

The Challenger

International Studies

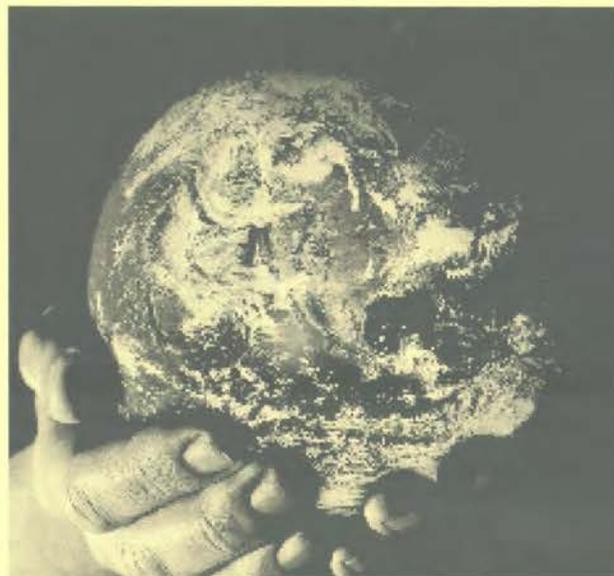
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Honors Trip to Argentina

By Eraj Ansari

This spring break Professor Veronica Mormino took seven Honors students to Argentina. She has been teaching several honors-level geography courses over last three years. According to Professor Andrew Wilson, "Since she is from Argentina, she volunteered to take the students on this trip." Professor Wilson took a group of students to Japan two years back in spring of 2006. As that trip was successful, students from Professor Mormino's geography class that went to Japan advocated that Harper sponsor an Honors trip to Argentina. Professor Wilson agreed. "It would be a great idea for students to learn a little about Latin America," says Professor Wilson. Professor Wilson was in charged of planning the trip, working with the Harper's administration and setting the criteria for eligible students to participate. Professor Mormino worked with the Argentine agency to make in-country trip arrangements. The whole process took approximately a year in total. The first half of the year was spent making the trip arrangements and advertising it on the campus. The second half of the year was spent in meeting and communicating with student participants. "I started meeting with students weekly for two months prior to the trip to ensure they were prepared, and to bring them together as a group," says Professor Mormino. Alongside this trip, there was also a two credit class for which every student had to sign up. Upon completion of the trip and the academic work that follows, student will earn their two credits. I was fortunate enough to be one of the seven students who traveled to Buenos Aries. This is the story of my trip.

Friday, March 27th, 2009

After saying goodbye to my family, on Friday, March 27, 2009, we made our way to the terminal to go to Miami. After two and a half hours, we finally reached Miami. Miami's airport is like is a maze without signs. We had some time before our flight to Argentina, so we decided to play rummy - a card game. After playing a couples of game of rummy for few hours, we boarded the plane for Argentina.

Saturday, March 28th, 2009

After another ten hour flight, we finally reached Argentina. Upon entering Argentina, we were exhausted from the long trip, but very excited to finally get there. Everything seemed different and unique. One of the first things we noticed was how huge the candy and cigarette boxes were at the airport. That's when we realized we were not in America anymore. When we got out of the airport, Claudia (our trip organizer), was waiting for us. Even though it was suppose to be fall-like weather, the temperature was in the high 80s. The airport was about 45 minutes away from our hotel. On our way to the hotel, I began to notice the difference between Argentina and America. People had parked their cars on the grass next to



