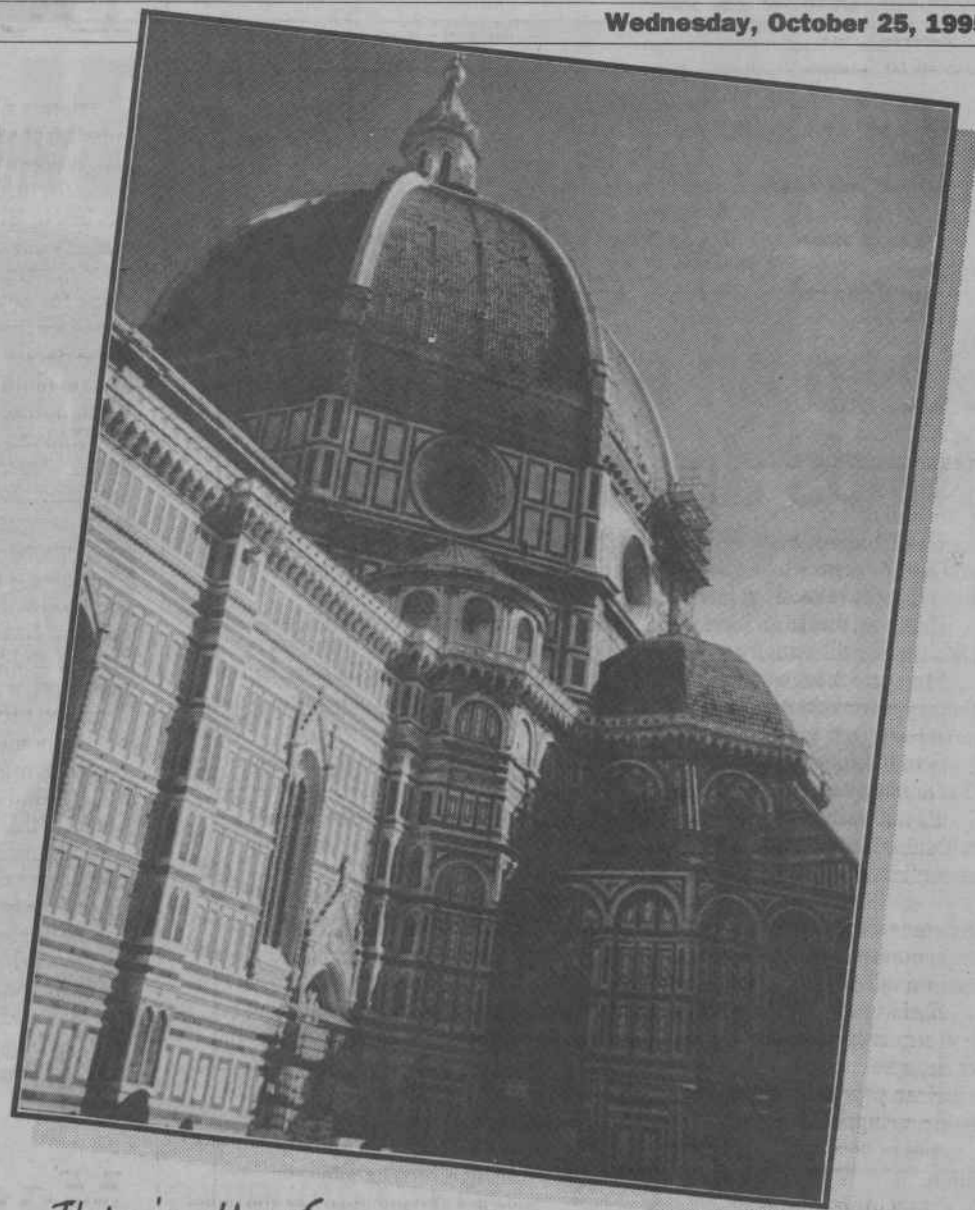




Here is a Greek Orthodox Church on Santorini, an island in the Aegean Sea



This is the famous Duomo in Florence, Italy

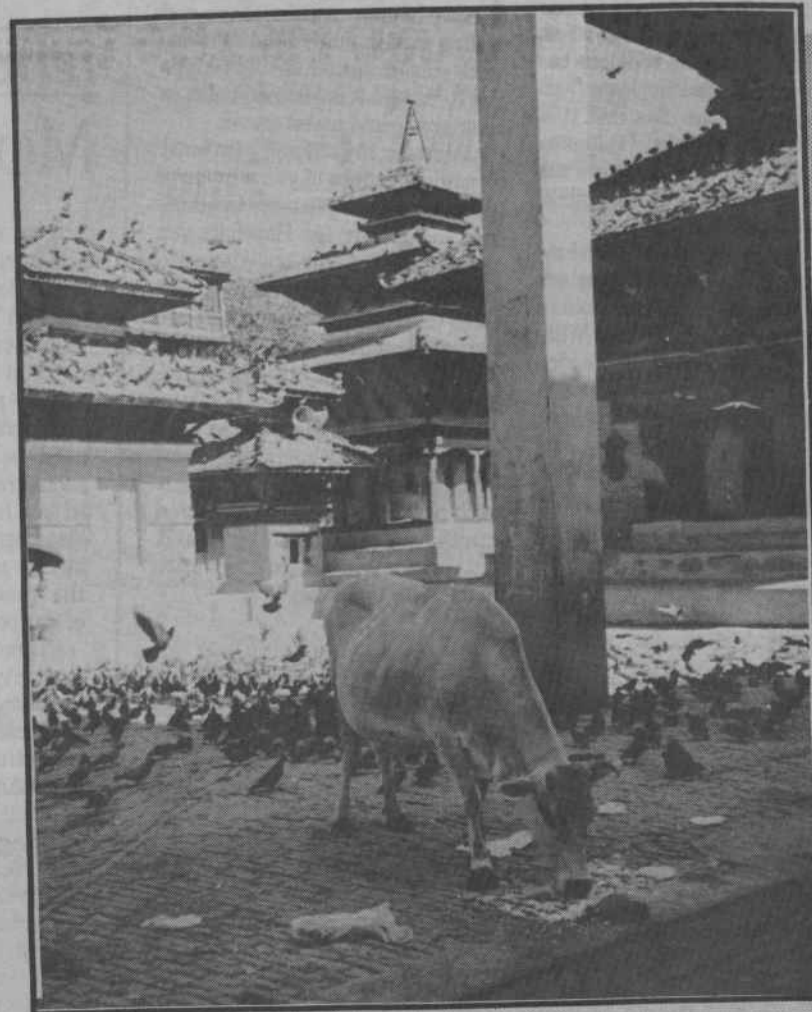


This is a statue of a Roman warrior in a museum in Venice, Italy



A statue guards a Balinese house from demons

A cow feasts during the Hindu New Year (Diwali) in Kathmandu, Nepal



# AROUND THE WORLD in 180 days

Are you stuck in a rut? Do you do the same damn thing every day with the same damn people and never make any headway? Are you feeling like you've lost direction, or that you have no purpose in being at school other than, well, to "go to college"? You may be experiencing a mid-school crisis. And that's exactly what I was going through two years ago.

By Luke Robinson • Staff Writer

So do what I did: quit school for a year, make a little money, and travel. Actually in my case, it was travel, then make money, with some extra funds taken care of by previously-stodgy parents (try giving the impression that you are seriously thinking about joining the Navy—it tends to loosen up those purse strings).

Not that I'm saying travel is the only way to focus yourself. It just happens to be my way. And, from the amount of other students that I met along the way, it seems like a fairly popular method. Plus, it sounds a heck of a lot better than saying, "Oh, I took a year off because Burger Barf promised me a managerial position."

Don't worry about leaving friends and school — school will still be here when you return, and so will your friends. In fact, you may come to appreciate your friends, to an extent you never realized, after a long absence. There is nothing holding you back from going - the school doesn't care if you go or stay, or when you graduate, sometimes they even arrange your trip, as in the Semester Abroad and Year Abroad programs.

Then set off! Make as few preparations as possible. Every plan you make will somehow be shattered to pieces. Once you accept this, traveling becomes immensely more enjoyable. I bought an unlimited-stop round-the-world ticket, and, after the initial flight to Europe, I ended up changing every single flight time and about half of the destinations over a seven-month-period simply because it suited me to do so.

Once you're on your way, learn to follow your heart. Lying to yourself only gets you miserable. If you have been to too many museums in the last week, take a break, find a beach, and go local for a while. Likewise, if you land in a country and have a feeling deep down that says you should not be there, then get back on the plane and hit your next stop. I did this in India, and I have to say that it was one of the best decisions I have made in a long time. I will go back someday, but at that time Delhi and her teeming masses gave me the creeping shivers, and I went back to the airport and caught the next



Here I am enjoying a sunny day atop Victoria Peak in Hong Kong.

plane to Kathmandu. As one wise traveler pointed out, "You don't win prizes for suffering."

