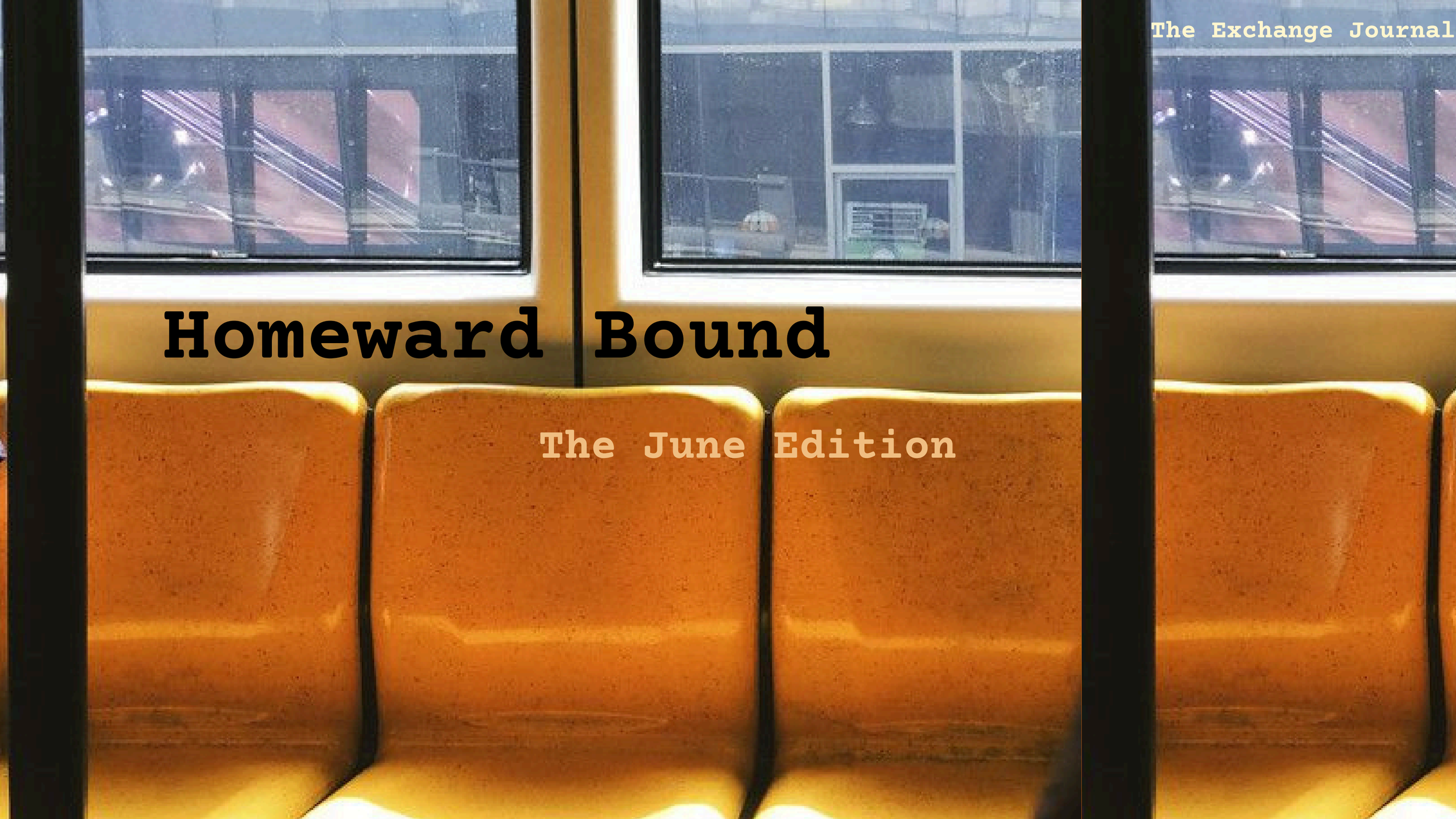


Homeward Bound

The June Edition



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Cycling Home

by Bella Henry

The nostalgia hits me hardest when I am cycling. As I pedal my way down the now familiar roads, gliding alongside the large bodies of water sparkling in the sun, I already feel the pangs of separation. The long summer evenings cast a golden glow of nostalgia over these well trodden paths, the colourful houses around me looking more picturesque than ever.

Cycling has undoubtedly become a crucial ritual to life in Copenhagen, and the thing that I think I may miss the most from this beautiful place. A mark of consistency through the changing of the seasons, taking to my bike everyday has been an unexpected source of solace for me. From the first days in September, I was stuck by the ease at which I could navigate the city, sailing through sun drenched cycle paths. Even as the leaves changed and the days grew colder and darker, the bracing bike to university served as much needed breath of fresh air.

