



In what other program can students stand on a site of ancient African civilizations while baobabs and giraffes dot the horizon line? When else can students become directly involved with research benefitting one of the world's premier National parks while exploring the savanna with a group of quirky, intelligent peers? The answer: only on the OTS South Africa program.

Not only are students exposed to a huge diversity of projects, people and ideas, they do so in the context of the fascinating and ever-changing South African culture. Conservation discussions and projects are made highly relevant as students encounter local peoples and their perspectives and begin to navigate the realities of African conservation work. Fieldwork is as engaging, intriguing and dirty as anywhere else, though perhaps more exciting as the prospect of encountering elephants lingers in the air. Overall, I would wholeheartedly recommend this program to any student looking for exposure to the excitement and dynamism of South African ecology and conservation

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Though I didn't realize it until the very end of the course, I grew in ways I didn't expect during my semester with OTS. I found that I had to tackle a lot of challenges simultaneously, which was harder on some days than it was on others. The little things like getting up to work early in the morning because your teammates are depending on you, or sacrificing some personal time to work on something that really just needs to get done suddenly added up to a giant, fun-filled 3 months with 25 other people who'd just gone through the same thing I did. The friends you make on OTS feel like family in the end, and that's something that also made me grow. The love I have for the people I've met here so recently, and the love they have for me, is something to be proud of.

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OTS has given me a huge leg-up in terms of practical field experience over my peers. The experience has encouraged my aspiration to be a scientist, more specifically as a biologist and ecologist. The student-staff relations are a real highlight, with personal attention and feedback. After 100 days you emerge with 30 other friends, students and staff included, having learnt more about yourself than any on-campus experience could have given you. I would highly recommend this program to anyone with an appetite for adventure, a passion for learning and a willingness to get their hands and clothes dirty in the pursuit of science!



OTS was a life-changing experience for me. I met the most incredible people and had supportive lecturers that I learnt so much from. I saw so much of South Africa and appreciate its diverse landscape so much more now. I also learnt a lot about myself and gained so much clarity about what I want to do with my career. I will never forget my time on OTS.

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From the first meeting at the backpackers in Jo'burg, I was a little hesitant about everything. Learning names and actually getting to know people was a tad difficult but before long, I considered everyone to be a close friend. Daily lessons that dragged on soon began to fly by as I learned to enjoy all of the subjects that we were learning. Exciting game drives and day off activities were easily the high point as I got to see parts of South Africa that I never knew existed and animals that were nothing but photographs to me beforehand. It will be heart-wrenching to leave here but I am glad that I was able to experience such an opportunity.

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OTS facilitated my exposure to new ideas, new places, a new culture, and lots of cool new people. The past three months has been fabulous, and I could not have imagined a better abroad experience. OTS is a challenging cultural experience, as well as a challenging academic experience. I was constantly learning new things, whether it was in lecture, in the field, or from the back of a Game Drive Vehicle. Over the course of the semester, I have made memories and formed relationships that are unique to this program, and I know that I will treasure these memories forever. Very few people are fortunate enough to experience OTS and all of the wacky and wonderful things that go along with it, but those who do should savor every second of it.

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I knew I loved ecology, now I'm positive. I got to meet incredible people, especially the South African's. OTS had instilled a desire to continue research, or some sort of fieldwork in my life. I'm so grateful for the opportunities I've been given.

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Overall, OTS was a very fun semester that I would not take back. It was stressful at times, but the stress was definitely rewarding in terms of the work we got out of it. An amazing experience in terms of being able to do field research, which I love, and learning about a new ecosystem.



OTS has enlarged the world around me. I now realize that opportunities are endless and that no scientific idea is too big or too difficult to attempt. This experience has been nothing short of life changing. – Cassie Pestana, Brown University

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It's hard to begin, but I know where it ends. I've left OTS South Africa a better scientist, a more creative student, and a more effective group member. I couldn't have asked for an adventure more different than a semester at my home institution, but I also couldn't have asked for a more incredible and eye opening semester. From lectures in the field, to homestays in a small village, to the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen, it's been a gift to study with OTS this semester. More than anything, the staff and the students make the trip what it is, a crazy, chaotic, and awe-inspiring three months.