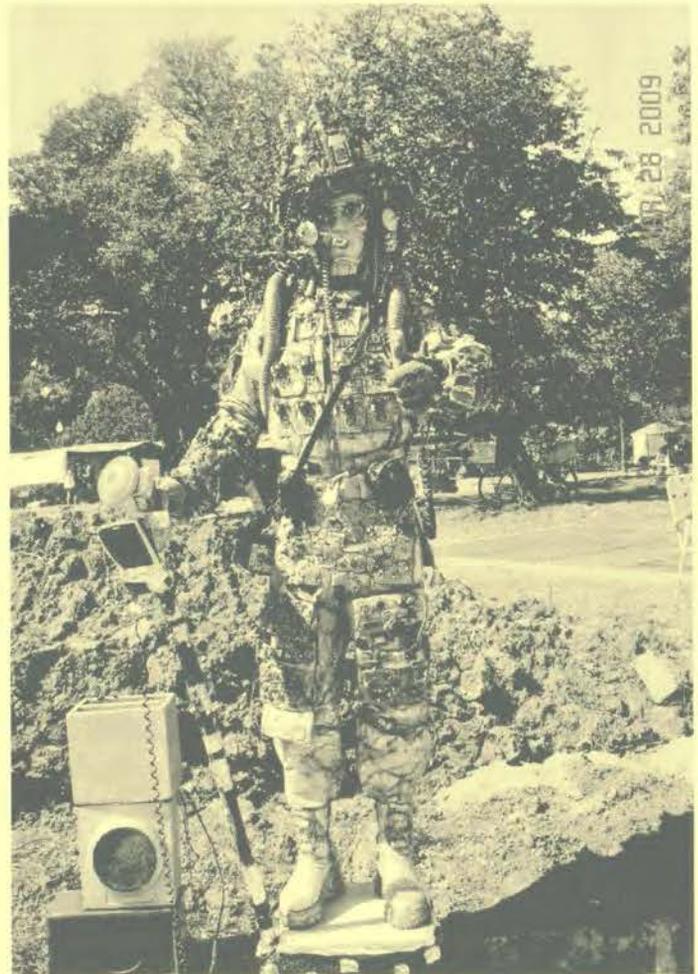
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the highway. When we entered Buenos Aires, we got a look at how traffic was organized in the city. Unfortunately, the traffic in Buenos Aires is very unorganized. Everyone is in such a rush; they don't drive in lanes. They just try to put their cars wherever there is an open area. This makes for very scary driving, which is much worse in a taxi than on a bus. Also, their traffic lights work differently than ours do. Our signal goes from red to green to yellow to red. Their goes from red to yellow to green to yellow to red, which I found very interesting. Also the city itself seemed very congested.

After our arrival at the hotel, we quickly freshened up and decided to go for a walk in Recoleta, the area where we were staying. The walk was really nice, although it was really hot. There are many historic European-style buildings. The city of Buenos Aires works hard to maintain its historical buildings. These buildings have been renovated from inside without any change to the outside.

Recoleta is known to be little expensive; however, with the exchange rate in favor of the dollar, things are not too expensive for the tourist. At the time we went there was a huge weekend flea market. We spent about two hours at the flea market, and still we were not able to go through all of it. Everywhere we looked, we saw Argentina's culture. From people relaxing underneath the enormous 300-year-old tree to people dancing the tango in the street, the culture came alive. We kept walking through the market, weaving our way through the people who were dressed up in various outfits and makeup. These performers had empty cans for change in front of them. The first performer we saw was a man in a suit which made him look like a robot man. He would stand completely still, until he received some money in his can. At that point, he began to do the robot dance for a short amount of time. There were many various "acts" such as this in the market. All of these people earn their living by standing or sitting in one spot all day, performing acts such as the robot. The enormous tree that we saw was so huge that its branches had to be supported by wooden beams. The shade the tree provided was thick enough and big enough to easily cover the area of an average sized, middle-class home.

We made our way back to the hotel to get some rest for couple of hours. At night we went out again for dinner at Magdelinaz. Magdelinaz is a pizza



place. In Argentina they put the corn pizza on top of the cheese pizza. At first that sounded disgusting, but after I had it was not that bad. We also had empanadas. Empanadas are dough puffs filled with meat or chicken. After dinner, we went for a walk. This time we decided to go in the opposite direction from Roceta. We walked towards the widest street in the world, known as 9 de Julio. It is nine lanes wide, with gardened medians between opposing traffic. Crossing this street was very difficult, because cars do not want to wait for you to cross. Even though we crossed by the signal, the cars that wanted to turned were impatiently waiting for us. Overall crossing this wide street was very difficult and was an adventure. After a nice walk and dinner we headed back to our hotel late at night; we were very tired.