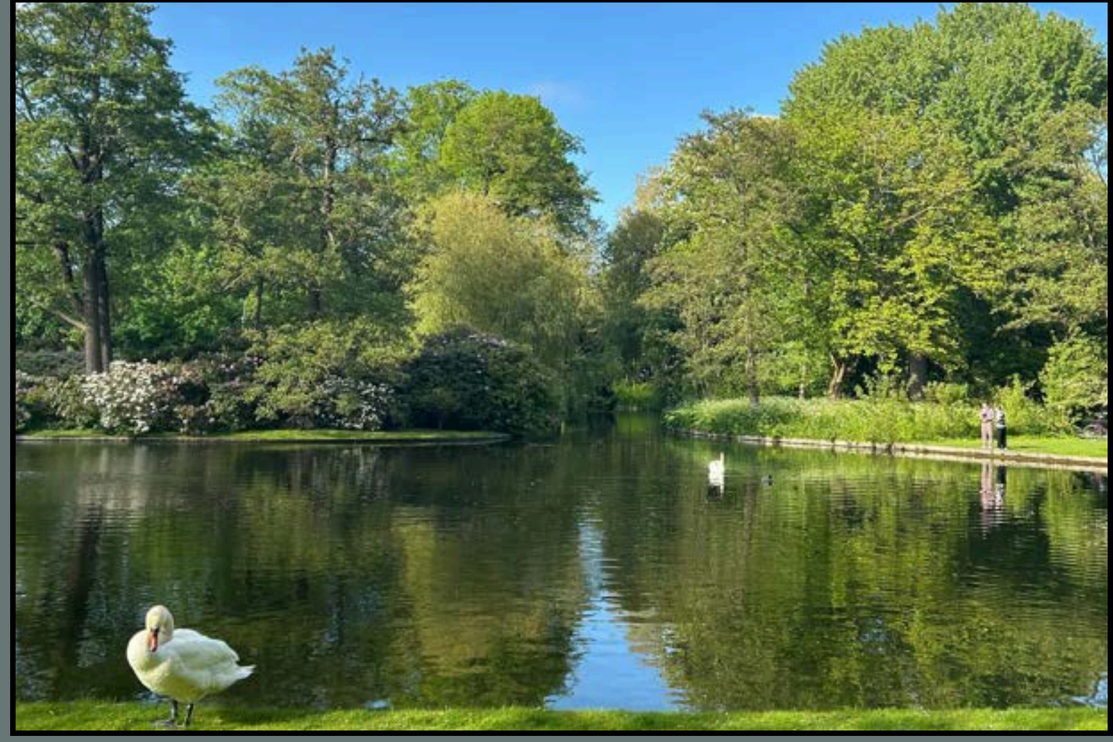
As someone who struggles with maintaining a stable routine (and often can be found sarcastically scorning the massively hyped running culture here in Copenhagen), I have found myself forced to appreciate the benefits of regular exercise. It has tapped into my competitive streak as I euphorically shave a few minutes of my daily commutes and has become a process of strengthening - not only in the newfound muscles forming in my legs, but in the sense of peace it has brought my mind, the quiet sense of belonging felt as I join the daily throng of bikes amid the morning rush.

Whether we are wandering out of a coffee shop or stumbling out of the club, we take to our bikes. It is in these moments, as we cycle along in a pack, that I have felt most at home in Copenhagen, most keenly aware of the friendships I have formed here. Side by side, we pedal to keep up with each other, shouting half formed jokes or drunkenly singing together over the rush of wind in our ears.

The monotony of regular bike journeys offers a window into the broader patterns of the year, in some ways. In the absence of big backpacking trips or globe-trotting, satisfaction has been found for me this year in the steady routine of gradually learning to call a place home. Of watching the seasons change in my favourite parks. Rather than the fast-paced frenzy of life in Edinburgh, this year has offered me a pocket of space to breathe, to appreciate the benefits of a slower social life that offers, at times, a deeper sense of friendship.

Whether it's due to being in Copenhagen, or maybe simply being a year older, I feel my brain has shifted gear. A little more in tune with myself, a little more comfortable embracing a slower, softer pace. With this, I look to my return to Edinburgh with both excitement and trepidation – a fear of returning to old habits is balanced by a quiet confidence in my new found sense of self, alongside the sweet anticipation of once again being surrounded by familiar faces as we meander, arm in arm, to George Square.





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The Highs, The Lows and Everything in Between



Leaving Copenhagen was harder than I thought it would be. My friends waved me off and as I cycled home for the last time I felt myself suppressing the urge to cry because I know the life I have created here is not one that I will ever have again.

I have had more or less a friendship group of six people throughout the year, and have honestly felt like I'm living in a sitcom. My friends and I have had many laughs about how (due to our lack of companions) we have accidentally ended up living the 'friends' tv show dream. Living in each other's pockets, and forming somewhat deeper friendships to the multitude of groups of friends that one has back in Edinburgh or from school.
Copenhagen has taught me the beauty of slowing down, and properly investing in less to find it always proves to be so much more.

Having only five people in one city does mean that you have a lot of time on your hands to occupy yourself with new hobbies, pick up old ones or just read - I would strongly urge you to take this opportunity to learn something new, or try something you have never tried.

On the flip side, living in such a big city with a small group of friends can sometimes feel incredibly lonely. Sitting at home now, surrounded by the familiar sounds of my family's background chatter, I can admit a small part of me was ready to leave. I lived alone and really struggled with this and found it hard to adjust to this new sense of independence. It wasn't always easy, and there were times when the solitude felt overwhelming.

I also want to gently remind everyone that while a year abroad is a great opportunity to learn and try new things, it doesn't mean you have to push yourself to the limit "for the experience." Your well-being matters just as much as the adventure. Living in a new country, away from everyone you've ever known, can be incredibly lonely and challenging at times so please remember to reach out to those back home if you're struggling - everyone is only ever a phone call away.



