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Professor Navia – Spanish Tour

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PERSONAL Reflection

Saint Augustine once said, “The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.” We all know reading can open up many new worlds of imagination and learning than otherwise known in our own small world. Traveling can also give you a new knowledge of the world. Going on the South America Tour was the longest time I have ever been outside of the country. I signed up for this tour at the very last minute, and it was the best decision I made during my freshman year in college. I learned a multitude of new things about culture, food, people, places, languages, and so much more. I had the chance to meet and build friendships with some amazing people in the tour. I had the opportunities to visit four breathtaking world wonders. I was able to challenge myself to speak the Spanish language with native speakers who were born and raised in the same foreign country. I had the opportunities to try new, authentic foods. I had the chance to build my creativity in expanding my worldviews about the places I have seen.

First of all, I think South America provides a more cultural exposure, than say Europe. There is so much history in both continents, but the cultures in South American countries are more authentic. It offers a more indigenous look on the history of the countries, cities, and monumental places. The majority of the tour was spent walking through historical cities and observing the architecture, history of the buildings, and the major attractions of the respective

city. There was so much rich information to soak in about each place. This kind of cultural trip is different from going on an exotic excursion to a tropical island. It provides much more – things that you will remember and carry with you for the rest of your life. You not only have a fun, rewarding, invigorating tour, but you will immerse yourself in the history and culture. It was a type of tour with long-term rewards.

Spending a whole entire month in different countries, surrounded by different languages, will increase your capacity for that language exponentially. Coming back from Spanish-speaking countries, I am able to understand so much more than I had before. Visiting a Portuguese-speaking country allowed me to get the exposure to Portuguese that I have not had the full opportunity for yet. No, I am certainly not fluent, but I have so much more language exposure than a stereotypical American who has never traveled outside of the country. Also, it was very interesting to hear and compare the different dialects in each country. I was able to differentiate a few distinctions in the way Spanish was spoken in each country. Colombians spoke very quickly; it was hard for me to understand the full idea of what they were saying. Peruvians spoke slower and very clearly; it was definitely more understandable. I could also understand most of the Argentinian Spanish. It was the most interesting to catch the similarities of Portuguese with Spanish. Some people I had talked to who spoke both, or were learning one of the languages, said that they are very similar yet they are very different. Many of the bulletin boards that I would read along the streets in Brazil looked very much like written Spanish. However, hearing Brazilians speak Portuguese, it sounded much more different. I learned that they pronounce some things with a twist: for example, the last ‘d’ in their words would be pronounced with a ‘j’ or ‘g’ sound. So, the word ‘cidade’ (city) actually sounded like ‘cida-jay’. Once I figured this out, it was a bit easier to listen to Portuguese words.

Another amazing opportunity that this tour provided me with was meeting new friends. Since you spend almost 24/7 with the same group of people, you are bound to get to know more about them. Our group was very entertaining, funny, interesting, and friendly. I enjoyed getting to know everyone's personalities, and I liked how people warmed up to each other so quickly. It is wonderful to learn more about the world around us when you are with people who are equally as intrigued and excited to learn. And with all the waiting time during the airports and other, it is really fun to have an outspoken comedian on the trip. I'm glad we had talkative, funny people to travel with.

The food was also one of the highlights of the trip. I love tasting cultural foods and even the food we eat in the US, but with a different way that it is prepared. The concept of vegetarianism is very different in South America. In a nutshell, the vegetarian meals consisted of rice, beans, French fries, and salad. They also had sandwiches, mashed potatoes, bread, pasta, and vegetables to choose from occasionally. It seems like most people have a limited view on what vegetarians eat. In Brazil, I noticed they always had a great variety of desserts to choose from. And interestingly enough, I learned that Brazil and Argentina are the largest producers of soybeans, yet they export almost all of what they produce. So soymilk or tofu products are not common there. In Colombia and Peru, many of the vegetarian dishes include avocado as the main food item. I thought it was delicious. The tastes were more authentic; the culture seemed to embrace the natural tastes without overdoing the spices. Americans generally overdo the spices, or salt and oil, which overpower the natural flavors of the food. Also, it was somewhat difficult to request black beans without meat. Surprisingly, there weren't a lot of plantain options. I absolutely love plantain, and I was disappointed to see that it wasn't available very often. Unlike

what I imagine most people would say, I really enjoyed having rice and beans almost every day. The food gave me a real ‘South America’ atmosphere.

The tour was very organized, and it provided us with a variety of activity opportunities. I really liked the fact that we got to spend the last short week in a warm, tropical tourist destination. It was finally a chance to swim in a warm pool and relax in the sun. Even though Machu Picchu and Rio de Janeiro were my favorite cultural experiences, the “boogie” rides in Natal, Brazil were the best *adventure* experiences of the tour. We had walked, rode busses, trains, planes, and trams throughout the whole trip. It was wonderful to do something different in Natal.

What I didn’t enjoy on the trip was the lack of clean water. I wasn’t able to just fill up a bottle at the drinking fountain because there were rarely any drinking fountains at all. I also didn’t enjoy the bathrooms. Sometimes, you would have to pay to use a toilet, especially in Peru and Colombia. Quite often, there weren’t any toilet paper in the stalls. Yet, with these disadvantages, it just goes to show the cultural shocks. It is just the way that it is in some countries, but the United States gave us a social norm that we grew up with. So differences such as those come as a shock to us.

With that being said, however, all of the amazing places and experiences outweigh the disadvantages and challenges by far. The culture shocks and language barriers just expand our mind and thinking. In the end it is all developing our worldviews and growth as a person. A month-long trip like this tour can do wonderful things for a learning college student, and I would recommend it to anyone who gave it the slightest thought.