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## Futures in Languages Transcripts

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### Episode 32: Daniella Sauri

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## Transcript

### **Christina Torres**

Good morning and welcome to Futures in Languages, a podcast showcasing stories from UCF's Modern Languages and Literatures Department alumni. I'm your host, Christina Torres. Today we'll be talking with Daniella Sauri, who graduated with a major from the Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Hospitality Management, and a minor in Business Administration from UCF. She also found our Modern Languages program through study abroad in Cuba with our wonderful colleagues Anne Pucha and Kacie Tartt. She graduated in the spring of 2019. Thank you so much for joining us today, Daniella.

### **Daniella Sauri**

Thank you, Christina. Looking forward to our conversation.

### **Christina Torres**

Yes, me too. I know we have a lot to cover, and you had a lot of experiences in your study abroad. If you're with our department, but let's go ahead and start with a general question, can you tell us a bit about yourself and where you're from?

### **Daniella Sauri**

Absolutely. Thanks, Christina. So my name is Daniella Sauri, I was born and raised here in sunny Orlando, Florida, a great place to live. But my family is actually from Peru, so both my mother, my father, they were raised, born in Peru, immigrated here to the United States, where me and my brother. But a little bit about myself studying at UCF and working in the hospitality industry, it's really been my passion just growing up here in Orlando, such a tourism hub. That's how I fell in love with the industry, and so happy that UCF gave me that opportunity to study hospitality management, take side opportunities like the study abroad program to read it, really delve into, you know, what the industry is not only on the local aspect, but also globally. But I'm happy to share my experiences today in this podcast. I'm looking forward to it.

### **Christina Torres**

We're so glad that you could come. And so you said that your parents are from Peru. Does that mean that you grew up speaking Spanish at home?

### **Daniella Sauri**

Absolutely. And it's something I'm eternally grateful for because it's just opened so many doors for me personally, professionally. So growing up in a Hispanic household, you know, school with all English, but as soon as you walk through those doors back at home, it's like you do that mental switch into Spanish. And as a child, sometimes you're stubborn about it, but you know, really my parents were looking for the best for our lives. So it's like how can we push our children to be bilingual here in the United States, and it's definitely paid off.

### **Christina Torres**

Yeah, I can say I relate so much to your story because again, both of my parents grew up in Ponce in Puerto Rico and they came here to the states in their early 20s. My sister and I were born here and we had the same thing. You hit the threshold of the house and boom, you were expected to code switch into Spanish. But we also, like you said, have some resistance, but I don't know if it was this way with your parents, but my dad would immediately go into "no, no, entiendo," you know like and we're like, oh, Dad, you understand? Like no. And you know, and we would have to just say it. He was forcing our output in Spanish.

**Daniella Sauri**

Absolutely same thing here, but some of like my best memories honestly growing up, aside from like learning the language as I was growing up, but was also like the culture of Peru. You know, that was something that was so prominent in my household like the food we would eat, the music, we would listen to. It's like, you know, I literally consider myself like a full on Peruvian even though I'm a Peruvian American since I was born here. You know, I'm so fluent and just like the history of Peru, how the people speak and interact and something I really love about my culture.

**Christina Torres**

Yeah, and the language is such an integral part of understanding that culture too. I don't know if this was the case for you, but I grew up watching a lot of, like, telenovelas with my grandparents in the summers, you know, and we would, we would listen to the news in Spanish, we would watch some local television shows and just that ability to say that, yes, I understand the culture is something that is such an important aspect of my identity. And it sounds like your identity too.

**Daniella Sauri**

I think another prominent show that you may relate to as well as like Sabo, yeah.

**Christina Torres**

And then he, Puerto Rico, too. There was La Comay, which again my grandmother was very into. So we would watch that with her but, and check out with the with the trumpet coming out. So to our listeners who might not have the context for this. However, there was a variety show that was really popular for Saturday nights. When was that? I want to say the 90s.

**Daniella Sauri**

Started pretty early, yeah few years ago.