By Lara Brech

Humweih and Fernweh

(Homesickness and Wanderlust)

It was watching my friends fall in love with this city that made me find joy here. That and the sun. Before I spent time wishing it away. There was miscommunication and heartbreak; wishing to be anywhere else with someone else. It was feeling vulnerable and anxious and alone but also free and curious and hopeful. An anxious countdown to Christmas was on the wall, and yet now I fear time is moving too fast.

My experience has been shaped by the changing of the seasons. It was mountains on the weekends and lectures on a Monday morning. Winter held its grasp as I waded through the days of wanting to be home. The sun made its grand entrance and the city transformed. I saw shifts in my behavioural patterns. It was lake swims and freckled faces. Always a beer to be drunk and a Kaffeeklatsch to be had. A world that took time to acclimatise to is now a world I have to leave behind.

Jumpers were shed and shipped back home. Now I'm walking out the door with a bag half the weight it used to be. It's spontaneity. Jumping on a bike to collect bread. Dipping my feet in the river after class. Train hopping to the neighbouring countries. A meeting of many cultures. A grasping of language and a newfound confidence in my own one. It was confronting the nature of my 'Germanness', and it was accepting that the reason I came here changed.

It was a freedom of anonymity. An uncomplicated existence. I perfected the art of not oversharing. It was laughing with people I don't know if I'll ever see again and learning to be okay with saying goodbye.

Heimweh and Fernweh.
It was both.

