



Living the dream

“Being alone in a big unfamiliar city positively alters a part of yourself.”

The Chief of Staff of the Melbourne ABC newsroom once told me that I would learn more overseas than I would in any cadetship, training or anything of the like.

Perhaps because I was so focused on the internship at the time, I didn't really understand what she meant.

But now that comment has lingered next to me for four months in numerous distant lands overseas, many different meanings have now come to possess it.

They say there's no place like home. That's true. But there's also no place like anywhere you land yourself on a six-month road overseas. A road well-travelled.

I write this as I sit in Paris' Charles-de-Gaulle airport waiting for my flight to Barcelona – among the Spaniards returning home and the French going away for the weekend.

Almost all around the world, I've travelled. Definitely a good whack of it. One month in the United States, four in Europe and the last month in Asia, just for a wind down.

The people, their stories, their homes and their lives. There is nothing more rewarding than learning somebody's story in their home, which is not yours. And that's what essentially I want to do as a career, tell people's stories.

Maybe it's just the little things that you learn when you travel. Like knowing that Germany has voluntary voting without having to Google it (one up on my colleagues).

Or maybe there are bigger things. Bigger things that are learnt and become a part of you so they are harder to pinpoint. Like mastering the art of patience. Or the art of sacrifice.

Being of a mind that is open to all: religion, race, politics, art, culture, people.

I have learnt more about the world and the way it works than what I have ever read in any book or article.

Away from the safety net of home; the

safety net of English; the safety net of security. There is something of essence in not knowing your way around a city. Or knowing the rules. Or knowing anyone. Being alone in a big unfamiliar city positively alters some part of your sense of self.

It also lengthens the horizon of the future. I can't decide where I want to live first: San Francisco, Paris, Berlin. I am a Melbourne girl at heart but as a friend living in London told me, "There's just nothing like the experience of living overseas."

I travelled with some well-established Sydney-siders in their mid-20s, who were travelling for only three and a half weeks – the longest time they could get off work (something to look forward to).

They described to me the way in which travelling was different for them now, four years into their career. It's not so much travelling anymore but holidaying. When you work, you holiday, usually with a little more comfort and a larger budget.

Travelling connotes some sort of living with it, which is exactly where I'm at, complete with an annoyingly persistent budget and slum-style accommodation.

Somebody of authority asked me the other day what I did, my occupation? I was stunned momentarily at the realisation that currently I am completely indefinable.

I am not a student any longer nor am I employed in anyway as a journalist (yet!). I'm in no man's land.

And how wonderful it is.

We all have our whole lives to work, so what's the hurry? That's what life is all about: you work to live and sometimes, you live to work.

But there is this tiny piece of time between studying and working that's like a goldfield. It must be seized, as it probably won't present itself again once life gets a chance to dish its other surprises. 

Larisa Tait

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