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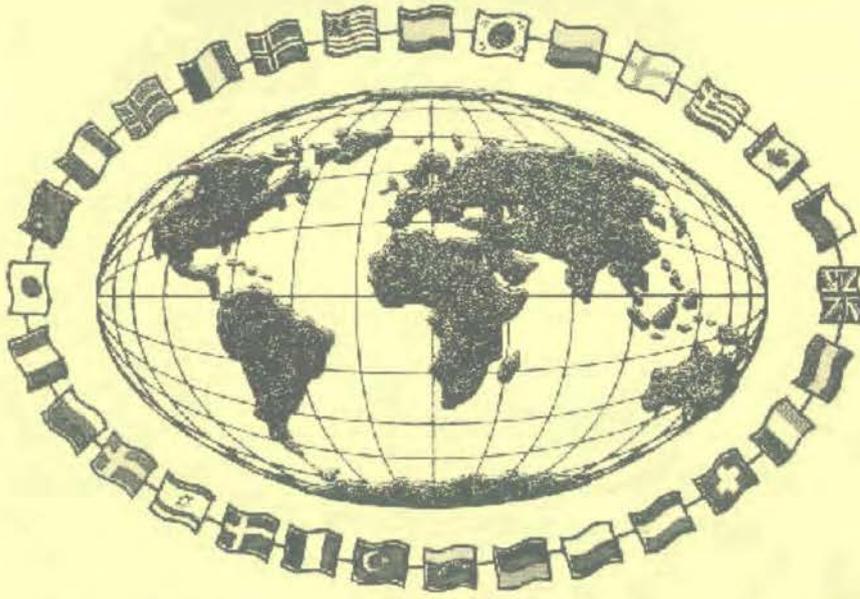
International Club

By Eraj Ansari

In Harper College's International Club, you can get an international experience while staying at Harper. The club consists of about 65 students from various parts of the world. According to the sponsor of this club, Professor Alice Roberts, their motto "is to have understanding among students."

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She tries to promote American students to join, so they can have a better understanding of different cultures that are present. They try to celebrate all the different holidays that each culture has to offer. For example, In January they celebrated Chinese New Year. In addition to that, they had a lunch buffet in March, which was held in Building A. They had food from different countries, so students could have a taste of different cultures.



International Students

In fact, Harper College has many international students. One of these students, Yessie Novica Susanto, came here from Indonesia. She has been in America for three years now. I had an opportunity to talk to her, so I asked her a few questions about her experience as an international student.

Q. How does it feel to study in America?

Ans. I would say, I feel lucky. Not so many people could get an opportunity to study in such an advanced and rich coun-

try, like the United States. Though I found it sometimes different in the education process and material, I think I feel I get much more opportunity than other students in my country.

Q. How do the education and the culture differ from those of your home country?

Ans. I would say, here, in the United States there is much more freedom. Not just in culture, but also in education. Students get to choose freely what they want to learn. They don't really have a strict schedule. In my country, we barely choose our schedule. Usually, the entire program that we want to pursue already has a fixed schedule. I am not quite sure the purpose of it. Sometimes I wonder, maybe they are concerned about the equality for education for all students. Furthermore, more often, what we call "student" in my country is really a student. They do nothing but study. They are also almost the same age, we can say school age. However, here, it is so different. Students are not just students, they are also employees, and they are every age. Age really doesn't matter here, not like in my country. You would get a weird look if you are old and still in college.

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Q. What inspired you to come here for your education?

Ans. Again, an opportunity. I see a much bigger picture and future here. I like to challenge myself in any way. Many people see that if you get an education here, you will get a better chance for a job and a future. It's really true, but for me it's not just that. I feel better than others that stay in my country just because I have the experience to be outside of my country and see another culture and life.

Q. Do you plan to stay here or go back to your country?

Ans. Right now, I am still planning to stay here. I want to get what I have been dreaming of first, to work professionally in the United States. I am not sure about the real future, but for sure just for four to five years, I would be here.

Q. Would you recommend that any student study abroad?

Ans. Absolutely, if they get a chance, they should really take it. It's a really good opportunity and experience for them. However, I would remind them, there will be something you miss the most after you study abroad; your people - family and friends- the hardest ones to leave behind. But after all, I think all the experience and opportunity you get will pay off.

Paris Trip

By Marie Kamal

Ever have a special place in mind to visit, that sings to you and interests you? Australia's outback for the adventurer, Tokyo for the business savvy, Paris for the incurably romantic? Indulge in your mild curiosity for your favorite foreign locale and you might find yourself transformed and becoming an expatriate.