by Maude Casey

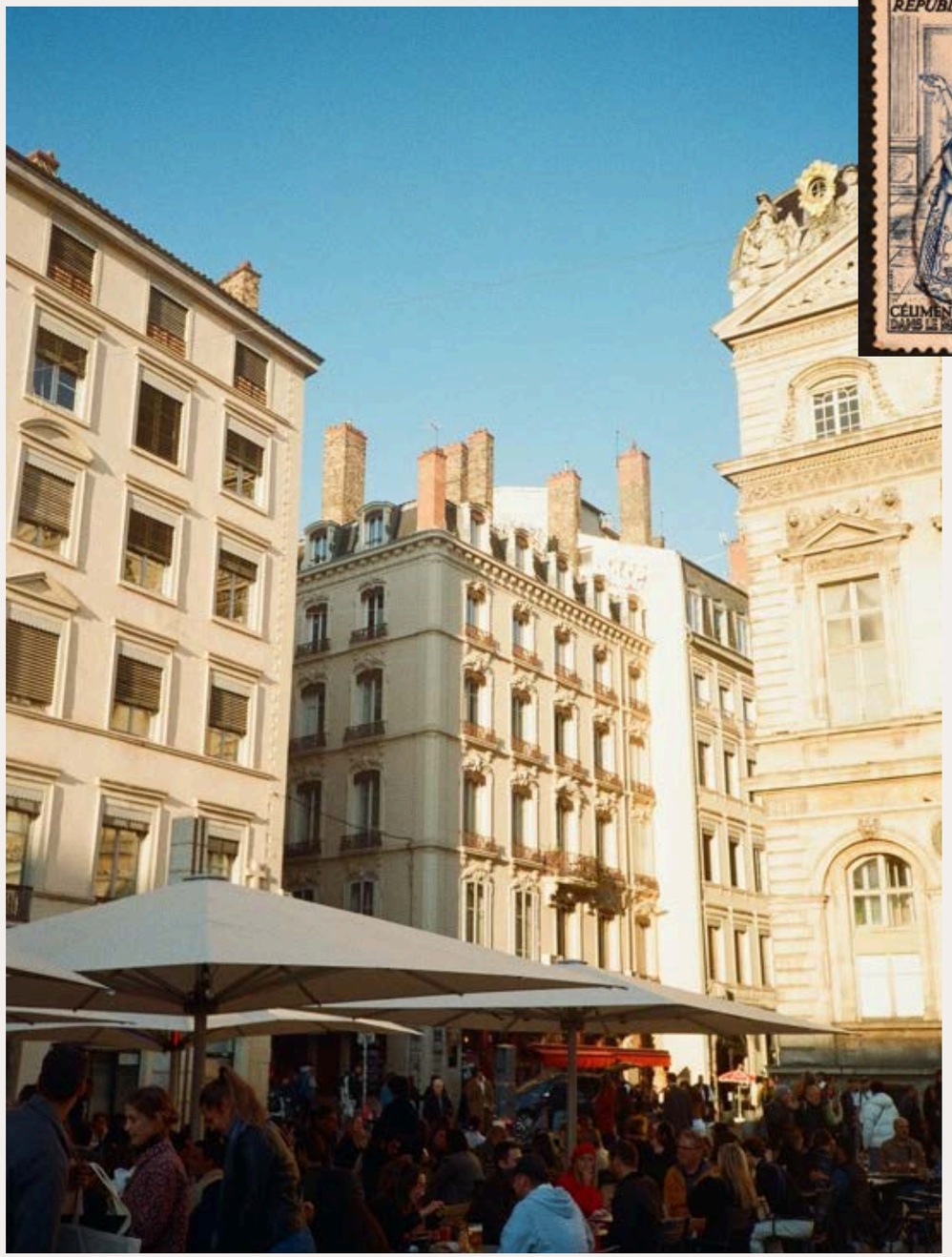


Joanna Bowman

Leaving My Little Lyon Life

I'm squinting, my clothes are stuck to me, I can hear insects' chirping and the hubbub of people sitting outside bars - the 35° heat is back in Lyon. It is these sensations that snap me out of my quotidien and remind me how things are coming full circle, yet also how so much has changed since those first sticky days in August. I have about a week left, and the more I think about leaving, the weirder it feels that I'm just going to leave this little life I've created and never relive in the same way. Lyon has been emptying these past few months: I've been saying goodbyes to my beloved friends since April. This also means my chances to speak English in person have become fewer and fewer. I currently spend more time with my 35 year old colleagues than any of my friends, let alone my boyfriend. Yet I still continue to meet new people here and there. From friends of my flatmates or a free choir in the park, having a social life in another language is not something I expected to actually achieve, let alone become somewhat normal. I feel such a separation between my Edinburgh student life and my Lyon working life, as well as discovering new sides to me in a different language - will it be strange to go back? I went from arriving in a city not knowing where I was going to live, nor what internship I would find, to leaving knowing every step of my flatmate's hair care routine, or all the names of my colleagues' kids.

The beauty of an exchange lies in the people you meet - individuals whose lives you would never have intersected with otherwise. I know soon as I'm back in Edinburgh it will be like no time has passed, but if I'm ever bored in lectures, I know where my mind will wander: it will float down my street to the river, breeze along the bustling barge bars, wizz on my bike up to the park, glide around the streets of the Croix-Rousse, and of course wander to my office gardens and pause at the outdoor lunch tables to soak in the sun.







postcards from Lyon



Ana Aritio:
Je Ne Regrette Rien

And just like that, my 10 months in Paris have come to an end. The city I once dismissed as dirty, overwhelming, and too French at the start has, somewhere along the way, transformed into my home; one I really do not want to leave.

It's funny how things shift. The fears I held at the start of not making friend, of never grasping the language well enough to feel at ease have now flipped; now as I prepare to leave, I worry whether the people I've met and grown so close to will forget me, or how I'll manage to readjust to a life in a place that, only 10 months ago, all felt so familiar.

With that said, The Exchange Journal has offered me a space where I've been able to document, reflect, and process everything this year has thrown my way. From the initial culture shocks to moments of unexpected joy, writing for the journal has served as a thread running through my experience, allowing me to pause and pay attention to the little things that have shaped and transformed my year and myself. As I look back through the pieces I've written, I can see how my feelings towards the city changed with the seasons.

Whilst my feelings in winter, still raw from the move, felt challenging to voice, the arrival of spring thawed any remaining anxieties. The city was no longer foreign but was now home. I navigated the roads and side-streets with a native rhythm.

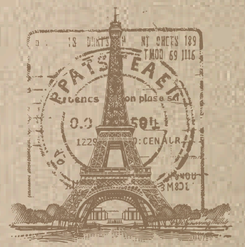
As summer arrives and I prepare for the next chapter, I carry with me not just memories but new lessons, lessons like this: cities only give back what you put into them. You shape your experience through choices, routines and most importantly, mindset. My Exchange Journal entries have become a celebration of this transformation, a method of communication and a guide that frames my time here

.

As the curtain to my Parisian Act falls, I'm struck by my immense dependency on the city. I once read that it takes just three weeks of consistency for something to become a habit, yet I fear it will take more than twenty-one days to move on from the scenic Seine runs and the routine evening drinks with the wonderful people I met.

However, this is balanced against the knowledge that I'm heading back to Edinburgh with a fresh mindset and a stronger sense of self. Never again will I complain about coursework after surviving Parisian university. Sitting through three-hour long classes every day is something I'm gladly saying au revoir to!

Truthfully, when weighing out the pros and cons of what you'll miss and what you won't, you find a lot of overlaps. Moving into a new flat next year and experiencing life in New Town feels like a natural step forward. I will undoubtedly miss the scale of Paris, its cultural depth, the food, and the energy it carries being a major city, but I'm determined to see what else Edinburgh has to offer beyond the student bubble. Re-reading some of my previous submissions has made it evident that while I immediately treated Paris as the dynamic city it is, I limited Edinburgh by purely viewing it through the lens of student life. By approaching it with the same openness and curiosity I brought to Paris, I'm hopeful I'll uncover a new side of the city that I can't wait to explore in my fourth and final year.



