

A Tour of Asia to Better Understand Foreign Cultures

By Community Counselor in Washington, DC, Joana Godinho

Communicating across cultures is something we do every day as community counselors. The best way to gain this skill is to travel, get out of our comfort zones and learn.

In 2013, I decided to take on a new challenge and travel to a new country every year. In 2018, I spent a sabbatical month in Asia and visited the following countries: China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand.

My goal was simple:

I like to “live” like a local during my travels. One of my friends had a good joke about this. When I was visiting Rio de Janeiro, a couple of years ago, I got sick and my host said: “Joana, today you are going to experience Rio like a local: stay in the waiting room for hours and speak with a doctor who doesn’t know much.” It turned out, it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. But from this experience, I was able to contrast the cultural shock our exchange students go through when traveling abroad. The word “ER” in Brazil means something just came up. It doesn’t have to be an emergency. Of course, in the U.S. that same word means something more serious. This explains why our Au Pairs show up at the ER when they get a cold and get surprised with the bill!

Yes, traveling is learning. The first thing I do after I purchase my tickets is to buy books about the countries I’m visiting to get some context. You will find me at home stays or boutique hotels. Most of my budget goes to experiences: sitting in a small chair in Hanoi while I enjoy a drink, fishing or visiting floating villages in Luang Prabang. I like to simply hang out with locals and learn more about their lifestyle, so that I understand their history, background, and what really matters to them.

Yes, I also tour the hot spots. I went to the Great Wall of China and that’s an experience that I will share with my grandkids one day. In that

particular section of the Wall, you must take a chair lift. I will tell them my chair lift partner was afraid of heights and she only disclosed it when we reached the highest peak. But I also learned about Chinese society: the respect for the elders, the importance of “saving the face” during confrontation, and WHY information is so widely controlled over in that country. There’s a difference between learning and being judgmental. I go in with



Community Counselor Joana at the Great Wall of China

an open mind, and that is helpful when welcoming foreigners to America too.

My trip to China happened at the right time. One of the biggest issues I encountered was how little English the metropolitan area population speaks. In fact, if you travel to the suburbs, you will not find many English speakers there. China recently launched its first Au Pair program. They are inviting English speaking foreigners. To make their program more appealing, they’re making the commitment shorter -- options start from one month to one year. I collaborate with Multiway, EurAuPair’s partner in Portugal.

I prepared a full report about what cultural foreign nationals might face if they decide to experience life in China.

In Vietnam, I visited the Hanoi Hilton, where late U.S. Senator McCain was held as a prisoner of war. I heard English speaking tourists referring to him as “an important man”. I also took a tour of Ha Long Bay and strolled around the streets of Hanoi for sightseeing and food.

In Laos, I enjoyed a 48 hour stay in Luang Prabang and saw most of the downtown landmarks. I even showered an elephant! In Cambodia, I toured Angkor Wat at sunset, visited the floating villages that flood during rainy season, and saw a healer. In Thailand, I sat down on an empty beach (low season) and talked to locals about their everyday lives.

From one country to the other, I met MANY aspiring young people, who taught me about their country. They also had their eyes on coming to the U.S. to get some sort of exchange experience. In fact, the daughter of my healer, a national of France living in Cambodia, wanted to participate in the Au Pair program in the United States.

I ultimately see traveling as training. I train myself to better understand local cultures. That is particularly important in the United States as I have to mediate between families and exchange students. A lot gets lost in translation because language is also culture. I also have a better understanding of the exchange students’ point of view and I think I can better address their concerns and questions because of my own experiences abroad.

Thank you Joana for writing about your experience. We wish you many more travels!



Community Counselor Joana in Luang Prabang, Laos

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About Us...

EurAuPair Intercultural Child Care Programs is a non-profit, public benefit organization designated by the U.S. Department of State to conduct the Au Pair cultural exchange program under the Fulbright Hays Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 and is intended “to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges”.

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2019 EurAupair Au Pair of the Year Finalists

We would like to thank our three 2019 EurAupair Au Pair of the Year finalists for submitting an essay about their au pair experience. We decided to share with all of you a summary of the essays submitted by our three finalists. We hope you enjoy!

**By Daniella Paes Da Silva,
Au Pair from Brazil with the
Cove Family in Lake Forest, IL**

“Becoming an au pair is not an easy decision, especially because many people keep reminding you of that the whole time. This decision starts long before you step on North American soil for the first time. When you are



Daniella with the Cove Family

in your home country, this dream seems to be very distant, almost unattainable. Luckily, I was fortunate to have an incredible family and friends who supported me since the beginning. After some paperwork and a lot of commitment, I was finally online on the EurAupair system, which caused a mix of feelings: happiness, insecurity, fear, but mostly pride in having taken a step towards my dreams. The waiting for the host family contact seems to be an eternity that, for me, lasted two days! Since the first video call, I was already in love with my possible future host family. After a few more calls and having read the family handbook, I made sure it was the perfect match. We had similar ideals and we agreed on key issues, like the way they raise Belle, my host child.

