Name: Kayla Pierce

Major(s)/Minor(s): Social Work Major and Spanish Minor

Site(s) of Experience: San Isidro de Heredia, Costa Rica

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$2,000
Critical Reflective Assignment

What I learned in my study abroad experience

2015-16 Academic Year

Kayla Pierce

My study abroad experience in Costa Rica during the summer of 2015 was a remarkable experience with my host family, academics, and the culture of Costa Rica. In eight weeks in Costa Rica I learned about how their flag was created, the importance of coffee in the economy, and indigenous influences in their culture.

My study abroad experience advanced my knowledge and understanding of the world’s diverse cultures. Coffee is an important for the economy of Costa Rica and represents a lot of the history. My host family lived on a coffee plantation and every December they would go and collect the coffee beans. The coffee plantation has been in the family for a long time and continues to become a large part of their income during the harvesting season. Coffee not only has an economic component but a social component as well. For example my Costa Rican family would spend time together drinking coffee and telling stories at any time of the day.

My study abroad experience advanced my knowledge of global systems and institutions. For example, how religion influences the everyday life of Costa Rica. More than 90 percent of the population in Costa Rica is Catholic. My host family is a Catholic and many of the social gatherings contained some religious component including but not limited to weddings, funerals, baptism, and confirmations. In the two months I was in Costa Rica I was able to attend a baptism and two social gatherings honoring the death of the loved one in the family. Also I attended church with my host family every Sunday morning. As someone who does not affiliate with any sort of religion, I found the fact that religion is a huge component of the Costa Rica culture quite fascinating as well as the healthcare in Costa Rica.

The healthcare in Costa Rica is interesting because most of it is free or comes at a very small price. In Costa Rica it is more common for the residents to seek advice from a pharmacist and then get referred to a doctor if the condition is more serious rather than visiting the doctor first. I think their health care is fascinating because without health insurance in the US healthcare is very limited or very expensive.

My assumptions before I left for Costa Rica were that they would not have hot water and that they would only wear traditional clothing. For the first two weeks I showered with only cold water because I thought that was all they had in Costa Rica. After a discussion with my neighbor about the cold water situation, she told me that I probably had hot water and to turn the knob only a little bit so that only hot water comes out. I learned that Costa Rica has hot water after all.

My study abroad experience has integrated the culture in Costa Rica into my everyday life. My host family in Costa Rica always was relaxed and never really seemed to be stressed. Whenever I was worried about something like a test or a quiz they always told me “tranquila.” That meant that I should not
stress about the little things. I learned to accept and apply that principle into my everyday life. Not only have I learned to relax more in life but also I learned to understand other perceptions. In Costa Rica people are more personal and are very friendly. For example, during one of my classes we all went around and said our religion and political party. In the US the idea of sharing that sort of information would make us uncomfortable. I had the privilege of visiting Costa Rica and developing into a stronger person by becoming more comfortable in uncomfortable situations. As a Social Work major that skill is important and essential because uncomfortable situations will happen all of the time with my clients. As a result of studying abroad in Costa Rica I have a more open perception cultures that are different from my own.

This picture was taken at our going away party after our last day of classes. My host family was important and meaningful to my study abroad experience because loving words and encouragement helped me improve my Spanish and learn more about their culture.
This picture represents how green and pure Costa Rica is and this is meaningful to me because zip lining helped me overcome my fear of heights.