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Major in Political Science  
Influence of Tourism on Gender Roles  
Istanbul, Turkey

Throughout the research I conducted in Istanbul, Turkey over the winter break, I interviewed tourists and local Turkish people to gain insight into the influence of tourism on gender roles in a predominantly Islamic society. During this time, I learned about my research topic at a deeper level than I could have ever achieved without travelling to the research destination, and more importantly, I was able to immerse myself in the local culture and gained an unforgettable, unparalleled experience.

Regarding my research hypothesis, I learned that the influence of tourism appears to have two polarizing effects on gender roles in Istanbul. To give a little bit of background, Turkey is a predominantly Muslim society and generally has more traditional views on the role of women in society. For instance, the percentage of women in the workplace is lower than that in the US or European countries. However, because Istanbul draws many tourists from all over the world who bring their own ideas of gender roles, I expected to see that this had a significant influence on the way in which women were perceived in the city.

What I found was that in many cases, women living in Istanbul felt empowered through their interactions with tourists who had more liberalized ideals of women; for instance, not needing to wear a hijab and participating in the workforce. On the other end of the spectrum, in a few cases women felt repulsed by such ideals, and the influx of tourists in fact had caused them to hold onto their traditional views more firmly. Additionally, another interesting perspective I gleaned multiple times was that women had more control in the society than perceived by the western world. However, this was mostly within the domestic space and not reflected in public presence.

Although my research in Istanbul certainly taught me a lot about my research topic, I also learned that I am very much interested in global affairs and development. I realized that I would be able to explore this area more with a degree in the College of Arts and Letters, and so I have recently changed majors from Finance to Political Science. My classes thus far have been very intellectually engaging and rich in class discussion, and I am looking forward to a great semester.

From my experience, what I treasure the most is the opportunity to interact and create friendships with local Turkish people and travellers from all over the world. Not only was I able to glean insight into Turkish culture, I was also able to learn about the culture of the many different countries that the people I interacted with were from. Most importantly, this allowed me to break many of the subconscious stereotypes that I was not aware that I had about people from certain regions of the world. I think that as a member of a global society, it is of dire importance to explore the world in order to maintain curiosity and develop open-mindedness. I encourage peers to research a topic that is both intriguing and foreign to them so that they can gain a perspective they would have otherwise not had the opportunity to experience.