

Study Abroad Reflection

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Viennese Ball - \$250

My time abroad was one of the best experiences of my life. Before leaving, many people told me that studying abroad would change your life, I never believed them until I actually got there. I spent a total of two months in Bagaces, Costa Rica. The journey I had there was a whirlwind, but it is something that I will never forget! My trip started off with a few bumps, including an unexpected trip to El Salvador. I was thrown right away into the Latino culture. On my plane to El Salvador, there were many Latinos so the primary language being used on the plane was Spanish. This verified to me that my journey was officially starting and I was going to have a lot of learning to do.

During the two months in Costa Rica, we took two different classes each weekday and traveled on the weekends. One of my classes was about the Costa Rican Healthcare system. My other class was a Spanish class based on medical translation and interpretation. Each weekend we made plans to travel to different cities in Costa Rica and also a trip to Nicaragua. Traveling allowed us to submerge ourselves deeper into the culture by trying new things and speaking Spanish with the locals.

I was able to see many different values and live as a part of a new diverse culture. The Costa Rican culture varies vastly from the United States. Food is a major part of the culture in Costa Rica. They eat rice and beans every day and usually with each meal. The staple food item is Gallo Pinto which is a combination of rice and beans. It was something that was very hard to get used to at first. At the end of the trip, there were many new foods that I really enjoyed. My host family always made me my favorite Costa Rican foods and even gave me a device to make one of my favorite foods at home.

Another part of their culture I learned a lot about was dancing. Dancing is very big there and everyone knows how to do it. They have dancing at every event. I got a chance to go to an event

with my host family where everyone was participating in the classic dances that most people begin to learn at a young age. The performer's ages varied from 9 years old to 60 years old. They are very dedicating to keeping the tradition alive in their culture today.

Family is something that is greatly valued in Costa Rica. The Costa Ricans do everything as a family, sometimes including all extended family as well. The host family I lived with took me to a multiple family members birthday parties. My family also lived very close, including right next door and right down the street so everyday consisted of interacting with all family members.

My knowledge of institutions, such as their hospitals and clinics, was greatly impacted during my time in Costa Rica. We spent two weeks learning about the healthcare system by actually getting to see and help in clinics and have tours in the various types of hospitals. Our large group divided into 3 smaller groups. Each group lived in a different rural area. We spent one week there working in the clinics. A lot of what we did during this week was teach the patients at the clinic about healthy lifestyles. We also got to do home visits and work alongside of the doctor, nurse, and pharmacist. As a nursing student, it was very exciting to get to see the numerous differences of what they do compared to what we do in the U.S. They also let us perform some basic things like taking blood pressure and drawing up medications under supervision.

Our other week was spent in the capital of Costa Rica. We toured three different hospitals. There are three different types of hospitals in Costa Rica, public, private, and a mix of the two. Your economic status is what determines which hospital you can go to because of what you can afford. They have a universal healthcare system meaning everyone has to pay a certain amount of their income and all basic medical expenses will then be paid for. This allows for everyone to

get the proper care they need with having to pay barely anything. On the other hand, the public hospitals aren't very updated because they don't have to pay a lot. They don't have the same health precautions or technology that we have in the U.S. Seeing how their system works, was very eye opening and widened my view on many topics.

One decision made by the U.S. that has impacted Costa Rica is that a lot of schools don't require students to know another language. The U.S. does not technically have an official language, yet many people tend to assume that English is the official language. There are so many different languages that people in the U.S. speak. A lot of people think that if you come to the U.S., you must speak English.

On the other hand, Costa Rica has an official language of Spanish. Even though they have an official language, many people still think it's important to know more than one language. In most of their schools in Costa Rica, even public, they are taught English because English is what people think is the official language of large countries like the U.S. They think knowing multiple languages will help them greatly.

Even through all of the learning and fun experiences, my group did encounter a disorienting experience. The men in Costa Rica were not always as they would be expected. Cat calling was a common occurrence. This was disorienting because it was something that caught us off guard, was very confusing, and made us feel very uncomfortable.

Going through this disorienting experience was hard at times. It usually caught us off guard when it occurred. We were warned before leaving that it would be very likely to happen but you never actually hope that it does. Instead of letting the event affect us, we tried to look at all of the better parts of the culture that we were learning so much about.

Studying abroad has had a great impact on my life. I have already incorporated so much of what I learned in Costa Rica to my life in the U.S. Since being home, I have made some of my favorite dishes for my family to help them understand some of the different aspects of the culture I experienced. I have also been trying to keep with my Spanish because I know how important it is to know another language and how others appreciate when you make an effort to understand their culture. I want to keep incorporating other cultures in my life in the future.

The biggest impact my trip has had on me is by creating a new open mind. Before going to Costa Rica, I had only ever been to Canada whose culture was very similar to the United States. Being in Costa Rica was a drastic change from my everyday life. I was able to learn so much about their amazing culture. I was also able to learn how they feel about certain topics. The word, American, now has such a different meaning to me now than before because I was taught how anyone who lives in North America, Central America, and South America can be called Americans. Even though it may seem like just a small thing, it has showed me how similar we all are through all of our differences.



This picture is of our entire study abroad group. This day we were at one of the hospitals taking a tour of what their facility was like.



This picture is of my host family. I lived with my host mom, host dad, and two year old little sister. I am so thankful to have been placed into their family and am looking forward to visiting them again someday soon.