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OTS South Africa is all the clichés about study abroad programs combined and beyond. Even as I am writing this review at the end of the program, it's still surreal and hard to fully grasp the fact that I have just spent three months in South Africa, travelling around the country and visiting so many diverse places - the conundrum of tree-grass coexistence, heavenly paradise of *fynbos* and its extraordinary diversity of succulents, tidal pools with amazing fauna and flora, and back to the savanna in the wet season to see the transformation. This course had the perfect ingredients for the perfect experience - inspiring and witty staff, amazing food (thanks to Aggyshadow), crazy students who are up for anything and have so much knowledge to share, all of which mixed and morphed into this mindboggling, life changing experience. - Ukyoung Chang

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I couldn't have made a better decision on a study abroad program. It was not perfect but certainly worthwhile and I gained so much from it. I somehow ended up with the greatest and quirkiest group of peers and staff. In fact having staff that I considered to be both my friends but also mentors was a great experience. I loved being thrown into the world of the Savanna, Marine Environments, and *Fynbos*. I loved meeting so many successful people in science and learning about their journeys of how they got there. It made me feel more confident in myself because their journeys were often filled with mistakes or sheer chance, making going into science a more possible dream. I fell in love with the people but also with this country. I want to come back for an extended period of time. OTS has been a truly remarkable experience and one that I will miss immensely. - Audra Bass



People have said it so many times to me over the course of the semester and it sounds incredibly cheesy, but it's true: there really is no way you can describe this experience to someone who wasn't here. The few times I was able to talk to my parents over the phone, they would ask me to tell them about the program. And I would tell them all the exciting game we had seen on recent game drives, and how I was within walking distance to a hippo in a river while doing fieldwork, or how incredible the almost daily frisbee and soccer games made me feel. But I often found myself running out of things to say to them - something I didn't expect while spending a semester in South Africa. There are certain moments I experienced here that I know will stay with me forever that I will never be able to explain to someone else. But that's the beauty of it. It's something you live for yourself and that you will take with you wherever you go. - Cecilia Cerilla

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If you decide to go on OTS, you will have no idea what you have gotten yourself into. That feeling doesn't stop once you're on the course, because every week there lies around the corner a new adventure in a new place that you don't even have the time to think about because you are in the middle of one at that very moment. On my program, it was me and 24 other students, some of which became my friends that I believe will last a lifetime. And to be a staff member, you have to be as ridiculous as the ones who designed what Laurence calls "an amorphous sponge that floats about the South African landscape." The staff was incredibly engaging, friendly, and concerned for our wellbeing. There is slim chance that I will ever experience a foreign country in this way ever again, and I am so grateful for the imagination and the hard work that went into creating it. - Nathaniel Simon

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OTS is a whirlwind of indescribable experiences. Jumping from place to place and project to project, I really got a feel for what South Africa and the savanna are like. On the program, we had remarkable opportunities to do field work in beautiful and restricted areas, to work with intelligent people, and to immerse ourselves in the mindset of academic ecology and conservation. The staff is incredible- their dedication to the wellbeing and intellectual and personal growth of the students is remarkable, and they always had good attitudes. One of the best parts of the semester is how close the student group becomes. I had a chance to get to know and have fun with every single person on the program, and the nature of the course brought us all together rather than creating cliques. Going into this program, I expected a fun study abroad trip and the opportunity to see amazing places. What I received was so much more, and I would recommend it to anyone with a love of science and adventure. - Matthew Farnitano

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The term “Rollercoaster” is probably the most fitting description put forward. The 99 jam-packed days of this life-changing program are exceedingly difficult to define with purely words... It as an experience like no other that cannot be replicated. The addition of 25 students into confined spaces for 3 months should spell disaster, but what OTS creates is something magical... a family. - Blair Cowie

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OTS was a phenomenal experience for me. Throughout the semester, I had the opportunity to think independently and conduct research with the incredible savanna ecosystem as a backdrop. I can't rave enough about the passion of the OTS community- both faculty and staff. There's something to be said about a program where you can spend the day doing research with elephants a few meters away from you and coming home to watching the sunset and sharing every meal with a close-knit group of people that are passionate about the same things you are. - Caroline Schechinger

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This program is an absolutely incredible experience that you will never get anywhere else. In three and a half months, I have grown more as a person and as a scientist than I have in any previous semester, and I had the opportunity to do so in the most beautiful country I've ever seen and with a group of amazing people that I wish I never had to leave. Doing this program was easily one of the best decisions of my life, and I will never ever forget my time here. - Jessica Coulter

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It was truly an amazing and challenging experience. - Christina Martinez

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This course is indescribable and out of this world. No words could ever describe the amount of fun and enjoyment I have had on this program. I have learnt so much about topics I did not even consider before. The approach of joint learning and hands on experience can never be surpassed. Best methodology for students. - Chris Rankin