JOHNSON STUDENTS SEE THE WORLD THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS ON INTERNATIONAL STUDY TRIPS.

EYE-OPENING, EXCITING, CHALLENGING, CULTURALLY RICH, UNFORGETTABLE, INVALUABLE —

these are just a few of the words Johnson students use to describe their experiences on international study trips organized and led by faculty each year. In 2014–15, more than 200 Johnson students participated in study trips to South Africa, Israel, Colombia, Dubai, Japan and Korea, and Western Europe.

Patagonia, southern Chile
Photo credit: Alison Manacca, MBA ‘15
"A study trip adds an international perspective," says Lourdes Casanova, senior lecturer and academic director, Emerging Markets Institute. "The trips allow students to learn and also change their perspective by looking at these countries from another point of view — a more local one. It is an excellent way to get to know a new country, its economy and business sector, and daily life."

International experiences are important to employers, too. "Increasingly, companies see most of their growth opportunities coming from outside of the U.S.,” says Cynthia Saunders-Cheatham, executive director of the Career Management Center. "We sometimes get job postings that specify strong cultural understanding and language skills for specific countries. Students who have international work experience and strong language skills are increasingly valued in this environment."

Matthew Shear, MBA '10, who went on Johnson’s India consulting practicum led by Professor Mel Goldman, says his international experience was tremendously important to his first employer, post-MBA. "After graduation I moved to Singapore without a job and started knocking on doors; I really wanted to be in Asia,” says Shear. "My experience in India and my summer internship in the Philippines (found through a Johnson classmate) were a great help in my search." Today, Shear continues to live in Singapore, where he does business strategy, planning, and operations for the Asia Pacific region at Cisco.

Cultural differences Shear learned about in India have also proven valuable. "Five years later, I still remember a specific teaching slide from Professor Goldman showing a comparison of the work progress on a project in Western..."
In January, all Johnson Cornell Tech MBA students participated in a global trek to Israel, where the focus this year was on startup challenges in Israel and entrepreneurial finance. The trip was led by Professor of Finance Roni Michaely, who serves on the boards of several startups and was director of the Israel Securities Authority (ISA) from 1998 to 2003.

“If you have a chance to attend a Johnson MBA trek, do it. The Israel Innovation Trek was one of the highlights of my MBA career and one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. Whether we were solving important challenges with Israeli startups, dining in some of Tel Aviv’s finest restaurants, or camping in the Judaean desert, we always had fun and created memories that will last a lifetime.”
— Ben Peterson, MBA ’15

Armed with a group of 32 close friends, we stormed the country in pursuit of exploring the country’s rich and thriving startup culture. Day to day, we worked intimately with local startups as well as innovation centers on projects ranging from developing go-to-market strategies to creating PR campaigns for new users. We learned about the cultural, political, and social complexities of the region from captivating discussions about Arab-Jew relations, public media in current day, and the way of life for many religious groups in the area. We also had fun discovering the world of underground street art tour of Tel Aviv, camping in Bedouin tents in the desert, riding camels, waking up at dawn for a sunrise hike and yoga overseeing the Dead Sea, and of course, eating and dancing our way through Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. There were lots of little moments — laughing with friends while hiking along the Mediterranean coast, sharing a gourmet five-course meal in the living room of an Israeli chef, good conversations with new and different people from all cultures, and being mesmerized by the vibrant colors of the local markets.

Undoubtedly, this trek has been a capstone to the Cornell Tech MBA experience.”
— Miwa Takaki, MBA ’15

ISRAEL

“countries versus in India,” he says. “In Western countries the work generally follows a straight, smooth line with even progress throughout the life of a project. In India, generally it’s a steep hockey stick; for the first 80 or 90 percent of the project the progress is quite slow, then there’s a massive rush of effort at the end. The end result is the same — the project gets done. However, the execution is quite different. I now work with teams in India, and this insight has helped me keep perspective on our projects there.”

Shear is not alone in gaining this kind of understanding. Goldman says that several past students say that the experience “changed their lives and interests, and was eye-opening not just culturally: It gave them insight into how business operates in [another] major country.” In addition to preparing students in advance of the month-long trip, Goldman, who helped initiate the VC industry in India when he lived and worked there as a World Bank executive over many years, draws on his considerable roster of contacts there to set up company visits for students.

Other faculty members who lead trips to various regions of the world are similarly recognized for their deep expertise and, through contacts developed over many years, facilitate students’ access to high-level corporate executives and government officials in those countries and often set up real-world consulting projects with fellow MBAs at universities around the world.

Casanova, for example, who led a study trip to Colombia
over spring break, specializes in international business with a focus on Latin America. Just this year, she was named one of the “50 Most Influential Intellectuals in IberoAmerica” by esglobal, a digital magazine on international relations published in Madrid. The Johnson students she took to Bogotá formed teams with Universidad de los Andes students to work on consulting projects with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Colombia. “This is extremely enriching for students because they know the challenges of emerging market SMEs,” she said.

In Colombia, students also visited the port of Cartagena and Alpina, a Colombian dairy, food, and beverage company. Guest speakers included former Colombian President Andrés Pastrana and the CFO of Grupo Aval, Colombia’s largest financial services holding company, which is led by Luis Carlos Sarmiento Jr., MBA ’85. To learn about Colombia’s history, students visited tourist spots such as the Gold Museum and the Salt Cathedral.

“It is critical for students to gain an exposure to business practices and challenges in foreign markets,” says Richard J. Coyle, executive director of Johnson’s Emerging Markets Institute and Suter/Staley Director of Global Business, who led trips to Bangalore and to South Africa this year. “With each year, the emerging economies are representing a greater share of global GDP — and this trend will not slow down during our students’ careers. Thus, it is important they be educated and comfortable in operating in these markets.”

Coyle held several sessions in advance of the South Africa trip to educate students on the cultural norms and socioeconomic situation of that country, as do all faculty leaders for Johnson’s international trips. In South Africa, students visited companies across a broad range of industries in Cape Town and Johannesburg. “This trip was eye-opening as we witnessed the strides South Africa has made since the dismantling of apartheid, but also the challenges which still remain,” Coyle says.

Students visited the Songdo International Business Complex, part of a “smart city” located in the Incheon Free Economic Zone south of Seoul. “Sustainable development can be seen throughout Songdo,” says Shamis Abdi, MBA ’11. “Built as a pedestrian city, 40 percent of Songdo is ‘green’ space, including a 100-acre park modeled after New York City’s Central Park, and paths for walking and biking. There is also an extensive public transportation system.”
Johnson students visiting a Juan Valdez coffee shop in Bogotá, where they were invited to a coffee tasting session by Hernan Mendez, MBA ’83, president of Procafecol, parent company to Juan Valdez.

As part of their trek to Colombia, Johnson students engaged in team-building activities with their counterparts from the Universidad de los Andes, including a couple of five-on-five soccer games played at a field near the UniAndes’ alumni building.

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Lourdes Casanova, senior lecturer and academic director of the Emerging Markets Institute, pictured here with Diana Narvaez, MBA ’16, at Andrés Carne de Res, a famous restaurant in Bogotá where Johnson students enjoyed a welcome banquet and were presented with banners with the colors of the Colombian flag.