



Step Through Time

Shoes Serve as Worldwide
Time Capsules

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The saying goes, “If the shoe fits, wear it.”

But what if shoes don’t just fit someone’s feet — they fit their stories as well? Every scuff and crease represents a story to be told, and shoes possess the power to hold their owner’s memories in every step.

Shoes were made for walking, and for some people, that means wearing them throughout all their adventures. Junior Tabitha Vanderhorst said one pair of shoes, her Reebok Club 85s, have been with her to 22 different countries.

“I love the idea of an article of clothing getting to see different countries and how much they got to view and be along with for the ride,” Vanderhorst said.

Worldwide Shoes

When packing to study abroad, many students said they decided against bringing multiple pairs of shoes in an effort to conserve suitcase space. This decision led students to wear a singular pair of shoes on all their travels — every walk, hike and plane ride.

“I didn’t intentionally make them my travel shoe to begin with,” Vanderhorst said. “I just went abroad the summer before my sophomore year, and those were the only pair of tennis shoes that I brought. So then they were deemed my travel shoes.”

From May 2024 to May 2025, Vanderhorst wore her shoes everywhere from Croatia to Brazil as she explored the corners of the world.

“The beauty about travel shoes is that you can just wear them everywhere,” Vanderhorst said. “You can wear them hiking, you can wear them going out, you can wear them walking around to visit new places and go sightseeing.”

Junior Damian Youssef wore his travel shoes to 19 different countries while he



studied abroad in London. Youssef chose Golden Goose Super-Stars as his everyday shoes for a slew of reasons.

“I decided to wear them because I thought they would match everything and they were plain,” Youssef said. “I also know that they’re comfortable, and they were durable, and they are somewhat water resistant and easy to clean.”

Junior Kal Auxier said he knew he wanted one sturdy pair for his year abroad in Switzerland. His priority was comfort, and he found that in THE ROGER shoes by On Cloud.

“Those shoes went to every country I went to,” Auxier said. “Through

13 countries, they touched Paris, they touched the Sahara, they touched the Serengeti, they touched London. Now, they’re back here in Kentucky, LA and Malibu.”

Auxier said his On Clouds were his go-to, even when there were better options. When other students chose to wear hiking boots in the Swiss Alps or flip-flops in the Sahara, Auxier always found himself going back to his On Clouds.

“They’ve trekked through the Sahara, and then they’ve also trekked through feet of snow,” Auxier said. “I just have this pair of nice tennis shoes that aren’t really built for the dirt or the rocks or whatever, but they had to deal with it.”

Through the multitude of countries and memories in their shoes, Vanderhorst,



Youssef and Auxier have certain experiences that stick out to them.

“They saw a camel in the Sahara, but then they also saw a lion because we got to go to Kenya,” Auxier said. “Those may be my favorite things that I did all of abroad.”

Youssef said he was able to check off a ton of bucket list experiences in his most trustworthy pair of shoes.

“I wore them when I was snowboarding in Zermatt, and snowboarding in the Swiss Alps was like one of my dreams,” Youssef said. “I wore them to Oktoberfest in Munich and then seeing the Northern Lights for the first time in Iceland.”

Even when her Reeboks were the least conventional option, Vanderhorst always chose to wear them. In one favorite memory, her shoes helped her complete a hike up a glacier while studying abroad in Argentina.

“As you can imagine, flat shoes with not a lot of tread on the bottom is not the best idea,” Vanderhorst said. “It was cool to know that my shoes got me up there, and even though it’s only a pair of shoes, it feels very meaningful.”

Even with a few standout memories, the shoes mean so much more to their owners than the little moments they associate them with. For Auxier, he said his On Clouds encapsulate his entire study-abroad experience.

“It’s a reflection of the whole experience,” Auxier said. “They were super worn out, I was super worn out, but also, I love that pair of shoes. They’re sentimental, they’re cool to look back on.”

Youssef echoed Auxier’s sentiment and said he is reminded of the hundreds of miles his Golden Geoses walked every time he looks at his shoes.

“I drew an emotional attachment to them,” Youssef said. “Every time I look at them, I can see some of the scuffs and different markings that were made in different countries.”

Unconventional Footwear

Some people’s go-to shoes are impractical for world-wide traveling, but they hold the same power to create an emotional attachment.

“Everyone told me I was silly for wearing them abroad the whole year,” Youssef said. “They held up and looked good when I was dressing them up or dressing them down, and on accident, they became my favorite shoe.”

When junior Kaylee Snyder spent a year studying abroad in Switzerland, which gets at least 100 inches of snowfall a year on average, according to On the Snow, her travel shoes left the entire program questioning her choice of footwear.

“Rainbow sandals were my go-to,” Snyder said. “I wore them in the thick of the winter. I wore them in the summer, no matter the time of day. They were just my go-to if I was running, if I was walking, if I was hiking. I knew I could just take them along for the adventure.”

Not only did Snyder wear her flip-flops in the midst of Switzerland winter, but she took them on every trip she embarked on. From Morocco to Portugal and all the way home to Oregon, Snyder was known

in the program for her Rainbows.

“I was known around the Chateau for only wearing my flops, even in the dead of winter, even when we were told, ‘Stop wearing flip-flops, stop wearing shorts,’” Snyder said.

Despite warnings from other students and staff in her program, Snyder chose her flip-flops every time she had the chance. They were the most comfortable in her collection, but they also meant a lot to her personally.

“It goes back to humility on a deeper level of things,” Snyder said. “Grounding is so important because it’s a humble reminder that we were gifted this planet.”

Preserving the Memories

Many travelers said their shoes are now in rough condition, which can be expected after they traveled the world for months on end. However, Youssef said he glued his shoes together because his connection was too strong to part with them.

“It’s pretty full circle to keep wearing them because I carried all these memories with me as I was making them,” Youssef said. “Now, I get to continue making more memories here, and I’m still exploring and taking every opportunity to make new memories.”

Some students said their travel shoes are in such bad shape that they are beyond saving.

“They started out very pretty, clean and white, and after visiting 22 countries, as you can imagine, they were disgusting and had holes in them and smelt really bad,” Vanderhorst said. “But regardless, they are loved shoes that bring all of my memories with me.”

Although she came to the tough realization that she will probably have to part with her Reeboks, the impact the shoes made on Vanderhorst throughout her travels stay with her, she said.

Vanderhorst plans to honor their journey by writing each country on the inside of the shoes, but to her, they symbolize

much more than the places she’s been.

“Those shoes remind me of finding my independence and my ability to travel,” Vanderhorst said. “Regardless of how torn up and destroyed they are, it’s hard to part with the shoes because of all the memories that they have carried me through.”

Snyder, Youssef and Vanderhorst all said they plan on buying a new pair of the exact same shoe.

“If anything, it’s a continuation of memories that I’ve made in these shoes,” Youssef said. “I don’t think I’d ever get rid of that.”

Before they get to the point of buying a new pair, the students have to cope with moving on from their current pair.

“It would be heartbreaking,” Snyder said. “These shoes helped me in a way of learning to be myself. Wearing them is a humble reminder of the little things that can make you so happy in life and what really fulfills you.”



Damien Youssef

