

Despite the many hours spent discussing my study abroad experience with friends and family I still find it difficult to accurately characterize my time in Costa Rica in a succinct manner. When asked to do that I find myself at a loss for words, unable to fully express all of the wonder and excitement of living in another country for two months. As a result I often respond with short and imprecise descriptions or single favorite memories. Given this opportunity to develop my thoughts in writing, I will attempt to expand upon my thoughts and provide details of my time abroad and the ways in which it affected me.

Throughout the first few days in Costa Rica, the cultural differences became glaringly obvious. On my third day in the country, my host parents wanted me to meet my great aunt. My father assured me that this would only be about an hour trip in total. Just long enough to try some of Costa Rica's famous coffee and meet some cousins. To my surprise, this trip entailed forty five minutes driving to the house, an hour at the house, two hours on a surprise trip to the mall and finally another hour back at the house. During this entire time period, the members of my family constantly offered me food and drink, anything to make sure I was comfortable. I would go on to realize that these two elements of Costa Rican culture, a different sense of time along with relentless hospitality, would be present everywhere.

The cultural aspect which required the most adaptation for me was the relaxed sense of time. From public transportation to meeting with my family, Costa Ricans perception of time made for a frustrating experience at first as people were consistently "late". However, I quickly learned that "late" was simply a socially constructed aspect and agreed upon way of viewing the importance of time. In the United States my daily schedule of activities rules my life and time influences my decisions more than almost any other factor. Of course in Costa Rica I always arrived on time to class and meetings with

professors would include a specific time which needed to be met. However, social interactions were no longer ruled by time. I found myself more relaxed as suddenly the next thing on my schedule was never more important than the here and now. By learning to accept this type of life style I gained the ability to focus on the importance of every moment and capitalize on each opportunity while eliminating stress about schedules.

Coming from the United States, undoubtedly one of the most powerful nations in the international system, many people have strong opinions regarding the actions of your state. However, every Costa Rican with whom I spoke about politics reinforced one of the most important lessons I could ever learn regarding the relationship between a population and its political leaders. Although some of these individuals held negative opinions of our government's actions, they never once discriminated against me on account of that. Instead they assured me that most people realize the difference between "el pueblo", or the population of regular people, and "el gobierno", the government or small percentage of individuals who make these unpopular decisions. Without a doubt this lesson would never have been taught in any of my political science classes. This new perspective has allowed me to reevaluate the relationships between governments in a more objective manner.

The most disorienting part of my trip to Costa Rica was viewing the world from a different perspective. Being thrust into the role of "foreigner" for the first time is an emotionally taxing event. As I began to adapt to this new role, I found my fundamental assumptions of the world being challenged on an almost daily basis. From family life with my host parents to walking in the road on my way to school, nothing compared to my life here in the United States. At first I grasped at anything that would remind me of home, foods, drinks, and even American television through Netflix. However, as my time in Costa Rica progressed these reminders of home became less and less important as I adapted to the environment in which I lived. Suddenly my perspectives on the world began to change and I saw people

and the world for the first time, not as an American, but as a global citizen. Consciously wanting to make decisions for the betterment of all and viewing the world in ways previously unknown to me.

Integrating my experience back into my life has been difficult at times yet it presents a welcoming challenge as I strive to combine my life abroad with my life at home. My experience has changed my goals as I now hope to find a career in which I can use my language skills and expand upon them. I believe the new found confidence in my Spanish speaking abilities will help tremendously in my job search no matter what field I decide to pursue. After returning home I have made an attempt to reduce my reliance on a strict schedule. Although this may prove much more challenging here in the United States with the prevailing time is money attitude, my attempts to spread a more relaxed and open sense of time have resulted in a less stressful life.



The “Chinese Lychee” was my favorite of the many new exotic fruits I had the privilege to try in Costa Rica.



This lizard, found in a parking lot, demonstrates perfectly the intimate experience one has with nature on a trip in Costa Rica.