

College of Education Study Abroad Summer 2018: Costa Rica

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I had the wonderful opportunity to study abroad for two weeks in the beautiful country of Costa Rica. This experience provided me with so many valuable skills both as an individual and as a future educator. This was my first real time out of the country and while I found it to be very challenging at times, I definitely feel as if this was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. A friend of mine convinced me to apply for this study abroad trip with her, and I was very hesitant at first. After coming home and reflecting on how much I was able to grow and how much I learned, I can certainly say I am so grateful that my friend convinced me to go on this trip!

The most important aspect of this trip was the cultural awareness that I gained. There were so many aspects of my daily life that I didn't realize were central to the United States. I also was very interested to learn about the influence that our country has on so many others. It was weird to see our American TV shows in Costa Rica and weird to hear our music there as well. There was also a lot of products that were imported from the United States. I ate a lot of Pringles while I was there because it was a very widespread snack option that I already was familiar with!

In addition to noticing cultural similarities and differences, it was valuable to be submersed in another culture overall. We spent 22 hours in schools during our trip and had the opportunity to work with small groups of students. This was a great time for me to gain experience working with students who differed greatly from me and may not have understood

me, and I may not have understood them. I also had to work through some large language barriers. I had to find other ways to communicate with my students and realized that I take a common language for granted. I know that it is very likely that I will have students in my future classroom who have many cultural differences from myself and some without English as their first language.

This trip was a perfect combination of “work and play.” We spent most of our time in schools and had adequate time to reflect and study, but we also went on many wonderful trips and weekend excursions. My favorite part of the trip was when we went to the pacific coast of the country to stay in Quepos and visit Manuel Antonio National Park. We saw monkeys, sloths, crabs, tons of beautiful birds and butterflies, and of course some giant spiders. We visited some of the most beautiful beaches I have ever been to. This trip was a full weekend, but we also took some day trips. We went to the Irazú volcano which is an active volcano. We learned about how volcanoes work. I was surprised that at the top of the volcano it was only about 35-40 degrees! I assumed it would be hot with lava pouring out of it, but I was naïve to think that! It’s one of the tallest volcanoes, so it was cold due to the elevation we were at. We also went to a rainforest and did a chocolate tour. I had no idea how many stages chocolate goes through before it tastes as good as it does in a candy bar! The cocoa fruit looked much different than I ever imagined it would.

Costa Rica left me with many great takeaways. Here are a few of the most important ones:

- You can always find a way to connect with and communicate with a student...no matter how different you are

- Take care of the planet. It is beautiful and holds so much life...and it's the only Earth we have
- You CAN get sick of eating beans and rice every single day
- Bugs that won't hurt you really aren't that bad (Costa Rica really made me less of a wimp because you just can't do anything without finding at least a few ants)
- You will learn a lot about yourself when you step out of your comfort zone
- Don't be afraid to try new things!!!