

# Blue all the way

Despite being born and raised in a small amiable village in Slovakia, Steven always felt like he did not fit in. His biggest dream was to travel the world and find his place among the living ones. For being too smart and attentive during classes, however lacking any social skills, his peers gave him a nickname - The smartass weirdo. When he was just a child it was not easy for him to put up with this. That is why he spent most afternoons sitting in his room, watching videos of children who lived in different countries and felt like they belonged.

Finally, at the age of 18, he decided to set out on a whole new adventure by applying for DiscoverEU programme. After thorough preparations his hard work paid off once he was selected and got the opportunity to travel through Europe for free, without needing to show his passport anywhere. He immediately accepted it with no hesitation. He planned out his whole journey and had a clear idea as to what countries he would be visiting. Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, Turkey, Denmark, Spain and Poland awaited his arrival.

The Day D took place in August 2023 when his supportive mother saw him off at the international airport in Bratislava. Flying away toward a better future with only an ID in his hand and a few things contained in his backpack, excitement rushed through his veins. He now was alone, fighting his own battle.

During this one month, that he was enabled to travel for free, he encountered a lot of interesting people, made a few friends and acquaintances, what's more, he was able to form his own opinions about the world. Sightseeing broadened his horizons, improved his knowledge on history and enhanced his English skills. The whole journey was splendid, however not always filled with pleasant experiences. One time, he even got lost in an unknown country, wandering the streets without having any connection to the internet. Luckily, he remembered that countries in the European Union allowed people like him to use his mobile data without needing to pay a fortune.

He got the chance to interact with people of different cultures and suddenly, he no longer felt peculiar. Having seen all those different countries and experienced people's hardships, he felt glad to have been brought up in Slovakia where his family did not have to struggle to get by and no war was endangering his life. Furthermore, he did not feel the urge to pretend to be someone else, anymore. He could be himself which meant that he was able to make friends more easily and all those factors combined made him happier than ever.

In a museum in Spain, he met a professor from Aalborg University in Denmark. Steven felt honoured to make his acquaintance and they spent a lot of time talking

about the Aalborg University. He became quite intrigued and set his goal to study at this particular facility. Fortunately, the professor took part in the Erasmus+ programme and persuaded Steven to join in, which provided him with the opportunity to study at AAU. After careful consideration, Steven decided to apply for Master's level module at AAU - International entrepreneurship.

Each and every day, he was having a blast with his new friend while also bearing in mind that all good things would one day come to an end. That day came sooner than he would have liked.

One month passed by in a split second. The time to return home came. After finally breaking out of his mother's embrace, he enlightened her with his intentions to study abroad. She could not believe her ears, right after coming home, her only son wanted to leave again. And now, for an even longer period of time. Once she saw the excitement and determination about this in his eyes, she knew he would not change his mind no matter how hard she pled. In that moment she buried her hopes of him staying right by her side for the rest of her life.

From then on, Steven devoted all his time to studying for the entrance exams and partaking in yet another Erasmus+ programme - European solidarity corps. He volunteered along with a couple of strangers from Slovakia in a cause concerned with environment and went to Belgium for 3 weeks. He came back seeming like a different person, more aware of the man's bad impact on the Earth, his mind set on making the future world a better place for his descendants.

Demanding preparatory, however, did not prevent him from keeping in touch with his international friends. It seemed to him that their friendships were bound to last a long time.

With the assistance and help of the professor he had met in Spain, he managed to pass the entrance exams, which brought him one step closer to accomplishing one of his goals. Over time, he adapted to the system in university, eventually receiving the master's degree. Nevertheless, his story did not end there. The steps he undertook brought him to a successful corporation and later on lead to a promotion. His life turned out to be better than he had expected when he was just a child, laughed at for being too serious about studying. He expressed his gratitude toward the European commission by writing a letter, describing the experiences he came across while travelling around Europe, which opened his eyes and changed his life for good.

Foreign countries turned out to be a sort of a refuge for him, a means to get away from the feeling of not belonging. Thanks to Erasmus and the opportunities provided by the European Union, Steven fell in love with life again, which seemed impossible to him just a few years before.

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