Who knows? As Professor Hemmer and Professor Middleton-Kaplan can confirm, you may fall so in love that you might want to move there! During the summer of 2003, Harper offered a unique study abroad program in Paris, France. A student, Jennifer Frederiksen, already semi-fluent in French, came back to the U.S. and then made up her mind to move to France permanently. She applied and got accepted to a French business school. Having completed her degree, she is now working in a managerial position for a very upscale hotel in PARIS! Ooh la la! I know I am being repetitive, but come on! Paris is the most romantic city in the world. Swoon! The Monet pond, the Louvre, the Eiffel tower, those cute little French accents, sigh... Talk about an existential trip! It must have taken her by surprise, her attraction to Paris. I mean, we hardly think of leaving our American roots behind, but what if on a trip to Australia, we fall in love with the koalas, kangaroos, and the Great Barrier Reef and make it our mission to relocate there? How well do we know ourselves until we take that dive?

Professor Hemmer and Professor Middleton-Kaplan didn't make that initial Paris attraction any easier for the poor girl. They concocted a literature itinerary that was so profound. Imagine yourself enveloped literally in the same spot as the object of such writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemmingway, William S. Burroughs and others. You can experience first-hand what these beat writers experienced and wrote about! Even if you are not a big literature fan, reading about someone's view of a place or scenery and then experiencing it for yourself in the flesh must be a very moving thing. To quote one student's experience: "We had good discussions about literature and art. We heard stories about what people have experienced on their own but to actually read the stories in class, and read the street names and hear the places and then to actually go there and have your own experience was just amazing because just reading about it doesn't do it justice...ever."

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Sunday, March 29th, 2009

After a restful night, we got up early and decided to hit two new towns on Sunday, San Telmo and La Boca. San Telmo is the oldest neighborhood in Argentina and is a fairly well-preserved area. There was another flea market known as artisan flea market. This flea market had tons of antiques, ranging from jewelry to amazing paintings. This market was a little more expensive than the one in Rocelata, but it had a lot more originals and antiques than Rocelata did. On our way to the flea market, we saw an old lady hitting the caps of bottles with what resembled drumsticks. When we tried to take a picture of her, she held up a sign in front of her face that said "show me the money." After we gave her some money, she did the cutest dance for us and played her drums. It was very funny to see her hold up her sign when we were taking her picture. This old lady was 78 years old and was dancing like she was a young woman.

After the old lady, we saw another woman who was dressed in gold. When we gave her money, she gave each one of us a tiny heart, which represented part of her heart. After this, we went to the flea market, where we saw paintings and other antique items. We also saw a tango show by this old man and his wife. The old man was very nice and wanted to do the tango with us, but we did not because we did not know how to do the tango yet. After watching this old couple tango, I got even more eager to learn.

After the tango show, we decided to hit another town known as La Boca. La Boca has a strong European flavor because many of its early settlers were from Italy. La Boca is very colorful and crowded. Every building is painted a different bright color. Each building had a cartoon-human wax figure sitting on the balcony, which is dressed in bright colorful clothing. It is probably the most colorful town I have ever seen. In the sporting world, it is known as the home of Boca Juniors, one of the world's top soccer clubs.

At night, we went to an actual tango show in Tango Porteno for dinner. At the show we saw more of classical tango. The show consists of different pieces, including singing. It was very interesting and everyone in our group enjoyed it a lot. After the tango show, we headed back to our hotel.

Monday, March 30th, 2009

After staying up all night talking and getting zero hours of sleep, we all met Ms. Mormino at 8:00 a.m. We had a tour guide, Pablo, who was going to show us different parts of the city. The first thing we saw on our tour was the Obelisk. It is a monument placed at the heart of Buenos Aires. The Obelisk was built in May 1936



to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first founding of the city. It is located in the center of the Plaza de la República (Republic Square), at the intersection of 9 de Julio and Corrientes Avenues. The Obelisk is like Argentina's version of the Washington Monument in regards to height and structure.