**Christina Torres**

Was like a cross between a lot of different types of variety shows, which included a talent show where this man would come out with a little trumpet. And as soon as people would get to a point where he thought they weren't good enough, he would play the trumpet. In retrospect, that's a little harsh, but yeah, so all of these fun stories that we can share about growing up with our families and. Brings in the culture. I like to joke that I'm Florican. Because I grew up here, but I do feel that identity pull back to the culture. So yeah, so I know that you graduated in 2019, which is right before the world changed permanently with all the craziness of the pandemic. What have you been up to since graduation?

**Daniella Sauri**

Yeah, absolutely love to share that. So kind of like going back to my time at UCF, I had the opportunity while studying hospitality to actually take on like the multiyear rotational internship at a local hotel here in Orlando, and that gave me the exposure to learn about hotel operations, everything from sales, marketing, housekeeping. That was a great opportunity because I was able to say, you know, I know how the business runs and I know the specific paths that are, that entail, and tell you know, it's all operations. And, but since graduating jumping off of that rotational program, I was offered a full time position in digital marketing within the same property, Free Royale Orlando. That was a great experience learning more of like the business side of things, which I've always been interested in, is just like more corporate business things. But ultimately fast forward, you know COVID happened, and the hospitality industry was heavily affected as we all know. So I found myself at the point of looking for my next opportunity, and my next jump and thankfully, you know the silver lining of the pandemic was that I found a great opportunity at a well known brand like Hilton Grand Vacations, which for those people who don't know is actually the timeshare portion of the Hilton brand.

**Christina Torres.**

OK.

**Daniella Sauri**

So Hilton Grand Vacations where I currently work, I am a Consumer Strategy and Insights Analyst. So I've really been able to marry the two worlds of hospitality and my experience in the industry with a more corporate, business, data-driven side of my experience into this current role. So that's actually what I've been up to professionally in the meantime.

**Christina Torres**

I'm sure that there's a lot that goes into your job as a Consumer Strategy and Insights Analyst. Could you maybe walk us through just for our listeners who might be curious what a day in the life might be like? What it, what a quote unquote typical day might be like?

**Daniella Sauri**

So technically, like I think an easier way to think about it is it's focused a lot on consumer research market research. So you know our business leaders can come up with question like "how can we solve for the increased need of work from home concepts within our property?" So like redesigning our rooms to be more work from home friendly. So really what we do is just create research methodology, so that can be like a survey or a focus group just to collect that data and then really have that data to support kind of our recommendations or insights to our leaders. So a lot of the surveying research components is part of my job.

**Christina Torres**

It sounds like you're then providing recommendations to the various locations where the people might have their timeshares at is that am I hearing that correctly?

**Daniella Sauri**

Yeah, it could be. So it could be like resort specific, but it also could just be at a corporate level just in general, Hilton Grand Vacation properties. So it could vary. That's just one example, but yeah, it's a lot of fun. I mean, I'm familiar with the hospitality industry. I'm fortunate enough to be able to stay within that industry, especially post pandemic era where job searching was tough but really enjoy it.

**Christina Torres**

I can imagine you. Well, you also mentioned working from home. Are you on site some days? Are you off site some days? What would your location be on a given say day or week.

**Daniella Sauri**

So actually after COVID, it's mostly remote at the moment, but I do find myself coming in the office couple times a month. If we have like in person meetings or things that it's easier to collaborate in person. But for the majority of the time, it is for me at the moment.

**Christina Torres**

OK, well, thank you for sharing that. I know that you also mentioned the study abroad program that you did in Cuba with my colleagues and Anne Prucha and Kacie Tartt, could you share a bit about how that study abroad program helped to prepare you for your life now?

**Daniella Sauri**

Absolutely. So you know, coming to UCF, it's always been like my dream to do a study abroad program. Initially I was thinking, oh, maybe I should do a long term program. However, with my rotational internship program, it would have taken too much time away from the commitment I had. So thankfully I came across the opportunity to do the Journey Cuba program was the official name, and it was a short term program. So I actually was just there with the team for a week during spring break 2019. Yes, 2019. And, you know what I was really seeking was that global experience and cultural awareness. Because working in the hospitality industry, you know, you come across so many different types of people, different languages, different walks of life in general. And I think, and I strongly believe that going on study abroad programs, and just traveling in general, gives you that awareness of how life is like at the specific country, also like what are their struggles, and you experience that by being there. It's not really something that you can just reading a book like experiencing, it's totally different and I had a great time during that program because, you know, we were able to learn about the culture, the music, just general lifestyle on the Cuban islands, so. It was a lot of fun. Highly recommend it to any students listening. Yeah, put it on their list.

