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Take the Opportunities of Travel to Always Learn Something New

By Vu Tran
UCF Forum columnist
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I love to travel because it is always a wonderful, life-changing experience — whether embarking on a road trip or flying overseas to a foreign country. No matter where you go, you will likely meet new people and learn something new, which is always my goal.

Over the recent holiday break, I traveled to Sweden for the first time, where I visited several historic landmarks and learned about the country's past Viking culture.

I may be biased because of my career aspirations to become a bioarchaeologist, but I believe that understanding the past can help us move forward in the future. History has a way of repeating itself, so it is our duty to learn and educate others about significant events in order to prevent unfortunate occurrences from happening again and to promote a better world.

Traveling can transform you into a more worldly and well-rounded individual, but only if you approach it with an open mind and heart. You never know what you may find, who you will meet or what you will learn about yourself.

I love eating traditional, local dishes rather than choosing more familiar options, and urge you to do the same while traveling. Food is a great way to meet people and foster new friendships. For example, during my first visit back to Da Nang, Vietnam (my hometown), I would regularly eat at a small café right outside my grandparents' home. To be specific, this café consisted of plastic furniture and a portable oven that the owner used to prepare and heat up soup.

Every day, this young man would ride his bike to this spot with his portable oven and work hard to make a living, regardless of the weather. He would always talk to my family, making us laugh while casually enticing us to return for his soup. I recall that he was very kind and really loved his children.

He was not there during my second trip, but I still remember how welcoming he made me feel, and I still think about — and want — his delicious soup on a regular basis.

Even shopping for souvenirs can lead you to explore and understand the local atmosphere. One of my favorite places to buy jewelry is in the Pass-a-Grille community of St. Petersburg Beach, where many of the vendors sell beautiful handcrafted necklaces and charms, and you may stumble upon some esoteric shop in a back alley. I also have a pair of leather sandals, perfectly crafted for my feet by Melissinos Art, the Poet Sandal Maker of Athens, Greece, where you can learn about the craft and the region.

One of the most important lessons I have learned from my travels is to respect everyone I meet. Every individual has his or her own unique story to share, and you may never know what hardships someone had to overcome.

And remember: You do not have to travel far to have a great adventure.

Vu Tran is an anthropology graduate student in UCF's College of Sciences and a recipient of the UCF Order of Pegasus for academic achievement. She can be reached at vuqntran@knights.ucf.edu.