Ok, so here comes the next question: Why should you travel? What's the point? The point is not how to get from A to B, it's what you experience on the way there. You'll come back with a head full of stories that all your friends will soon know word-for-word. You'll be able to speak with some knowledge about world affairs, or at least indigenous drinking habits.

For instance, had I not gone on this trip, I would never have known the reason behind the supremacy of the McDonald's burger chain in the Asian market. A Thai businessman shared this with me, so take this how you will. Burger King has failed because it offered things "your way," as opposed to McDonald's set menu. Wendy's failed because it promoted its hamburgers as "Old-Fashioned." What we gain from this is an understanding of the Asian market, which tends to favor set choices and the newest of the new.

This is not a judgment, just as saying "in many Asian countries, women are not given equal status" is not a judgment, but simply the

way things are. You gain a respect for other cultures, and the events and moods which define them. Most important of all, you come closer to understanding them.

And then the experiences you will have. Some are good, some are bad, but all increase your sense of self immeasurably. A hike into the Swiss Alps. A sunny day on the harbor of Monte Carlo. Sitting in the open doorway of a train flying through Norway. Watching the sun rise from atop a massive Buddhist temple in Indonesia. Getting roaring drunk with a bunch of Australians. Walking the streets of a 2500-year-old city in Turkey. Celebrating New Year with 10,000 Malaysians (then getting stabbed two hours later, that goes in the less-fun category). Riding a motorcycle along the rim of a simmering volcano on a Greek Island. Singing "Roadhouse Blues" with a band in a disco on Bali. Giving traditional gifts to a Buddhist monk in Thailand on the King's Birthday (hey, I'm open-minded). Downing one-liter beers at Octoberfest. Jumping naked off of a 45-foot boulder into the Aegean Sea. Venturing into the Himalayas on foot, where no vehicles can go, and coming out again a few days later with a nasty case of dysentery. Christmas carols by candlelight in Singapore. Accompanying a beautiful woman on an incredibly romantic tour of Italy. A lifetime's experience in the span of half a year.

People ask me if I would do it again. In a heartbeat. I am no longer the totally irresponsible boy I was when I left— when you're traveling alone, either you get things done or they don't get done. I also came away with goals, which is not something to take for granted. I have taken the necessary steps to change my major to reflect the goals I have set for myself. Because of this trip I am now in International Relations — I liked traveling so much, I want to do it for a living!

Ed. Note: If you are interested in seeing the journals of this trip, e-mail me at robinsonluke@sc.edu and I will send you a copy. They are quite interesting.