A Tale of Two Cities

by Sarah Challen Flynn

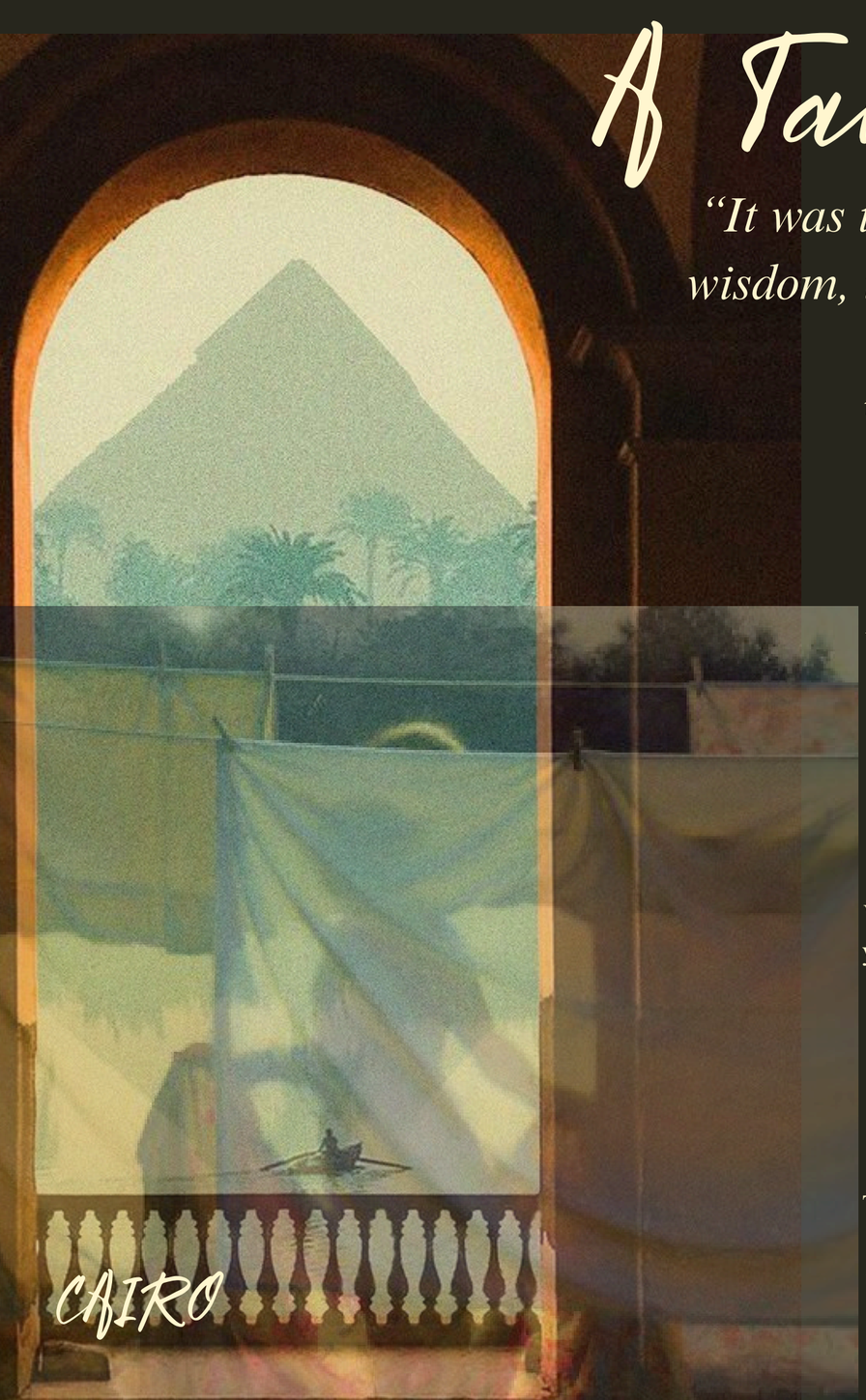
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness"

As dual-language students (or others) will have experienced, I have had the great fortune (but also great tragedy, as I will explain) to spend this year in two different cities. From September to May, I made Cairo my home. This was with no great ease, and the ebbs and flows of novelty, settling in, homesickness, overwhelm, and I think I could live here forever were as fickle and frequent as the traffic jams. I think I owe the SWAY team an apology for being so sceptical of what I thought was the pointless, patronising 'graph of homesickness' in one of the pre-departure presentations.

After a final week of indulging in all the joys of Cairo and bidding farewell to all my wonderful friends, I made a mad dash for a week at home before hauling myself off in the opposite direction, to spend the summer studying and working in Medellin, Colombia. It has already been a whirlwind (or tropical rainstorm more accurately), with a 180° climate and language change, two apartments, two placements, a new currency, new friends, thousands of mosquito bites, and to top it off my brain has been scrambled by all the spinning salsa classes - all within just a month and a half so far.

While I am having an absolutely wonderful time with no complaints whatsoever about how this year has turned out, it has been impossible to process or even believe that I spent the previous 9 months in Egypt. Not only are the two experiences so totally different, but I am now so occupied trying to soak in every detail of my new city. Medellin's vibrantly saturated palette of banana trees, orchids and parrots makes Cairo's desert hues feel like a nostalgically faded photograph. Though the contrasts are worlds apart, I can't quite bring myself to favour technicolour or the rose-tint, as both have been a delight to the senses.

Though I am struggling to reflect for now, I am sure it will all come flooding over me once I get home and have time to think. There are limitless cliches I could list about what this year has taught me about myself, but I have already pretentiously begun with a quote so I won't indulge. I have certainly been wise, foolish, hopeful and despairing, just as Dickens imagined it.





