

Global Competency Reflection

GLBL 1000

Emma Leach

T00683129

Due: March 23rd 2026

My experiences studying abroad, travelling, and working in tourism have shaped my understanding of the world and how I want to be seen within it. Before these experiences, I saw them as exciting opportunities to explore new places and meet new people. However, by taking the time to reflect on my experiences, I have come to understand that they contributed to my global learning in much deeper ways. I have developed an awareness of my own privilege and a stronger sense of responsibility in a global setting. My attitude was shaped by these experiences and has transformed how I see myself and how I navigate the world.

One of the most impactful realizations I had was recognizing the privilege that comes with being a native English speaker in a world where English is the global language. Before travelling, I had never considered how much I relied on language as a form of confidence and independence. I also assumed communication would be easy because I spoke English, and I did not fully consider how culture influences communication or daily life. This changed during my trip to Asia. For the first time, I found myself in a place where I could not communicate easily, read street signs, or express myself. Simple interactions became challenging, and I felt uncomfortable and unsure of myself. My first sleeper bus experience in Vietnam was stressful because I didn't know which bus to take and couldn't read the Vietnamese signs. I showed locals my ticket, and they pointed me to a bus, but the driver sent me back to wait. At the time, I didn't understand that the bus wasn't ready to board. Once I boarded, all the announcements were in Vietnamese, and I worried I was on the wrong bus. The ride was 10 hours long, and I was too scared to get off at stops in case I got left behind, so I stayed on the whole time, feeling isolated and unsure. When I arrived in Da Lat, I was exhausted and overwhelmed, but the experience helped me grow. On my next bus, I brought snacks and felt more confident to get off during breaks. By the end of my trip, I had taken six sleeper buses! This experience changed how I approach new situations. I learned to stay calm, adapt and be better prepared. Looking back, Google Translate would have saved me the anxiety I was experiencing. In the future, I will be more confident stepping into unfamiliar environments and more willing to ask for help even when communication is difficult.

This feeling of discomfort helped me better understand the experiences international students go through. I didn't fully understand how difficult communication could be for international students in a completely new environment. My experiences with a language barrier made me think of my friend Elisa from Japan. When we first met in Australia in 2023, Elisa was quiet and not confident in her English-speaking abilities. Our conversations were surface-level, and I did not put enough effort into building that relationship because communication felt harder. Over the year of us living together, Elisa became more confident in her English and would often come to me with questions or ask for advice. Through these conversations, I began to understand how culture influences communication style. Elisa valued my direct honesty and straightforwardness, while I learned that her communication style was more indirect and focused on avoiding conflict. For example, Elisa would often go along with whatever the roommates had planned for an activity, and I now wonder if she sometimes had a different opinion but chose not to share it to avoid conflict. This taught me that I need to take a step back to allow myself to understand a different perspective and how I can adapt in conversations. I will apply this by being more patient in conversations, asking more questions when I don't understand, and considering how I can adjust my communication based on different communication styles. This will help me build stronger relationships with people from diverse backgrounds in my personal life and career.

Before this experience, I didn't realize how much deeper cultural understanding could be when you learn from someone who lives it. My friendship with Elisa is something I have never experienced before, as I have been able to share my culture with someone new. When Elisa visited me in Canada in 2025, I was able to show her my everyday life and help her feel comfortable in a new environment. Later, when I stayed with her family in Japan, she was able to do the same for me. Experiencing Japan through Elisa's perspective allowed me to move beyond tourist experiences and gave me a better understanding of Japanese culture. One of the most memorable moments was when we visited local shrines together. Elisa taught me how to properly bow, cleanse myself, and show respect before entering. She also bought me a goshuincho, which is a book used to collect temple stamps and showed me how to participate

in prayer and draw a fortune. These were things I would not have understood on my own, and I needed her guidance. I would have likely just observed without fully appreciating their meaning and kept to myself. This also helped me understand how important it is to take the time to respect other cultures and approach new experiences with the willingness to learn. I feel I was able to step into a position of a learner, rather than a visitor, which deepened my appreciation for Japanese traditions. The exchange Elisa and I have given each other over the course of three years has expanded my understanding of the importance of empathy and relationship-building across cultures. We have both been able to step outside of our comfort zones and support one another. These experiences also motivated me to continue learning. I am learning Japanese and want to learn basic phrases when travelling to new countries in the future. I cannot expect everyone to know or learn English to adapt to my communication needs. This reflects a shift in my mindset, as I am now more willing to put in effort to communicate rather than relying on others.

Another key area of global learning was developing adaptability and learning how to cope with uncertainty. Before I moved to Tasmania for my study abroad experience, I had very specific expectations of what “Australia” would be like. I imagined beaches, surfing, and a certain lifestyle. However, Tasmania was very different from what I expected. Instead of the beach culture I had imagined, I found myself in a quieter and more isolated place. The difference between my expectations and reality made my experience more challenging. I struggled with homesickness, loneliness, and a loss of confidence during my first few months abroad. It was the first time I had been outside my comfort zone without the usual support systems from my family and friends. However, this discomfort became one of the most valuable parts of my experience. I overcame it by making new friends and learning to embrace the discomfort. I learned that growth often comes from uncertainty and that being able to adapt to new environments is an essential skill in a global context. I have already started applying this mindset during my travels in Vietnam and Japan. I went into the experience with fewer expectations and was more open to the unknown. I will continue to approach new

environments with an open mindset and actively push myself outside my comfort zone to build confidence and resilience.

My understanding of global systems also expanded through my travels, particularly in Vietnam. As a tourism student, I have spent the last few years learning about how the industry impacts local communities. Travelling through both urban and rural areas allowed me to see how heavily some communities rely on tourism to live. In regions like Ha Giang and Phong Nha, local businesses, homestays, and tour operators depend on international visitors for economic sustainability. During a caving tour in Phong Nha, our guide personally thanked us for visiting his home and explained how important tourism is for his community. As I come to the end of my Bachelor's in Tourism Management, I have now experienced first-hand how this industry works as a global system that has real impacts on local communities. In the future, I will apply this by supporting locally owned businesses and choosing community-based tours. I will be more aware of where my money goes when I travel, as well as in my daily life, to help directly support local businesses. In my career, I aim to promote responsible tourism practices by working with local operators or designing travel experiences prioritizes the community.

Overall, these experiences have helped me develop as a person, friend, student, and daughter. I have learned the importance of communicating across cultures, being aware of my own perspective, and staying open when I feel discomfort. Being globally competent has also taught me the importance of reflection and taking the time to think about my experiences and how they have impacted my life and others. Moving forward, I will continue to apply these skills by seeking out new experiences and reflecting on my actions. Most importantly, I will be intentional in how I engage with people with different perspectives and backgrounds in my life and future career.