The second place we went to was the Plaza de Mayo. Plaza de Mayo is the main square in downtown Buenos Aires. There we saw Casa Rosada (the pink house), which is basically the Argentina version of the White House. An interesting fact is that the reason this building is Pink is because back in 1873 when it was

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built, there were two main political parties; one red and one white. After debate on what color to paint the building, the compromise was reached that the structure be painted pink, which echoed the sentiment of unity to the country. Another interesting fact about this building is that Eva Peron made her final farewell speech from the balcony of Casa Rosada before she passed away.

We also learned about Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. This is an association of Argentine mothers whose children “disappeared” during the Dirty War, the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. They go around the statue called Pirámide de Mayo (May Pyramid), which is in front of the Casa Rosada. It started out with one walk; now it occurs every Thursday. It was very surprising to hear that these mothers come here every Thursday on behalf of their children, even though their children disappeared more than 25 years ago. It was very inspiring to hear how dedicated these mothers are. Even after 25 years, they come and express their feelings.

After visiting an old church, we drove by Saintamo, where tango was born, and by La Boca Junior stadium. One of the most interesting things about this stadium was how coca cola changed their color from red to black and white for the stadium. The reason Coca Cola changed their color is because red represented La Boca’s rivals, River Plate. La Boca Juniors and River Plate are rivals like the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Cubs. The only difference is soccer is more famous in Argentina than baseball is in America, so the rivalry between La Boca and River Plate is a lot stronger than it is in between the White Sox and the Cubs. Our tour guides were fans of different teams. Pablo was a fan of La Boca, whereas Claudia was a fan of River Plate. It was very interesting hearing them argue over which team was better.

That evening, we went for our tango lesson. For me, tango was very hard and frustrating at first. In tango, the man leads throughout the whole dance. For me it was very frustrating not to lead and be lead by a man. Because of that I kept stepping on my partner’s foot and going ahead of him. When I got the hang of it, it turned out to be tons of fun. Everyone in our group enjoyed tango a lot and wants to take more classes.

After the tango, we went back to our hotel to get ready for our dinner. It was at Spettus, a steak house, which is located in Puerto Madero. The steaks there were the best I had ever had. It is like Texas de Brazil at the Woodfield Mall, where they keep bringing you pieces of steak until you tell them to stop. After our dinner, we walked around Puerto Madero. Puerto Madero is a waterfront, occupying a significant portion of the Rio de la Plate riverbank and representing the latest architectural trends in the city of Buenos Aires. After walking around Puerto Madero, we headed back to our hotel.

Tuesday, March 31st, 2009

After spending another night with only a few hours of sleep, we met up with Ms. Mormino and our tour guide around 9:00 a.m. Today we were going Estancia la Cinacina, a ranch with ganchos, which are Argentina’s version of cowboys. On our way to Estancia la Cinacina, we drove by the River Plate stadium. This stadium had a red Coca Cola sign unlike La Boca Junior stadium, since River Plate’s color is red. I am not sure, but in my opinion, the River Plate stadium looked bigger than La Boca stadium. We also tried Mate on our way. This is an infusion including caffeine, and is prepared by steeping dried leaves of yerba mate in hot water. It is the national drink of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Mate is served with a metal straw called bombilla. At first I was very scared to try mate, but it turned out to be very good and every one in our group loved it. We enjoyed it so much that each of us bought mate home with us. Pablo, our tour guide, was very shocked to hear that we love mate. Since Mate can be strong and sour, it is served with biscuits.

After reaching Estancia, the first thing we saw was the adobe homes, which are built with mud, water, urine, and cow pies. Surprisingly they did not smell like urine and cow pies, which was a good thing. After the adobes, we went horseback riding, attended a concert of traditional gaucho music, had barbecue, and saw a horse show. During the barbecue, we saw a folk dance and a gancho dance, which were wonderful to watch. They also performed a traditional boot-stomping dance during the gancho show. After the show, we decided to take pictures with the performers and we saw the boot prints embedded in the wood due to stomping in the gancho show. Then we went outside to see the horse show. In this horse show, a gancho holds a tiny stick and

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tries to get the stick through tiny rings hung on a rope over a path by putting the stick through it while riding the horse. After collecting a certain number of rings, the gancho then gives a ring to a woman he chooses. After the show, we came back inside for some appetizers and mate, and then we headed back to our hotel.

