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Why Travel?
Chapel Thoughts at the International Chapel
Ouachita Baptist University
Joe Jeffers
October 1999

Why travel? Travel gives us exposure to other people and places. Travel allows us to measure our traditions and experiences against those of other people in other lands.

When we go, we should go as guests and be sensitive to differences in customs. We should go abroad not looking for America over there. Rather, we should revel in the ways other people differ from us.

Travel has several dimensions. From my experiences, I will reflect on three: people, places, and images.

First, It's People

It's Kimiio Noguchi, a 75-year old Japanese geochemist, who walked two younger men into the ground as he took us to volcanos, radioactive springs, and acid springs in Japan.

It's Dos Sarbossov and his extended family in Almaty, Khazakhstan, who took us in and made us a part of their family while we were there. Who gave us smoked horse meat, but wouldn't reveal its identity until after we ate it.

It's Gilberto Vasquez, who knows every animal sound in the tropical forests of Belize.

It's Manoa, a Fiji Islander, who ran the seven miles to work every day and the seven miles home. Who was always smiling and had a kind word for everyone.

Second, It's Places

It's the Sistine Chapel in Rome, where Michelangelo painted lying on his back.

It's the Kremlin in Moscow, where images of the cold war melt in the warm gaze of ordinary Russians.

It's Dachau near Munich, where the ovens stand in mute testimony of man's inhumanities to man.

It's the Louvre in Paris, where masterpieces are as common as Razorback fans in Arkansas.

It's the Rock Garden of Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan, where shared solitude is raised to an art form.

It's the Sydney Opera House, where performance and structure both demand a standing ovation.

Third, It's Images

It's the street kids of Mexico City cleaning windshields at every traffic light.

It's my British friends joyfully attending a 4th of July party I threw the summer I spent in England.

It's stalking a jaguar in the tropical forest, armed only with a pair of binoculars.

It's seeing Galileo's middle finger preserved in the History of Science Museum in Florence, knowing full well it's pointed at Rome.

It's coming home, proud to be an American, but just as proud to be a citizen of the world.

People, places, images. Growth, tolerance, kinship. Travel allows us to see God much larger than we tend to define Him. As we see His people in their places, we appreciate them more. As we appreciate them more, we appreciate ourselves more. We learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Let us pray.

Lord,
Let us go to other lands with open minds and open hearts...but let us go. Help us to free ourselves from the boxes into which we've put ourselves, and help us to remove You from the box we've designed for You. You can be so much more to us than we are willing to consider. Your world is so grand and so diverse. Let us appreciate all of your people and their customs. Use them to bring us closer to You. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Note: At the International chapel, several students were asked to report on their study abroad experiences from the previous academic year. A faculty member was asked to close the chapel. 1999 was my year.