
2014-15 Field Notes

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person

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Person to Person in Costa Rica

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Mid-Semester Assessment, IDST 031

NAME : Kara Barlow COUNTRY: Costa Rica Date: 22/10/14

Learning the “Pura Vida” of Costa Rica

By Kara Barlow

My stay here in San Ramón, Costa Rica has been an experience filled with many surprises. I have learned an exceptional amount about the Costa Rican culture, from the Central Valley to the Caribbean, and even more about my own culture back in the United States. During one of the visits from our extended host family here in San Ramón, I had the pleasure of interviewing my host cousin, Daniel Villegas, about his thoughts on the differences between our culture in the United States and his culture here in Costa Rica. Daniel, lucky for him, has a lot to go off of. He is not only lucky enough to have me as a host cousin, but there are *two* of us wonderful Linfield students staying here with his family.

What surprised me most about the interview was the comfortable, relaxing way in which it was conducted. Our interview worked more like an easy-going conversation, which actually is a perfect example of the culture here in Costa Rica. The “don’t worry, be happy” vibes are ever present and at first, it gave us students from the U.S. a bit of anxiety. I don’t think any of us have heard the phrase “tranquila” (“relax” or “calm down”) so much in our lives, in either language. Daniel even mentioned during our conversation that people from the United States “always like things to be on time.” I couldn’t help but laugh. He is correct, many of us definitely do. Patience is key here in Costa Rica. From waitresses or waiters at restaurants to waiting for a reply to an email, the culture in Costa Rica puts a lot of emphasis on the idea of taking life as it comes and stopping to smell the roses.

Although we come from two, very different, parts of the world, I was surprised to find that Daniel and I shared many of the same interests. For example, we enjoy some of the same TV shows, some of the same musical artists, and even enjoy some of the same YouTube videos. Many of our media-related interests were similar. It could be the fact that we are similar in age or that globalization itself is growing and our world seems a bit smaller, but either way it was comforting to find these similarities in a country so far away from home. I was, however, interested to hear that Daniel (like many other Ticos or Ticas) still believes those of us in the United States are rather materialistic. I have to admit I have heard this many times before, but for some reason I have always placed myself in the category of “unmaterialistic.” As I have spent more time here, however, I have come to realize just how this stereotype has been placed upon us. Many of the material items I thought I “needed” before, I have been able to live comfortably and happily without. This cultural difference has begun to change my mentality on what the word “necessities” really means and how I can begin to change my own ways and habits to reflect my *independence* from many material things. Besides, we could all benefit from saving a little money in college, couldn’t we?

My interview with Daniel as well as the two months I have spent here in Costa Rica has opened my eyes to many things. When immersed in another culture, and many times in life, it does one good to observe before taking action. Language barriers can be tough to overcome but with some smiles and patience, one can go far. Be careful with stereotypes, of your own country and culture as well as others’ because you might be surprised at just how much you learn about yourself or someone else. Food (especially in Costa Rica) is a beautiful thing; take it slowly and enjoy it. Above all though, I have learned to relax and make an effort to live in the moment as much as possible. I have been very blessed to have grown up in such a beautiful country as the United States,

however, I have also been just as blessed to be part of a college community that has allowed me to appreciate the rest of the world.

Interviewee: Daniel Villegas (cousin to host family in Costa Rica)
Interview was conducted on the 21st of October