**Christina Torres**

It sounds like that was a very transformative experience for you. And I understand too that there was a class that you took to prepare to go on the study abroad, though it was a short term study abroad, there was still a full class to prepare you for that. Could you share a little bit about your takeaways from the class that prepared you?

**Daniella Sauri**

Absolutely. So it was in a very intimate class setting. I think there was about probably 10, 15 students.

**Christina Torres**

Oh, that's so nice. So it's a small class, yes.

**Daniella Sauri**

It was very nice. Because, you know, we had a strong bond going into the study abroad program, but actually something that continues today is just like our friend group from that class, we still stay in contact, which is really nice. Who knows, we might travel again one day to Cuba. But going back to your question on takeaways from the class, you know it was very nice because it was a combination of components during the class. So we would listen to, you know, traditional Cuban music, but we would also read about the history of Cuba. Especially during the revolution, learning about, you know, leaders like Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and just really understanding the background of Cuba and kind of what the country in itself went through, and very informational because you know, you could say ohh, you know Cuba, they have great salsa music. But no, there's so much more to them. So much different layers and things that they've experienced and it was a great class because you learned a little bit of everything. So it was history, it was music, culture, tradition. So really well organized class.

**Christina Torres**

It's such a treat to be able to really take the time to focus and learn about a place before you visit it. And what a really lovely treat. To have that be a guided experience in your undergrad to really prepare you for when you land in Cuba, and then you have that experience too. I understand that there was a research project in that class too. Could you tell our listeners a little bit about your research project during that class?

**Daniella Sauri**

Yes, absolutely. So my research project focused on tourism development and Cuba. The great thing is that they gave us the ability to really choose a topic that resonated with you. So of course, coming from tourism and hospitality, that was a topic that interested me, but I had a classmate, for example, who was in Health Sciences. She did stuff about healthcare in Cuba, which was interesting. And the good thing is that we each had such a variety of topics, so we were able to learn from each other. But really, my focus of my project was tourism development, so learning about all the key factors that played into, that plays into tourism in Cuba. So things like political relations between the US and Cuba. Because you know when the borders or the ability to travel to Cuba became available for you as citizens, that obviously was a positive impact for Cuba because tourism equals money. So there's more of an economy boost, so learning kind of about the implications that tourism has on the island, but also you know negative things that have happened, you know, during Trump's administration where the ability to travel to Cuba was no longer accessible. So you know that again it's, it's a pitfall in Cuba and kind of how the people are able to survive. But it was also interesting to learn more on like the business side of things, key moments. Like a part, I remember when Airbnb had its first property listing in Cuba, so that of course was monumental and I think that was around 2017 and...

**Christina Torres**

So not that long ago, yes.

**Daniella Sauri**

No, not that long ago, but having like a U.S. company in Cuba and having Airbnb listings was pretty monumental.

**Christina Torres**

So I would imagine too, when you're there having the experience of being in Cuba and visiting Cuba that you might notice those differences between the tourism side of Cuba and then the Cuba that everyone lives in. Could you tell our listeners a little bit about maybe some insights that you've gained or something that you've learned from that experience?

**Daniella Sauri**

Yeah, absolutely. And that's actually something that Professor Prucha and Professor Tarrt did a great job explaining to us within the classroom. And prior to traveling is that you know, you will see those differences obviously like from the tourist lens, the country wants to project the best, but that's not the reality. So, you know, especially with Cuba, who's gone through a lot of hardships, I would say, you know, one of the things, one of the things that really stand out is just like the food availability. The population of Cuba, they live off of, like quotas, so they get a set amount of food, think it's like on a weekly basis, at they need to manage during that time. But you know, as a tourist, obviously you go to a restaurant and you order something and you're not part of that quota. But I do remember seeing that there wasn't like a plethora of options on like a menu, like don't expect to get like a filet mignon or a lobster. You know, something more simple, like rice and beans. And I think that's like the biggest difference I would note, it's like if you go to vacation to any other country, you know you want to go all out and go to the best restaurants, but really you need to be in like a humble state when you travel to Cuba and understand that it's more of like you understanding their reality and living through it. So that's one of the key takeaways I would say.

