



ILLUSTRATION: SHAH ALAM SOURAV

The Motivations Behind the Move

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Studying abroad. No matter where you go or how long you planned for it, you will probably feel like you have been yanked out of your home onto a very different terrain. In a short period, you will be expected to get used to new living and dining situations, meet new people, probably work, while excelling at your faster-paced courses at the same time.

After potentially living your entire life under one roof, amongst similar people, you become a stranger in a strange land. You experience culture shock; you are overwhelmed by the peculiarity of new-found independence. Even after all this, thousands of students leave their homes to pursue their desired degrees all around the world. The reasons for this are simple, and complicated, as most things are.

A majority of the students pursuing their education abroad feel like they could not unlock their current quality of education here. Be it their chances of getting into research, accessing better technology, or just being challenged intellectually, students generally agree that schools elsewhere have a better reach into what they seek.

Usually, schools abroad, especially those that are better-ranked, are better at helping students gain mobility in their professional careers. The idea of job security right after college is comforting and a huge driver towards their decision of studying abroad.

From a more personal angle, students want to move to achieve comfort in self-expression and independence. In many cases, they feel like the only way they can truly be themselves is by moving away and being on

their own for a while.

Tahsin Ferdous, 20, is an undergraduate student residing in Japan. He says "I started worrying less about what others say pretty early on. It was difficult to have to do everything on my own but the benefits outweighed that by a lot. I don't regret it."

However, let's not forget that a rosy picture of college abroad is painted amongst people who have not yet walked over to the other side.

Sumaiya Rahman*, 21 and an undergraduate student in the UK, comments, "You always see people having the time of their lives on social media and start to feel like student life's a breeze. They think that you will get a job and be able to settle down in a foreign country no matter what. This is not true. Real life is much more difficult. You just don't see people post about it all that often."

Does she ever regret choosing to study abroad? "Absolutely not. I have learned so much academically and about myself. I got these amazing opportunities that are helping me get a job that is perfect for me. I wouldn't take this over anything else," comes the reply.

Whether the move is justified is only something one could answer if they chose to study abroad themselves. But it does very well seem like if you chose to take a chance, you would be likely to gain much more than just an education.

*Name has been changed upon request.

The writer got bitten trying to fist-bump a duck. Send her more dumb ideas at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com

The Inherent Despair of Standardised Tests

SHREYOSI ENDOW

Standardised tests like the SAT, IELTS and GRE are necessary hurdles to get to our goals.

Perhaps they are small hurdles in the larger scheme of things but I remember the day of my SATs, burnt out after my board exams, with a heart full of dread, fear and anxiety. Years later, I took my GRE in a freezing glass box in the middle of Texas and found myself feeling the same way.

There are a lot of resources out there that tell you how you can get over these hurdles, but in my experience, they don't do much to take away the anxiety — there's only so much preparation you can throw at them. Maybe you're in a similar boat I've found myself; maybe you can relate.

I scored enough in these tests to get me to a good college and grad school. While preparing, I would hear tales of perfect scores that many peers and fictional relatives of my neighbours achieved, and that made things a lot more intimidating. We, as a society, reward perfection, but often fail to question why it even matters. A perfect SAT or GRE score is neither a ticket to your dream university, nor a reflection of how good you are at your field, so chasing it only makes the process more stressful and scarier than it has to be.

Not to mention the need to memorise a couple hundred (thousand?) words to successfully pass the writing sections. I scored lower in these portions than I did in math in both my SAT and GRE, which was quite embarrassing as I had always aced English in high school.

It's disorienting when you think you are good at a subject and then someone drops a 5-pound book on you and asks you to memorise a thousand words, and suddenly you have a worse vocabulary than a three-year-old. If it's any consolation, I write scientific papers for reputed conferences now, and I don't use most of the words I "learned" back then.

Preparing for standardised tests is also often a lonely experience. Many of your friends may not even be taking the tests, so someone to relate to is difficult. I remember feeling isolated in my SAT tuition as people were able to answer questions I could not even guess right.

The truth, I know now, is that many of these strangers are probably waiting for someone to tap them on the shoulder and say "Hey, are you really as clueless about this as I am?" It's worth taking the shot, you may even make a friend along the way.

Looking back, the standardised tests really were hurdles I needed to jump over to get to a future I want, but I would've never believed that when I was preparing for them. Here's a speck of motivation, though: if you can find a way to shut out the big scary thoughts and just get yourself through it, you are one step closer to a future where you don't have to take standardised tests anymore.

Shreyosi Endow is doing her PhD in Texas, USA. In her free time, she likes to embroider, paint and rant to her friends.

