Colombia Trip Provides Life-Changing Experience for Student

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This past summer break, I took a six week excursion with two other Schreiner students to Barranquilla, Colombia. My reason for going was to improve my Spanish and take a few courses during the summer to lighten my semester load, but this trip turned out to have so much more in store for me.

I was completely immersed in the Latin American culture of Barranquilla. I lived with a host mom in an apartment complex with other locals, took two courses through CUR that were completely in Spanish, and made new friends that wanted to take me out and show me their city and popular attractions. I truly felt like a member of their “familia.”

Before I came to college, I never thought that I would have the opportunity to travel until I was retirement age, much less leave all my friends and family behind for a month and a half. Within my two years at Schreiner, I saw this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore a new culture, actively improve my foreign language skills, and start my journey towards a global perspective and cultural competence.

My journey to Barranquilla has been the best experience of my life thus far. Granted, this trip was also emotional for me; being a first-time foreign traveler, I didn’t know what to expect with culture shock, being placed in a city where everything (music, signs, magazines, etc.) is in a foreign language, and not having my typical friend and family support group. I believe that because this trip was so trying, it makes my experience that much more rewarding.

I now have more confidence in myself; I am able to adapt to new environments, and I am more observant of the people and places around me. I never realized just how much culture affects the way we live our lives; upon my return, I started to notice the culture of the United States! I was so immersed and accustomed to my habits here at home that I didn’t think we had a culture.

I now have more friends and connections than I ever thought possible. Even though my visit was brief, I made connections with the locals. They continue to keep their arms open and have invited me to return and stay in their homes whenever I’d like. Without this study abroad trip or my language skills, I would never have met these good-hearted individuals.

The people of Barranquilla are like one big family. Everyone is open and interested in learning about Texas, while also sharing their own history and culture with me. I would never know as much about Latin American culture, the true atmosphere of Colombia, nor the beautiful landscapes of the coast without actually traveling and seeing the country for myself. You can’t always learn through a textbook. You have to actually go out there and experience it.

This experience also reinforced the idea that life is meant to be enjoyed. All we have right now is the present. In Barranquilla, family is the number one priority. Relationships with people are genuine. Even in the office, employees will have a personal conversation with the client before doing business. This is vastly different than the overwhelming work ethic in the U.S. We could all take some tips on how to slow down and really enjoy life.

I highly encourage all students thinking about traveling abroad to go forth with it. It’s not the easiest, and sometimes not the cheapest, decision to make, but I promise it will be the most gratifying decision you make in your college career.