Over spring break 2017, I spent a week with eight other MSU undergrads in Cuba through a James Madison college study abroad program. With it being the first year the program ran, I didn't know what to expect. The trip exceeded what I could have ever imagined.

Upon hearing we were staying in a convent for the week, some of us were skeptical. The building turned out to be beautiful and the perfect place for us to stay. Breakfast was included every morning and the nuns were helpful giving us directions around Havana. Classes while in Cuba were focused on early Cuban history, the Cuban revolution, US/Cuban relations and taught at San Geronimo College in the heart of Old Havana.

San Geronimo faculty are experts on Havana's history and are continuously at work on the preservation of the city. The restorations were evident as we got to roam around old Havana and its beautiful buildings and plazas. We also saw the unrestored parts of the city and saw a more realistic Cuban life.

Everyday after class and lunch, we had a trip to a museum or another historical location. One of the days, we got an exclusive tour of the Capitol building that is currently under construction and not open to visitors. Much of the building still had its original furniture. Other days included trips to the Museum of Africa, The Museum of the Revolution, and University of Havana. Our class got a photo in front of the University’s famous Alma Mater. On the second day of the trip, we took a two hour bus ride to Vinales. This countryside of Cuba is known for its tobacco production and limestone hills. We stopped at a family owned restaurant that produced all...
of its own food and got a table with a view [Photo of the students at table overlooking the countryside.] The colorful city [Photo of student playing drums with Afro-Cuban musicians] provided us with tons of opportunity to get immersed in the culture. [Photo of singer and student dancing] Almost every restaurant had live music [Photo of restaurant with people watching students dance], many of which we participated. [Photo of group and professor at table in restaurant] Almost every meal was provided already and the food never disappointed. [Photo of ocean at night with a few buildings along] Many restaurants also included amazing views like this one overlook the Malecon in Havana. [Photos of students at beach] Our spring break wouldn't have been complete without a trip to the beach. The last day we took the bus to one of Cuba's most famous beach towns, Varadero. [Photo of student next to vintage car] Overall, my week in Cuba was amazing. I learned more than I ever thought I would, [photo of students under a wooden shelter with foliage in background] gained perspective, and made great friends. [Photo of students on a stone lookout holding the MSU block S flag] I'm so glad I decided to study abroad and took a chance on this program on its first year running. [Written by Lizzie Ausmus, Narrated by Joy Whitten And Edited by Jessica Lundquist]