

## “VACATION TO BEERLAND:” ALCOHOL AND THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

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### Abstract

Wright and Larsen (2012) analyzed graffiti produced by study abroad students and depth interviews conducted with a sub sample of the student graffiti artists and found that three major themes contribute to making study abroad a consistent example of an “extraordinary experience” (Arnould and Price [1993]). The three themes identified in that study were *travel trophies*, *magic moments*, and *communitas*. Wright and Larsen (2012) also identified, but did not analyze in depth, a fourth theme that appeared frequently in the data and that may have been a constitutive element of the study abroad “extraordinary experience.” This study returned to the data and focused on the undiscussed theme--alcohol.

The study reviews past literature that has looked at alcohol consumption abroad primarily as a problem for program managers. It then shifts the focus to the meaning of alcohol for students participating in the study abroad program. The graffiti data and depth interviews indicate that alcohol played an important role in breaking down barriers between students and between students and locals. Students bonded with each other as they participated in various drinking activities. And by interacting with and observing locals, students gained new perspectives on the cultural role alcohol could play in their own lives and the lives of others. The key role of bars and nightclubs as meeting places between students and locals is discussed. Also discussed are the role of local alcohol brands in defining students as a cohort with shared experiences and the role the brands play in connecting students with the foreign country while they are there and in reconnecting them to it following their return home.