After we matched, I had to prepare myself for it: packing, saying bye to my family and friends and getting ready for a year full of new experiences. All of this happened very quickly, when I realized, I was landing at New York International Airport. A whole new world that I would be able to discover. In my first week here, I experienced the most different kinds of feelings and, thanks to the friends I made in the training week, they were largely positive. Of course, we feel very homesick, but the will to grow and develop as a human being is certainly much bigger than that.

On September 14, 2018, the paths of my new friends were separated from mine, it was then that I landed in Chicago, full of expectations. I must confess that they not only met my expectations, but they also overcame them. The au pair program has many rules that were set to make our experiences here the best possible, but what I found at home with my host family went far beyond the requirements to sign up as a family in the program. I was received with respect, dignity and much love and kindness.

I was welcomed with posters that represented exactly what I felt when I arrived: welcomed, comfortable, loved and happy with the whole family. (...)

**By Maxmiliana Gusmao De Paula,
Au Pair from Portugal with the
Vanden Boogart Family in Alexandria, VA**

“(…) I simply love my host family and I confess I didn’t know what to expect with this new experience, but I am grateful that this exchange program brought an extra family to my life, 2 amazing friends (Amy and Matt), that I know I can count on anytime, 2 nephews and 1 niece (Zachary, Max and Madison) that I love as if they were my own. It turned out that I became “Big Max,” and there’s the baby Max, and we always laugh about it because we even matched names. I remember one day I told them blow kisses to tia, which means “aunt” in Portuguese, and since then I became their tia, and that means a lot to me. (...)

I have experienced so much American culture with my host family. In May, when I first arrived, my host family had a barbecue for me to introduce me to their friends and so I could experience the American barbecue. I also cooked my country’s food so they could experience it too. In the summer, we went to the pool, museums, celebrated the fourth of July together. In fall, we did a lot of activities in the pumpkin fields. I carved my first pumpkin with Zachary. I taught them how to sing happy birthday in Portuguese when Zach turned 4. Then at Christmas, we saw the National Christmas Tree, the lights at the zoo, and visited Santa together. The best part of having my host mom is she is only a part time worker so we can do a lot of activities out of the house and we help each other with the kids, making me get to know more of this area.

They are adorable kids and I definitely couldn’t choose any other family. They really treat me



Maxmiliana with the Vanden Boogart Family

as a family member. They introduced me to their extended family and I love them so much! I even spent time with my host mom’s cousin who is my age, and her friends. I’m really having a blast this 1st year and I wouldn’t change a thing. What I love the most living here is the respect, trust, love and care that I receive every day from them since the beginning. They are making my au pair year have a huge meaning in my life. I will never forget my host family and I am grateful that God put them in my life. I will surely carry all of them forever in my heart.”

**By Neila Santana,
Au Pair from Brazil with
the Brown Family in York, PA**

“(…) My host mom is one of the strongest and nicest people that I’ve ever met. I don’t know how she can handle everything, but she does. Maybe it is the coffee. Who knows?! We’ve gotten along very well since the beginning and



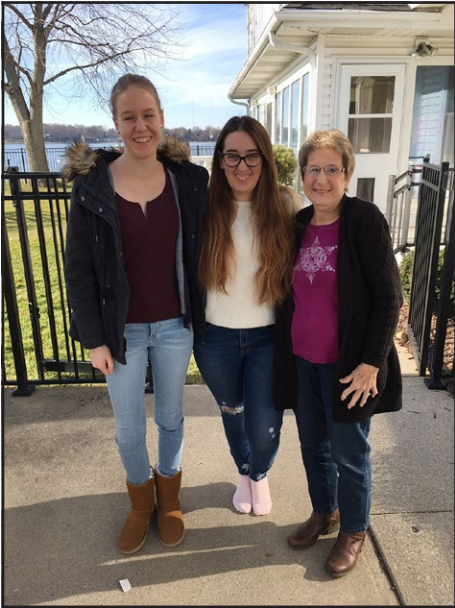
Neila with the Brown Family

she treats everyone she meets with respect. She has so many good qualities, but the way she always puts others first really stands out. She has set an example for me and to everyone in her life. She is constantly inspiring others to improve and believe in themselves. It has inspired me to do my best in helping with the kids and the house. I try to make her happy every day because I know how much she deserves it. She is the best host mom I could have asked for and I know there isn’t one person who would disagree with me.