ON FRIENDSHIP

BY FREYA SIEBERT



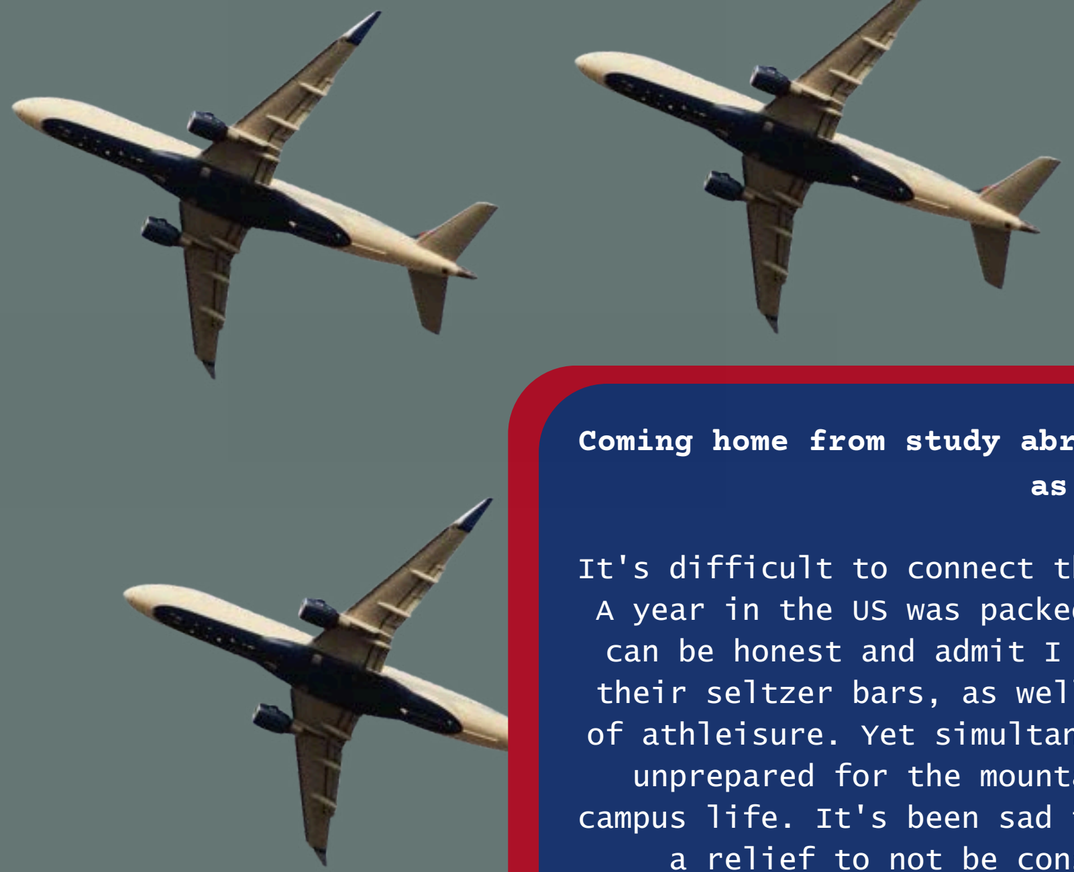




I left Montreal on the first hot, sunny day in months. It was the end of exams and there was a massive party on the main lawn, everyone was happy, everyone was there. My flight was at 8pm so I left there around 4:30, and just like that the year was over. I remember walking across the campus, from the party field, down the paths that I had taken every single day for that year, past lecture halls and libraries that I had sat in and slept in and through the main gate, and that was it. It's funny how quickly that year went, how well now I know a city I might not go to ever again. How many of its houses I have been inside, how many restaurants I have eaten at, and how many people I have come to know and love. One of my best friends there gave me a note just before I left. It was hand-written, double sided, and she'd drawn little stars around the border: she had taken time to write it, so I took time to read it. I pulled it out of my pocket on the flight, somewhere over the sea, no longer in Canada and thousands of miles away from the one who wrote it. In this liminal space, between the last year and the next back home I read her writing, and I could hear her. I read the note now and I can hear her still. I had never expected to make such strong friends on a year away from home, I had never expected now to be in the position of having to miss them, just as I missed my ones from home when I was away. It sounds ridiculous, self-indulgent in a way to think like this now, but it is as if I am split. The version of myself in Canada was of course, myself, but the people who made me into person are still there, and so that version of me stays there too. I do not ever want to forget those people and that happy, confident, independent image of myself, the one bordered in stars like the words of Keira's note. So, whenever I write or text my friends abroad, and now my ones at home too, I take more time, and in my head, there is a border of stars round every text.







Reflections on the return home

By Sami Chakkara

Coming home from study abroad has paralleled waking from a fever dream, where everything is just as I left it, and yet nothing is quite the same.

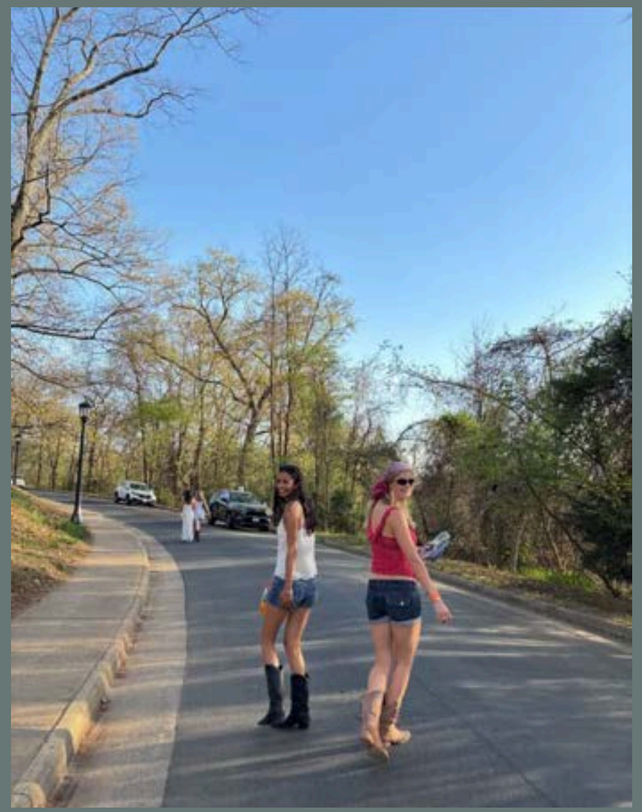
It's difficult to connect the life I've slipped back into with the surrealness of the one left behind. A year in the US was packed full of experiences and still incredibly fleeting. Now that it's over, I can be honest and admit I was ready to say goodbye to the concerning conditions of frat houses with their seltzer bars, as well as the American allergy to walking and public transport, and the uniform of athleisure. Yet simultaneously, the absence of certain things has been harder than expected. I was unprepared for the mountainous beauty of Virginia, which set the perfect backdrop to UVA's small campus life. It's been sad to return to a place where our accents don't work our charm for us, and yet a relief to not be constantly surrounded by American voices. Fundamentally, coming home is a bittersweet process.