**Christina Torres**

OK, so I hear you're saying that some of the local availability of food then trickled into the culinary culture experience, even in the hospitality side? OK. Were you able to while you were there explore areas and is there maybe like a fun story that you'd like to share with our listeners who might be curious.

**Daniella Sauri**

So one of my favorite things to do just personally is dance.

**Christina Torres**

Me too.

**Daniella Sauri**

So hey, nice fellow dancer. So everything from like salsa, merengue, but also just quick note but I also danced like Peruvian folkloric music. It's like traditional dances from Peru. But in general as a dancer, you know, I'm always attracted to a place where I hear music, you know, you hear the guitar, the people singing. It's just something I really enjoy. But I'd say the takeaways was we were actually at it was this like underground cave and it was actually a like a dance place. So. It was one of the evenings that we were free and we went there and it was a lot of fun because we were able to kind of like dance and be

immersed into like the salsa aspect of things, which, for those who don't know, like salsa, is a big component of the history of Cuba and their general culture. So it was just such a fun experience that I'll never forget it. Like I've been in Cuba, and I've been dancing in Cuba so. And check those things off of my bucket list for sure.

**Christina Torres**

That sounds like a very special experience and I would imagine again, if you go to a salsa club in Cuba, there are a lot of folks that know how to dance salsa in that club in Cuba.

**Daniella Sauri**

They're definitely great leaders.

**Christina Torres**

Always, always a treat. A good lead is fun to dance with. Well, thank you for sharing more about your study abroad program. And about your job in the Grand Hilton Vacations. We have a new segment in the podcast called "Ask our Alumni." And today we have a question from Cassidy. Are you ready to hear Cassidy's question?

**Daniella Sauri**

Let's hear.

**Cassidy**

Do you have any specific research interests that you're passionate about? What got you interested in this research?

**Christina Torres**

Feel free.

**Daniella Sauri**

All right. So to answer your question, Cassidy, like to talk about the personal experience during my time at UCF, and that's actually when I had the opportunity to be a founding member for the Peruvian Student Association, also known as PeruSA, and happy to know that it's actually still active and running today on campus. But really, our intent behind founding that organization is just to create a safe space for students of all backgrounds to learn more about the Peruvian culture and really be a supporting community for any student. But it was at a pivotal time because UCF has actually recently recognized as a Hispanic serving institution.

**Christina Torres**

Yeah, we are. When we celebrated that when that happened.

**Daniella Sauri**

Yes, I was very happy to hear that because I'm all about like Hispanic empowerment and how we can help. And so to touch on the question about, you know, research and things that I'm passionate about,



we had the opportunity to collaborate with our faculty advisor, which was at the time was Professor Norma Ledesma, who had since retired. But she's been a tremendous asset for us. Because we were able to organize Quechua classes for our student organization. So in that aspect, you know, it was really developing our students and how we can help them grow and develop these skill sets that's, you know, something very unique learning Quechua. You can definitely add that to your resume.

**Christina Torres**

Some special skills.

**Daniella Sauri**

So that was a lot of fun. This offering those unique opportunities.

**Christina Torres**

Do you have maybe a favorite story from one of those sessions with the UCF Peru Association?

**Daniella Sauri**

I would say that my favorite experience from the Quechua classes that we offered during the Peruvian Student Association was, you know, after we would introduce Professor Norma Ledesma, was just taking a step back to really see how our member base was engaging with the content that was being presented. And I would say just their willingness to kind of be in a new territory, and just learning something so outside of their comfort zone. And that really was inspiring just because, you know, when we founded the organization, that was really our mission is to bring Peru to UCF, in the sense of everything that we are, you know, not just music, food, but also things that are very unique and sometimes not as recognizable and is that we actually do have Quechua as a language that is spoken. Obviously, it is not as popular or recognized as Spanish, but it is of course, in the language in Peru, so it was great because people were really able to take that away.

