

The Trip That Changed Everything: My Personal Reflection

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South American Study Tour

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As soon as we stepped foot onto South American soil, it finally hit me. We were actually there, in a place I never thought I would be, doing things many never have the opportunity to experience. Immediately, I was able to tell the differences that Colombia brought to the table and I knew that for the rest of the trip we were sure to have a story or two to tell. For example, we had to take shuttle from the tarmac to the airport and the driving that we experienced was something I would never forget. We were weaving in and out of other airport vehicles, speeding up only to slow down seconds later, and having a few close calls when it looked like we just might clip another car. Little did I know, this driving might have actually been relatively tame compared to the public buses in Brazil or the long, winding drive up to Machu Picchu. This study tour was something I will never ever forget and something I will always be grateful for. The culture, people, food, and languages were so different on many levels and were a definite reflection on how each of the five countries are uniquely diverse and something beautiful to learn from. I believe that I left each country a better person than when I arrived.

Each country we went to was slightly different from the one before it. I expected them to have more similarities because they were closer together however all five countries were different in food, people, architecture, attire; the list goes on. I think that in total Peru had people that were still very traditional and connected to their Incan roots and way of life. We saw many people with the traditional garb and in Ollantaytambo we were able to see a one room house where they raised the “cuys” (guinea pigs) that they would soon sell or eat. However in Argentina, it seemed like the people were more modernized perhaps, the most modern people we saw the entire trip. (However, those tall platform shoes that most of the women boasted was not a trend that I intend to follow any time soon.) The people in Brazil were without a doubt the most diverse. We saw people of many different races and ethnicities wherever we went as

opposed to the other four countries where the people had more similarities with each other. Of course there were differences as they are with all people, but in Brazil these differences were more prominent and noticeable.

As I mentioned in the paragraph above it was very easy to compare each country to America and what it lacked or what comforts we missed from home. However, the country I was most impressed with was the one that might have been least like America. My favorite place that we visited was Peru. It was absolutely gorgeous there, the mountains were breathtaking, and it was clear to me why the Inca people valued their home so much. The mountains were so commanding and beautiful and caused me to feel very small and with that my problems became small as well. In turn, I was then able to realize how big my God is. It was an amazing moment.

Obviously one of the highlights of Peru and the entire trip was Machu Picchu. While the breathtaking views and impressively spectacular city were amazing by themselves, what really made the experience remarkable was learning about the history and cultural meanings behind the things we were seeing. I admire how much the Inca people were in tune with nature and consequentially with their spirituality. By no means do I agree with what they practice or believe but it sounds like a way of life that takes a great amount of faith and I find that admirable. I also admire the intellectual capacities that the Inca people had at such an early time in history. They utilized the sun and other elements of nature such as the mountains in order to tell time among other things. Some of the highlights were walking part of the Inca trail and seeing the removable bridge that could be used to escape their enemies. Another favorite part was when our tour guide lined us up along the edge of one of the buildings there. We then proceeded to clap at the same and heard one of the clearest and most pronounced echoes I have ever

experienced. It was something so simple but I happened to think it was one of the coolest moments I have had in a long time.

While in Peru I was awestruck by nature, Buenos Aires left me impressed by its complexity and how it moved. It was like perfect chaos; all the people cars were going their own way, doing their own thing, and contributing to the heartbeat of the city. Buenos Aires was probably the most sophisticated city of the trip. It reminded me of a mix between Washington, DC (my home) and New York. I greatly enjoyed my time in that city and being a part of the flow of life.

However, while the places and views were practically indescribable, what I think I will remember from this trip for the rest of my life was the culture and the people. It was so incredible to be immersed in an environment where all I heard was Spanish. While at times it was frustrating to not be able to communicate everything I wanted, it amazed me how I surprised myself with what I did know. This trip pushed me to use my limited Spanish skills in a fun, friendly, real life environment and I think by the time the month was over I was more confident in speaking and even more in love with the language.

Academically, this trip has really caused me to become even more passionate and serious about becoming fluent in Spanish. My goal is to be a doctor one day and even more so now than ever, there is a huge amount of Spanish speakers in this country that seek medical care. I want to be the kind of doctor one day to make my patients as comfortable as possible and if that means speaking in their native language that is what I hope to be able to do. This trip has shown me that this is possible for me to accomplish. Spanish is a beautiful language and I know one day soon I will be able to master it.