When we got to the hotel, we rested for little bit and then we went to Rocelata for some dinner. This time Ms. Mormino did not join us; it was only our group. After a little searching, we finally figured out where to eat. Trying to order in Spanish without the help of Ms. Mormino was another adventure. Even though the waiter knew how to speak English, we insisted on ordering in Spanish, so we could practice. After some trouble, we were finally able to place our orders. Luckily, we got what we wanted. After our dinner, we headed back to our hotel late at night.

Wednesday, April 1st, 2009

After spending another night talking with other group members and staying up late, we got up early to go on another tour with Pablo. Today we drove by Parque Tierra Santa, which means holy land. This is a religiously themed amusement park. Then we went to San Isidro, which is located in Buenos Aires Province. In San Isidro, we saw San Isidro Cathedral. Like any other church in Buenos Aires, It is huge and gorgeous, but sadly we did not get the chance to go inside.

After the church, we went to Tigre Delta. The town sits on an island created by several small streams and rivers. The Delta does not connect to any ocean. Most of the houses on this island are vacation houses, but some people actually live there. Personally, I could never live there because it seemed very isolated from the main city, but it would not be a bad place for a vacation. There is also a replica of the house of the former president, who passed away while we were in Argentina. The house is protected by a big glass box. Almost all of the houses on this island are on stilts. There are walls and big trees surrounding the island so it does not flood. If the island does flood, it would be because of the wind, not because of the water level. Since it is an island, everything is controlled by boats, instead of buses. For example, instead of a school bus, there is a boat that goes to each house and picks up children. This service is run by the government. Also, if someone needs drinking water, they leave an empty water container by the river front and the boat will come and give you fresh drinking water.

After Tigre Delta, we went for lunch at the house of Victoria Ocampo, a feminist and a writer. She met famous people during her life time, like Mussolini. Victoria Ocampo's house is located in Mar del Plata. First we took a tour around her house and then we ate lunch. Her house is huge and gorgeous from outside. I would not mind living there. After our lunch, we had the tour of the inside of the house. It is very well-preserved. There are copies of her writing everywhere. Also there are pictures of all the famous people that she met during her lifetime. After the tour of the house, we headed back to our hotel. On our way to the hotel we drove by the art museum and a statue of Eva Peron.

When we got to the hotel, we rested for a little bit and then we went to Rocelata for some dinner again. Like the day before, we went without Ms. Mormino. After searching for a little bit, we finally decided on a restaurant. This time we did not have a hard time ordering in Spanish, since we had practiced from the night before. After our dinner, we went for a walk around Rocelata, and then headed back to the



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hotel.

Thursday, April 2nd, 2009

Today we did not had a tour guide, so we were allowed to go anywhere we wanted. Because we had been getting very little sleep every night, we decided to sleep in. After getting up late, we decided to go and watch a movie in Rocelata Theater around 2:00 p.m.. The only difference between theaters in U.S. and in Argentina is that in Argentina they have assigned seats. Before the movie started we had about two hours to waste. Right across the theater is the Rocelata cemetery, in which they were burying the former president, who had passed away earlier that week. Due to that, it was extremely busy around the theater. Since we did not know the area that well, we decided to see the funeral from a distance. People were applauding as the body was coming. Even though I didn't know what kind of a president he was, the way people were applauding and cheering, you could tell that he had been popular. Since it was very crowded, there were cops on horses controlling the crowd. After a little while, it was time for our movie, so we watched *The Fast and The Furious*.

After the movie, we went to the supermarket to do some shopping. Throughout the week, Ms. Mormino made us try different Argentine candy. Argentina loves Dulce-de-Leche, and there was Dulce-de-Leche in almost every candy that we tasted. We liked most of the candy we tried, so we decided to buy all different kinds. We also got some mate to take back with us, as I mentioned before. After the supermarket, we headed back to the hotel to get ready for our farewell dinner, which was at La Querencia. The food as always was very good and filling. After our dinner we headed back to the hotel to pack our bags.