**Christina Torres**

Thank you so much for sharing that experience. And I'm so glad to hear that the association continues. It's great to see that continuation too.

**Daniella Sauri**

Yes, I figure too.

**Christina Torres**

So I know that you and I both grew up with bilingualism in our household, but could you share some insight about the importance or the significance of having your additional language and your job now.

**Daniella Sauri**

Yes, I'd actually like to highlight my job at Caribe Royale, where I did the hotel operations internship because I think that was really a moment that stood out to me in regards to the importance of being bilingual because I had the opportunity to work in such a variety of roles, mentioned a few, but like housekeeping, food and beverage later, more corporate goals like sales and marketing. But you know

being even at the front office, taking calls and reservations, it was so important, and I was really an asset to the company, being able to speak both English and Spanish because. Of course, we're a hotel. We get people that are arriving from all over the world being so close to Disney. You know, we had a lot of Latin American visitors, and you know, it's always a sense of relief when the traveler is coming to check in at the front desk and the front desk agent knows Spanish, so yeah, it's a good start to their vacation. Of course, being comfortable speaking in their native language. But it's really given me an advantage because the company was able to value me even more, just working with my colleagues. You know, if someone approached them that only spoke Spanish, you know, they would quickly reference over to Daniella and I would be quick to help, of course. But yeah, overall it's been tremendous. Also living in Orlando where there's just such a variety of Latin American visitors, and also locals that come from different countries. It's been great because I'm able to quickly communicate with someone if I'm at a store, or even helping someone who doesn't know the language. That's like one of the best parts I think of being bilingual is just being able to be that helping hand. And coming from hospitality, you know it's always being hospitable and helpful. And that's been my favorite thing about being bilingual.

### **Christina Torres**

Yeah, thank you. And you also in our conversation talked about the significance of your study abroad program in your educational experience for undergrad. What advice would you offer someone who is interested in maybe pursuing a study abroad program?

### **Daniella Sauri**

I would say, you know, throughout your research and determining where exactly you want to go is important. Make sure it's like a country that you somehow resonate with or have an interest to learn more about, because it just makes you that much more excited about the opportunity and it really makes you like a sponge for the opportunity, everything you're going to absorb from where you're going to visit, what you're going to learn. But frankly, at the end of the day, as a traveler myself, you know, any country, and every country has such a unique. History and background that I know any student would benefit from traveling anywhere, and it's just another country on your bucket list.

### **Christina Torres**

Yeah, thank you. One thing that you mentioned that I would just want to reiterate to our listeners is that study abroad doesn't have to be a traditional semester, or two semesters, and just in your experience, you went to Cuba for a week, you prepared in your class, but you went for a week. So for our listeners, you might be concerned about the time or the cost of study abroad, we just want to encourage you to consider that there are many types of study abroad. And you might find something that suits your needs and suits your financial situation. You might also find some financial aid support that's available for study abroad. So for our listeners, there is there's a program out there that might interest you and there are funding options out there that might also work for you. Daniela, is there anything that you'd like to end on here at the at the end of your podcast episode.

### **Daniella Sauri**

I would just like to say thank you Christina for your time, but also a shout out to Professor Anne Prucha, Professor Kacie Tartt. and just the, you know, UCF Global opportunity in general for giving me this study

about program. I have a lot of lifelong memories with this study abroad program, so it's a great experience in my life.

**Christina Torres**

Great. Thank you so much, Danielle. Thank you for listening to this episode of Futures in Languages. I'd like to give a shout out to Davideo Guy for our intro and outro music downloaded from freesound.org. I'm Christina Torres and our featured guest today was Daniella Sauri. Tune in next time you hear more alumni stories from Modern Languages. For more information about study abroad opportunities and language programs, and the Modern Languages department, please visit our website at [cah.ucf.edu/languages](http://cah.ucf.edu/languages).