Australian university and found an advocacy center for students going through anxiety or depression that would help free of charge.
- The advocacy center counselors also introduced her to two exchange students who had similar issues, but had been on campus longer; these peers listened when she was having doubts or feeling overwhelmed and offered her coping strategies.
- Yanin was in contact with her family once a week; as the only child and with her mental health history, they were a little worried. It was just a way to let them know she was okay and to connect when she was homesick in the first weeks.
- In Australia, she was required to buy into the country's universal health care, which was affordable and convenient.

Without my support - friends, family and therapist of 8 years - telling me that I was strong enough to go out there, meet people, make these connections, I probably wouldn't have gone or would have come back early. Make that support group. If you really want to do it, don't let your fears stop you.



Learn 15 Ways to Feel Emotionally Ready

www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/15mentalhealthpreparations