Then there are the boys; Sean, age 8 and Scott, age 10. I now see them as my younger brothers. We have so much fun together and never run out of things to do. We play sports, play video games, bake the best pumpkin cookies (among other crazy recipes), ride bikes, swim, watch movies, and eat lots of ice cream, which usually ends up all over our faces. No matter what, it’s always fun to be around them. Sean always wants to play outside, even when it’s too cold. Sometimes we are the only people outside in the entire neighborhood playing football, baseball, basketball, soccer or even looking for helpless birds to feed. Scott prefers indoor activities. He likes foosball, pillow fights (I’m the current champion), and video games (we are always competing for first place in Mario Kart.) We even created some games together. One of our creations is a mix of football, wrestling and basketball, that we call ‘fightsketball’. We also have a game that when someone says the “key words”, we must sing a song with this word. The last one to sing, loses. It’s never boring over here. I try to teach them some Portuguese, so they can visit me in Brazil someday and I teach them some Spanish too, it always can be useful here. It’s been fun teaching them how different we do things in my country. They love hearing my stories, and love interrupting my speech to help with my pronunciation. (...)

Thank you Daniella, Maxmiliana and Neila for writing these beautiful essays and sharing your experience!

EurAupair Photos



Community Counselor Nancy from Huntertown, IN met for lunch with her Au Pairs at the Light Rail Cafe in Winona Lake, IN.

From left to right: Au Pair Annika from Germany, Aroa from Spain and Community Counselor Nancy



Community Counselor Shanel from Newington, CT took her Au Pairs to a soup kitchen in CT to volunteer.

From left to right: Community Counselor Shanel, Au Pair from Spain Irene, Au Pair from Venezuela Sofia and Au Pair from Brazil Maria



Au pairs Pansiri from Thailand and Elif from Turkey are at the ProRodeo Hall of Fame: Museum of the American Cowboy.



A requirement of Chicago Saint Patrick's Day is watching the Chicago River dyed green! From left to right: Au Pairs Daniella and Nathaly from Brazil



Au Pair Lupita from Mexico on vacation in Florida with her host siblings.



Community Counselor Pamela from Wichita, KS took Au Pair Kelly from Colombia for breakfast and tasting whipped cream for the first time ever!



Community Counselor Elizabeth from Colorado Springs, CO took her Au Pairs to the ProRodeo Hall of Fame: Museum of the American Cowboy.

From left to right: Au Pairs Pansiri from Thailand, Elif from Turkey, Community Counselor Elizabeth, Au Pairs Lisa from Germany and Tiffany from France



Community Counselor Otilia in Nantucket, MA met her Au Pairs at a local coffee shop to catch up and share their experience on the island!

Chinese Dinner

By Community Counselor Darcy Voreis in Noblesville, IN



Xiaolin teaches Amanda how to make dumplings.

We are all stuffed after our Chinese dinner and tiramisu dessert. We exchanged Christmas gifts and discussed the girls' plans for travel over Christmas vacation. We also looked up different au pair weekend courses across the country.

Thank you Darcy for sharing this experience and pictures with us! We wish you many more wonderful dinners and celebrations with your au pairs!



From left to right: Au Pair Xiaolin from China, Baxter (Community Counselor Darcy Voreis' dog) and Au Pair Amanda from Brazil. Baxter enjoyed all the extra hugs and pets after dinner. He sampled all the food.

Thankful!

By Community Counselor Dawn Rothermel in Round Lake, IL

November is a month to be thankful. To show their thankfulness for all the gifts they receive from being an au pair, Community Counselor Dawn Rothermel and her au pairs paid it forward and volunteered to help pack food at the Libertyville, Illinois Feed My Starving Children complex.

After the initial orientation, washing up, it was off to the tables to do some assembly work. The task at hand that night was making rice packets, each packet containing 6 meals and costing \$0.22. Wow! Each table was identified by a different country to where the rice packets

would be sent. The au pairs did great and really enjoyed the experience.

When it was all over, all of the volunteers had packed enough boxes of rice packets (36 to a box), which would feed 80 children for an entire year. Way to go au pairs!

Thank you Dawn for organizing such a meaningful activity for your au pairs.

From left to right: Au Pairs Julia from Brazil, Irene from Spain and Daniella from Brazil



Painting Christmas Ornaments

By Community Counselor Jessica Okugic from Fort Mitchell, AL



From left to right: Au Pairs Roxana from Venezuela and Paige from Namibia



From left to right: Au Pairs Gaelle from France and Jessica from Venezuela

For our December meeting, we went to Bare Ware Pottery in Columbus, Georgia. We all painted ornaments, some for presents and some to keep. They were fired in the kiln and

then each of us picked them up when they were done! It was fun!

Thank you for organizing such a fun activity for your au pairs, Jessica!



From left to right: Au Pairs Nollz from South Africa and Joi from Brazil



From left to right: Au Pairs Paige from Namibia, Roxana from Venezuela, Nollz from South Africa, Jessica from Venezuela, Joi from Brazil and Gaelle from France