

Why Your Child Shouldn't Wait Until College To Study Abroad

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As a high school student who studied abroad, I often get asked why my parents allowed me to go overseas at such a young age. In fact, despite the many benefits of this experience, I've found that parents often decide not to let their children study abroad in high school, and instead, wait for them to do it in their college years.

Parents often fear that having their child study abroad for a semester or a year when they're still a minor is much harder than when they're an adult. Yet, a lot of exchange students I've encountered say that "waiting for college" is one of their biggest regrets.

To prevent this becoming one of your (or your family's) biggest regrets too, here is a list of reasons why your child shouldn't wait until college to study abroad.

- **The high school experience varies much more than the college experience in different countries.**

It's indisputable that high school and college are two extremely different worlds. However, college life is a lot more standardized than high school life across countries, meaning students often experience a relatively similar experience to what they see at home. In contrast, students who study abroad during high school experience things that can only be experienced during high school in that specific country.

In the United States, these are things like Football Fridays, themed dress-up days, homecoming week, odd competitions (of any sort, from best tractor to quickest milk drinker), teepee-ing, American football and prom.

In a different country, the high school experience is totally different.

In Italy, for example, students choose among a wide range of different types of schools, depending upon what they want to focus on more: humanities, sciences, foreign languages, arts or sports. Italian high schoolers don't have the chance to try as many activities as high schoolers would in the U.S., because they usually play sports at sports clubs rather than at school; however, they don't have to change classroom every hour, thus remaining with the same group of people throughout the school day.

- **There are more opportunities at more affordable rates.**

In many countries, tuition fees are high for college students and relatively low for high

schoolers. The cost of living is also cheaper in high school as students don't usually have rent, loans, gas and other miscellaneous expenses to worry about, because they live with a host family school. There are also lots of scholarships available for teens who wish to go overseas because it's not a standard practice.

- **It helps high schoolers grow their international network.**

Studying abroad during high school allows students to meet people from outside their social circle and culture with relative ease, because there's a huge social side in high school that often isn't seen in other areas of our lives. This allows them to make international friends before entering college.

- **High schoolers have less responsibilities to concern themselves with than college students.**

Besides maintaining a decent grade-point and behaving in accordance to school rules, there's little that high school exchange students need to be concerned about. This compared to the larger amount of responsibilities that college students have. Of course, it doesn't mean that high schoolers have more freedom, but they do have less to worry about during their time abroad.

- **It's often easier for a high school-aged student to learn a foreign language than a college-aged student.**

Integrating oneself into a culture that speaks a different language is a lot easier at a young age, when students are a lot more impressionable, than in their college years. Regardless of whether it's a language the student is already learning, or it's completely new to them, by the end of their experience abroad they'll likely be able to speak the language without major struggles.

- **Studying abroad during high school helps high school students choose their career path.**

An experience abroad during high school is often beneficial for that student's selection of a future career. Students often encounter new experiences which help them understand what career path they'd want to pursue, through falling in love with something they've never tried before, or realizing that they can't do without an activity they did back home.

- **It matures high schoolers.**

Going abroad during high school changes the way high schoolers interact with the world, and gives them the opportunity to mature before most of their peers. Often, this is because they're required to undertake more 'grown-up' challenges, such as adapting to new cultural activities, learning to do their own washing or planning weekend trips with their host family. As a result, high

school exchange students learn at an impressively young age how to be self-sufficient, manage money, solve problems, network, plan and organize.

My own parents recognized that there was a huge difference between what I prioritized before I left , and what I prioritized after returning home. The same could be said for your child as well.

- **Studying abroad during high school looks great on future college and employment applications.**

Colleges and employers appreciate and covet students who have studied abroad during high school, as they are generally recognized for being more adaptable, independent and skilled. In countries where finding a job is becoming a harder challenge to undertake, unique experiences like studying abroad really seem to make a difference on a curriculum vitae. Speaking more than one foreign language fluently, being prone to interact with people from different settings and having an adventurous and perceptive disposition constitute the essential bases requested in an international environment, whether in a college or workplace environment.

Going abroad during high school changes students and the way they interact with the people around them. It helps them grow their network of friends, mature as people, discover their passions, enhance their skills and become more confident; each of which is of extreme worth, especially at such a young age.

While I understand that having your child separated from you, even momentarily, seems extremely scary, I guarantee that those fears have little substance. There's few reasons why students such as your child should wait to be in college to study abroad, as they could get the same benefits (and the potential for even more) at an earlier age.