Friday, April 3rd, 2009

After spending another night with very little sleep, we got up early, since we had to check out by 12:00 p.m.. After we checked out, we went to En la Calle Floria, leaving our bags in the hotel. En la Calle Floria is kind of like a strip mall, and right by it there is a small mall called Galerias Pacifico. It has a wonderful ceiling painting located in middle of the mall. There is a food court located in the middle of the mall as well, so we decided to have lunch there. The food court consisted of all kinds of food, anything from Asian to American. After our lunch, we walked around the mall and in En la Calle Floria and did some last-minute shopping. We finally returned to the hotel late in the afternoon. Our bus arrived around 7:00pm to take us to the airport. The bus ride to the airport was very sad, since nobody wanted to leave. We got to the airport around 8:00 p.m. and our flight was at 11:00 p.m.



This concluded our wonderful but short trip to Argentina. Even though I learned most of the history about Argentina in my history classes and from books, I had a much better understanding by going there and learning it from our tour guide, Pablo. After coming back from this trip, I would love to go and do another study aboard program. What made this trip even more wonderful was our group. Even though we did not know each other very well prior to the trip, we ended up becoming very good friends after the trip. Of course, this wasn't the only thing we got out of this trip. In my opinion, I think we felt just as attached to Argentina as we were to each other. After learning their wonderful culture and their history, it's not hard to fall in love with it.

Poor Jennifer didn't have a prayer. She is now the hotel liaison for Harper's future study abroad in Paris trips, and of course is now very fluent in French. So if you get the opportunity to go, you can probably pick her brain in person. How deliciously spontaneous her decision to move was! To explain her decision better she states, "I don't think visiting there and staying in a hotel is really learning a city." She was so intrigued that she really wanted to experience it from a local's perspective...grocery shopping and meeting the baker, etc.

If you would like to see a video of that trip, Professor Middleton-Kaplan has one on DVD. They went to exotic locales like Versailles, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Eiffel Tower, Van Morrison's Grave and the Greek marble sculpture Venus de Milo at the Louvre. They even visited French impressionist painter Claude Monet's house and garden at Giverny, and they got to view the famed pond in person.

The students truly felt that their short trip was more educational than a semester full of classes. They received six literature credits for their twenty-day excursion. Just a few books that are listed to read on the DVD: *The Beat Hotel* by Barry Miles, *The Happy Birthday of Death* by G. Corso, *Satori in Paris & Pig* by Jack Kerouac.

Can you believe that last year's planned trip to Paris didn't rouse enough interest? Unimaginable, I say. As Nat King Cole said, after a nasty break-up, "A week in Paris, will ease the bite of it. All I care is to smile in spite of it." The lyric makes perfect sense. If your whole world is tumbling down, how can you not be hopeful of the future in the most romantic place in the world?

Trip to Japan

By Marie Kamal

In my teen years, I was forced to transfer to a high school in Texas from East Aurora High. I was surprised to find out the Spanish class was going to Mexico and my World History class was going to Russia when it was still a part of the USSR. (Yes, I know, I don't look my age and I just dated myself.) I was surprised that there were travel options to the classes! I so wanted to go to Russia! I was a huge Tom Clancy nerd and like the dumb lamb attracted to powerful lions, I was all in love with vodka-loving KGB espionage and the threat of being sent to Siberia. Not being born with a silver spoon prevented me from going at that time. But the idea of traveling with a trusted professor to a foreign land and learning first-hand about the culture, sights, and smells was very appealing.

College study abroad programs are not that much different, except for the fact you get college credit. YAY! Plus you have financial aid, scholarships, grants, and student loans to help you with the cost. Not to mention that ever-handy and abusable new credit card arriving at about the age of 18, whether you have an income or not. So costs and credit aside, I bet you are wondering about which professors are the harbingers of escape. Professor Andrew Wilson has hosted a trip to Japan, Professor Veronica Mormino just returned from a spring break in Argentina, and Professors Hemmer and Middleton-Kaplan have an intriguing trip to Paris offered practically every summer! Make yourself available on their trip lists, or talk to the multicultural center in the D building to find out more information about traveling to your favorite exotic locale. Australia anyone?

