

My Visit to Kyrgyzstan Through Study Abroad Program

Kyrgyzstan is a truly incredible place. The country has a long history of nomadic culture, the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, and the past few decades of development. The people were incredible. I visited Kyrgyzstan with my five peers as a Utah Valley University (UVU) study abroad program during August 1-13, 2019. I decided to go there to learn more about that part of the world after my previous visit to Russia in 2015 which I really enjoyed. As a major in political science with an emphasis on Global Politics, this trip helped me to gain more experiences including internationally which graduate school for me to choose and whether to focus on international affairs through the governmental or non-governmental career.



Sarah Michaelis with Graham Taggart riding horses

We made so many friends and experienced world class hospitality in Kyrgyzstan. Everyone we talked to was very excited to meet us and show us around the city. In addition to our lectures, we also learned a lot about the rich culture of the country.

Before this trip, none of us knew anything about Kyrgyzstan, so our UVU professors and our Kyrgyz hosts had a lot of activities planned for us. We spent a whole day at the Al-Archa Gorge hiking near Bishkek, which is the Capital of Kyrgyzstan, relaxing in a yurt and riding horses. The last weekend of the trip we spent at Lake Issyk-Kul, which is a popular tourist destination. At Lake Issyk-Kul, we visited their cultural center to learn about the prominent religions, history, and activities. Some of my favorite experiences from this trip were when we spent time with the people and experienced Kyrgyz culture.



UVU delegation at the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek

Some of the lectures and discussions I enjoyed were about judicial reform by Ms. Nurgul Asanova, a deputy Chair of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan and humanitarian aid in the country. Judicial reform was a common topic that came up during our study abroad because of the strong efforts made by the government to fight corruption. We had the chance to meet many politicians in Bishkek and hear their perspectives about the current state of the government and their goals for change. An experience I found very interesting was our visit to the American Embassy in Bishkek. We met with Mr. Harry Linden, head of USAID who taught us about

humanitarian efforts in Kyrgyzstan and the process of approving funds for major projects. Kyrgyzstan is still a developing nation and it was amazing to see how passionate and people are about improving their country.

The most impactful part of this trip was how much the experience put me outside my comfort zone and taught me about a different culture. This trip taught me to be more open to new people and new experiences. Before participating in their study abroad, I didn't know anything about Kyrgyzstan. Now I can't wait for the chance to go back.

Sarah Michaelis, UVU student