

South America Study Tour 2016: Personal Reflection

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It was a cold, snowy day at Andrews University, and I had decided to get some work done in Harrigan Hall. After finishing up for the night, I packed up my stuff and started to head out. As I walked towards the door, a vibrant poster caught my eye on the bulletin board. I stepped back to look at it and in big bold letters I read, "South America 2016!"

After that night, I shared my idea with friends. Little did I know that one of my friends, Shanel de los Santos, had been planning to go on the trip for months now. Following a long, exciting conversation, Shanel convinced me and Avielle Fernand to go with her on this trip. Going on a study tour together with my friends turned out to be a great adventure that has given me many valuable experiences that I would not trade for the world.

I thoroughly enjoyed the South America study tour. Traveling through 5 different countries in just under 4 weeks was very fun. Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Brasil, and Paraguay were vastly different, yet I savored every moment in each country. The study tour was both fun and educational. I appreciated how the time was divided out according to the specifics of each country. I also liked how our activities such as going to museums and shopping at handcraft markets were available to do in each country, giving the group and I a taste of the history and culture. However, participating in specific activities such as picking and harvesting coffee beans in Colombia, hiking Machu Picchu in Peru, learning tango in Argentina, and riding on buggies in Brasil have greatly impacted my life and provided me with experiences and friendships I would not trade of anything.

Although I had valuable experiences in each country that we visited on the study tour, there were some that I enjoyed more than others. In Colombia, my favorite activity was visiting the coffee plantation and picking some of the beans for myself. I really valued the opportunity of participating in an important cultural act of Colombians. It was one thing to watch but another thing to contribute. In Peru, my favorite activity was hiking up Machu Picchu. Earlier that morning, I had been sick and nauseous. By the time we had reached Machu Picchu, I felt horribly sick from the altitude as well as food poisoning from the night before. Several people insisted that hang back and rest, but I refused. I was determined to see the ruin, and when I did I knew that my determination was rewarded with beholding one of the 7 modern wonders of the world. ...Above all, my favorite activity during the entire trip were the buggy ride through Natal, Brasil. The buggy rides on the beaches in Natal allowed me to see scenes that took my breath away. The thrill of riding up, down, and even sideways on the dunes was spectacular. I was also able to see dolphins for the very first time! Therefore, the entire experience with little special moments in between was indeed serene.

I do believe that the trip was well planned, organized, and executed. ...I am very grateful for the amount of care that was placed into this study tour. Professor Navia or “Profe” did his very best to protect the group while providing enjoyable activities and making sure that we had fun. His level of professionalism was superb and was exhibited in situation when things did not go according to plan. ...His calm composure and level-headed wisdom gave me a sense of safety and assurance during the study tour.

The study tour to South America this year has opened my eyes to several different Latin cultures. While traveling through Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Brasil, and Paraguay, I noticed that there are some key differences between their cultures and the culture that one would find in

the United States of America. For example, the food and meal choices are very different. They eat more plant based food while Americans tend to eat a great amount of processed foods. Their meat choices are different as well, including animals such as guinea pigs and alpacas for Peruvians. I believe that I ate more beans, rice, and French fries in those 3-4 weeks than I had in the past 5 years of my life. I also noticed the difference in technology. The United States of America fairly advanced when it comes to technology. Devices like iPhones and iPads are common as well as access to the Internet is being abundant and everywhere. However, in the countries we visited, iPhones were scarce and Wi-Fi was not always promised. They do not have a great need for it like most Americans do. I observed differences between each South American country as well. I noticed that Colombians are more Americanized where as Peruvians are still fairly indigenous and true to their roots. I also realized that the Argentinians are more European in their culture than the others. While touring these countries I detected some similarities in culture as well. They have some of the same fast food restaurants in the countries we visited. I can recall seeing a large number of Subways, McDonalds', and Starbucks'. I also noticed that they play a good amount of American artist music.

In conclusion, it is evident that this study tour has impacted and changed me personally by giving me experiences that have opened my eyes to see the world through a different lens. I also believe that it will impact me in the future academically. Traveling and exposure to the rest of the world is helpful when one desires to expand their knowledge. Therefore, I would strongly recommend this study tour to anybody, for this journey has personal touched me, given me new friendships while strengthening old ones, and encouraged me to embark on more adventures in the future.