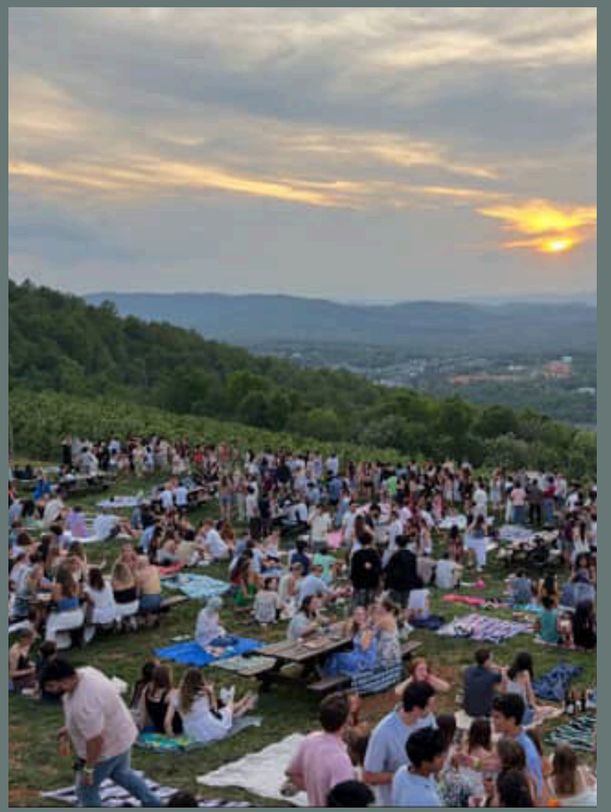
And still, I managed to befriend people who fulfilled the American brand. This included people fascinated by us and our collective home country of 'Europe', girls who dressed us in their southern ensemble of sundresses, cowboy hats and boots, frat boy bandmates who swore to me that their 'brothers' could get us gigs, and friends who secured us an honest American Thanksgiving and 'Spreak' experience.

Above all of these experiences, the best thing I've taken from this is over said, but undeniably true – I have learned a world about myself. Being removed from everything I've known to be familiar; all the routines and people that have made me 'me' has forced me to take a closer look at what I create and value most for myself. The loneliness and distance were confronting at times, but coming out the other side was also incredibly rewarding. I can and will endlessly recommend a year abroad to anyone – however daunting the change may be, it’s a fever dream that changes your life forever.