In 2007, six honors students took a trip of a lifetime to Japan, all for only \$1000 per student. That price included airfare, room and board. Unfathomable in the world of study abroad programs. Plus they got two honors credits in Humanities to boot. The program had room for eight but as the deadline neared two students had to bow out. I cannot believe that only eight students wanted to travel to Japan with Professor Wilson, who is still my favorite teacher. My first thought was how Professor Wilson kept the students from barging down his door to go! Not to worry. Professor Wilson plans on a similar trip every other year for those Honors students who

missed out. This past year was with the endearing Ms. Mormino, a native Argentine, who hosted students to go to Buenos Aires. Maybe if enough students whine, we can bump the trips to every year, 'grease the wheels' if you will.

Imagine the scene from *Memoirs of a Geisha* in which the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. Many don't know this but cherry blossoms only bloom for two weeks of the year in spring. I used to live in D.C. and the effect is magical on your sense of sight and smell. The Japanese even print cherry blossom trees on their currency! That is how enchanting the result is on a person and the Japanese culture. Kasia Daniliszyn had this to say about the enchanting atmosphere: "While in Kyoto we took an impromptu trip to the Nijojo Castle in the northern part of the city, and the castle's reflection in the water surrounding it, with the cherry blossoms everywhere, was unforgettably beautiful."

Imagine the voyage to get to a temple in Japan. You first board a tidy train and are greeted by bowing and friendly conductors. Student Keunae Choi notes that "the bullet-train can run as fast as 125 to 186 miles per hour, and in Japan, the trains are rarely if ever late." A cable car is your next mode of transportation as

you travel almost vertically up a mountain. Once you get to the top, you enter the temple and don Buddhist robes. Meandering around the labyrinth of brick paved walks among the cemetery lit by ethereal stone lanterns on both sides of the walk was a highlight for one of the students who is a practicing Buddhist. There is a mist on the mountain and the air is cooler. It is quiet and peaceful. All you can feel is the Zen of the space you are in. Being a tourist you take pictures of comical tombstones that have hamburgers and you ponder what kind of life that person lead that would constitute a hamburger tribute on his grave. Did he have a smile like



the Hamburglar? Did he own a hamburger franchise? Jessica Chang observed that, "Miyajima, a quiet and beautiful island off the coast of Hiroshima, is a heavenly sanctuary of nature and religion...The island is home to a large and beautiful Shinto shrine. There is also a giant, red-orange torii gate that stands majestically on the shores of the island."

To Professor Wilson, the most profound aspect of the trip was the visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. He shrugged as if this was an old "fuddy duddy" hazard of being a teacher. I countered that of all the museums in the National Mall in Washington, D.C. there was nothing that compared to the pain I felt for the loss of lives remembered at the Holocaust Memorial. That experience to me was the most emotional and moving. I can't imagine the conflict of emotions of visiting a lovely country, falling in love with the people and culture of Japan and visiting the Memorial. There you see the shadows of children playing and people lunching burned into the concrete where their instant incineration by an American bomb has left their reminder forever. Michael Bentley, Jr. says, "The unaltered devastation of the A-bomb Dome, a charred tricycle, and a 'permanent shadow' rests permanently on my conscience."

In an attempt to counter his self-perceived notion that he is conservative and stuffy, Professor Wilson

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offered to take his students to a 'maid café' in Tokyo. A maid café is a restaurant that has the waitresses dress up in Manga-style frilly maid costumes and wait on customers in a subservient manner, calling them 'Lord' or 'Master'. Concerned with how the students would respond to this type of 'role-playing' I am sure Professor Wilson was in a sweat. Never having been to one himself, he didn't know what to expect. The waitresses were demure, childlike and saccharin sweet. If you watch Japanese game shows or cartoons, you can imagine the easy smiles and surreal enthusiasm that met those students. Student Andrew Bargielski offered this insight in regards to the maid cafés, "All of us wondered whether the Tokyo "maids" were -- perhaps in some small way(s) -- updated versions of pre-war Kyoto geishas." The maid café's purpose is to cater to shy gaming and cartoon enthusiasts and to bolster their egos. I commented to him that I am sure these café's are a far cry from the American Hooters institution that many a foreigner has come to experience. I relate that to the similar phenomenon of Borat's 'obsession' with Baywatch and Pamela Anderson.

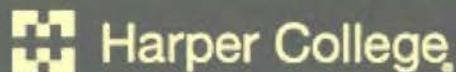
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