

Francesco Sudibyo

University of Zagreb, Croatia

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francescosudibyo5@gmail.com

Dreams and Manifestations

I know it sounds like a **cliché when I say that going abroad has been a dream since I was little**, but really, it's more than just a dream to me, because I know that the world has more to offer. The people, the culture, the knowledge, and the emotions, I just know there is a place where I can finally breathe in peace. **That's why when I heard about the IISMA program, I was ecstatic.** With no mentors and other similar support, I jumped right into the waters and swim right for the finish line, which is to become an awardee of IISMA.

With my biomedical engineering background and my familiarity with the English language, I applied for The University of Edinburgh in the UK, since it offered me the courses that I needed and I happen to be more familiar with the culture there, which I found advantageous. **Also, my second choice was Croatia, but it was purely just an afterthought since I was in a panic due to the incoming application deadline and the University of Zagreb offered similar courses also.**

After all the applications were done, I was so confident about going to the UK, I didn't even think about the possibility of me going to Croatia. So, to my utmost surprise, I checked the IISMA website for the announcement to see "The University of Zagreb" written on it. I could only remember thinking, **"Wait, so what now?"**



Unexpected The Expectations

No, I wasn't mad about the result, in fact, **I am more bewildered than bummed by it.** Bewildered since I didn't prepare anything about going to Croatia at all. I only knew about its flag and its geographical position on the globe, that's all. The fact that I was going through a series of academic challenges during that time didn't help me at all with wrapping my head around the result.

I was doing my research internship in Jakarta during my preparation for my IISMA pre-departure, and not to mention I had several organizational mandates also, so **it was very chaotic for me** trying to prepare for my visa and other administrative documents. But luckily, my fellow awardee friends and the program coordinator from the university were very active and helpful throughout the whole process. This led me to finish my preparation more at ease while being able to endure my ongoing challenges.

What was left was managing my vision, mission, and expectations in departing for Croatia and living there for 4 months. Sure, going abroad has been my number one dream, but this whole diversion had my mind disoriented. **All I could expect was to ace my study**, have fun with my fellow awardee friends, visit places, and immerse myself in the new environment, and nothing more at that time.

The Calm During The Storm

Baroque buildings, trams, chilly weather, and tall white people around me, I'm in Europe already, there's no going back now. Funnily, Zagreb is quite a small city, so it took us **less than a month to familiarize ourselves with our surroundings**. But, still, adjusting yourself to a new environment is no easy job, no matter how good you claim to be at adaptations. I had to keep reminding myself that I wasn't alone in the journey, I had nine other friends with me managing through this process.

The adaptation hit way harder when the academic activities started. Even though I only took four courses, and the learning environment was better than what I got here, I **still struggled, especially in a course where I was the only Asian person in the class**. Due to the course getting harder, I pushed myself to bond with the other students in class and help each other through the whole semester.

In that same period, I realized that I was stressed out about fulfilling my squeaky-clean expectations there that **I forgot to live in the moment**. Carpe diem, they said, and that was what I tried to enforce. I started to go out and made a lot of **new fellow exchange students**. In a month, my connections grew significantly bigger than I had expected. With them, I got to explore the country and experience new things. With them, for the first time in my life, I felt so seen for being who I am.

Epilogue-ish

Did I regret living in the actual moment just in the last two months I was in Zagreb? Definitely not. **I acknowledge that I was going through several psychological issues that might have hindered my experience there**, but I endured the whole experience unscathed in the end. What's important for me, though, was having to get the chance to get to know myself even better, to learn new things that I didn't know I needed, to feel all of the emotions I have never felt, and to see my own life in a way I have never seen before.

If you ask me what is my long-term plan after IISMA, **I'd say going back to study abroad**. Well, I know I need to save some time first by gaining work experience after I gain my bachelor's degree. Then, when the opportunity appears, I am going to take it right away. Because besides being able to study more in-depth for a master's degree, I know I need to experience studying abroad once again since studying for only a semester was not enough for me, frankly speaking. Also, who knows? Maybe I'll get the opportunity to pursue my career abroad afterwards. But in the meantime, with the experience and knowledge I've gained, **I would love to contribute to mentoring other aspiring students about studying abroad**. I would love to help them manage their preparations and execution so that they could minimize the chances of experiencing the downsides and live the upsides.