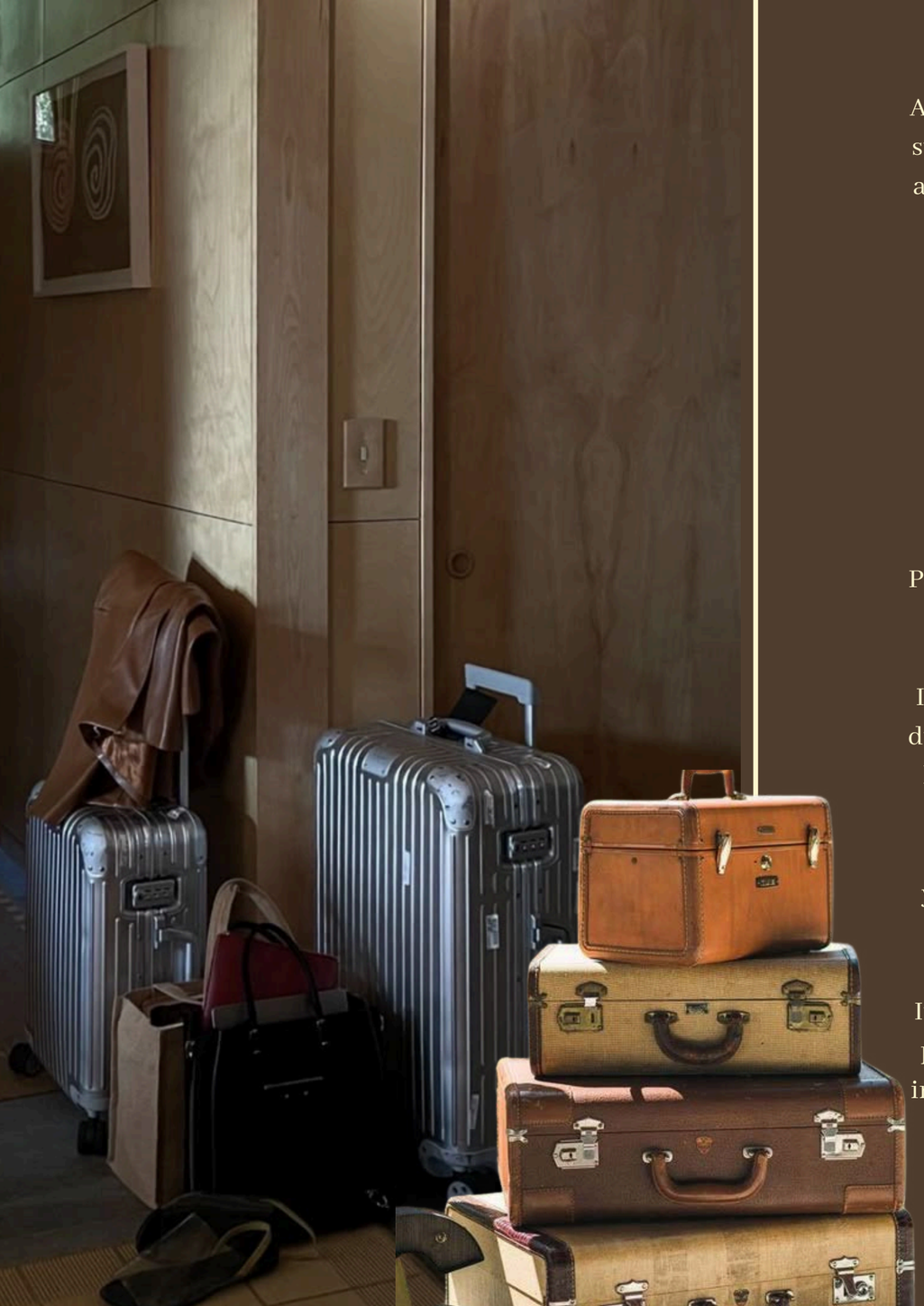








life at The University of Virginia



GOODBYE FROM OUR EDITORS

As I hope may be the case for many, I have found it extremely comforting reading the experiences of other exchange students. Though separated by borders, languages, and different types of placements, we all seem to have shared in a range of experiences between homesickness and comfort, excitement and mundanity, culture shocks, and lessons learned.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reflect on the wider role of cultural exchange. While those of us studying or working abroad may have all learned some personal lessons about adaptability and perseverance, I think this type of exchange is also hugely important in a political climate of division.

The last year has seen increasing attacks on migrant communities across the globe, with harmful anti-migrant rhetoric from the UK government and beyond fanning the flames of racism, islamophobia, and xenophobia, exemplified by the race riots across the UK last summer and Trump's policy of mass detention and deportation. People of the two countries, regions, and respective languages I have spent this year immersed in, have both been at the receiving end of vitriolic xenophobic attacks.

I don't want to preach the importance of language learning only (although of course, as a language student it is my duty), but more generally of cross-cultural education where people take time to learn about the customs, traditions, histories, perspectives of others. Spending time engaging with different cultures dispels stereotypes, widens your worldview, and arms you against the false narratives so often circulated about migrant communities.
Within the scope of this Journal, of course I refer to the experiences of Edinburgh students on a year abroad, but you don't need to physically go on exchange to engage in cultural exchange! I will be returning to Edinburgh with even more curiosity and searching for Egyptian and Colombian food, art, music, cinema, etc, wherever I go.

It has been absolutely wonderful, if logistically challenging, to work with such a brilliant cross-continental team to pull the Exchange Journal together. A massive thank you to anyone who has contributed to The Exchange Journal in its' newborn year! Especially to Bella, Lara and Freya, the wonderful writers, anyone who signed up to receive my emails, SWAY for their support, and anyone who read the Journal. I can't wait to see where in the world the Exchange Journal will go next. <3

-Sarah Challen Flynn



A final note

This journal began as Bella and I tried to find a new hobby, and productive way of spending our time whilst abroad. Now, it has become such a prominent thing in my Copenhagen life, and a hobby that I have really enjoyed.

Each journal edition has consistently amazed me by the amount of entries and enquiries we have recieved. With over sixty applicants for the new roles of the exchange journal next year - I am very happy to pass it on knowing that it will be in good hands, and will continue to be a space of comfort and query in such unique times.

To those that have just finish their year abroad - welcome home! And to those that are about to begin best of luck.

I cant wait wait to read all about them.

Lara xxx

In compiling this final edition of the journal, I have once again been struck by certain universal patterns that emerge between our vastly contrasting experiences abroad. The feelings of shifting with the seasons as we slowly begin to call a place home are balanced against the strange leap back into our lives at home, into the patterns of familiarity that we left behind this time last year. In making it through this year, in whatever form it took, there is undeniable sense of achievement and growth, as well as uncertainty with how this will blend with our lives back at home and the reunion with Edinburgh

It is the discovery of these shared feelings and experiences that make me so glad we were able to set up the journal this year, and so proud that it will continue to grow next year with the next study abroad students to come. It has been a beautiful thing, having a space for personal reflection and for connection with those in similar or vastly different positions. I cannot wait to watch it grow!

If you have made it this far, thank you so much for reading.

Bella xox