

International Experiences Are Important for Everyone

As a teenager I was fortunate to have a young lady from Chile stayed with my family for a week as part of the AFS program. On her final night in our home she cooked us an authentic Chilean meal. As I watched her break the lettuce by hand and pour oil, lemon and salt on it I remember turning up my nose and commenting on how awful it would probably taste. Needless to say I was wrong, it tasted good, different than anything I was used to, but definitely good. This experience was one of the first times I realized the importance of international education, a concept that should ideally be taught from a young age.

The world we live in has become more global with the introduction of the internet and the easy access almost everyone has to e-mail. Today's youth can use a computer to access information about other countries or use it to speak to people who live on the other side of the world. The business world is more global than it has ever been. Recent studies have even shown that when hiring, companies are look for individuals with a global experiences.

There are many ways for individuals to get a global experience. For some traveling to another country is the answer. There are many programs established to send young people other countries. After college I had the chance to participate in the International Four-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) program. The current IFYE sends youth to Australia, Finland, and Costa Rica for a four week stay. I had the opportunity to travel to Finland and stayed with eight families over a six-month period. That international experience provided me with a new understanding of not only another culture and how they live, but also a better understand of the culture I left here in the United States. Other travel programs are available to individuals with a variety of focuses for a variety of ages.

For some traveling is not the ideal way to have an international experience. Not everyone can handle spending that much time away from school, work, family and friends. There are other ways to learn about different cultures. One way is hosting someone from another culture. For some this can be a heavy burden, but the rewards are endless. Not only will you provide someone with a positive taste of America, but it will also give your family a chance to learn more about the culture of the person you are

hosting. You can learn about customs, foods, dress, and other aspects of another country. Most important your children will learn to be accepting of individuals who are different than them. If you are unable to host someone yourself having an international person visit your home, even if it is just for one day, can be a great learning experience.

There are simpler ways to teach your children, and maybe even yourself, about other cultures. One idea is picking a different country each month for your children to study. Check out books from the library about that country. Have a special meal one night during the month eating food typical to that country. Talking to someone who moved to the United States from another country can also be educational. There are many festivals throughout Missouri and Kansas devoted to other cultures. This is a great way to see the traditions, food, and costumes of other culture. Hosting or attending events where people who are from another country or people who have visited another countries give presentations is another great way to learn. There are so many ways to learn about different cultures and the time and effort you put into it will be so beneficial for the future of you and your children. Helping children to be well-rounded accepting individuals will not only help them to succeed in the business world, but also help them to succeed in life.

International experiences are all around us, take advantage of them when they present themselves. If you would like more information about international experiences, participating in an exchange program, or hosting someone from other country please call the University of Missouri Extension Office in Henry County at 660-885-5556.

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Sarah Staude
4-H Youth Specialist
Cass and Henry Counties
staudes@missouri.edu
816-380-8460 - Phone
816-380-8465 - Fax