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Person to Person in Costa Rica

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Tika Zbornik
Costa Rica
November 6, 2015

Experiencing Cultural Differences

One thing that surprised me when I arrived in Costa Rica and settled in with my host family, is the different pace of life here in Costa Rica. Ticos, as locals are called here, generally wake up earlier and go to bed earlier than we do back in the States. This is in part caused by the location of Costa Rica close to the equator—the sun rises at around 5:30am and sets at around 5:30pm. This means that daylight is limited in the afternoon! Work and school usually start at 7:00am here. At 12:00, most people return home for lunch and eat with their family. After lunch, they return to work or school. In the case of the Linfield students, we start school at 8:30 every day, have a break from around 11:00-2:00, and then we have class for another two hours in the afternoon. It is definitely a different pace from life in the States! I have really enjoyed the mid-day break and eating lunch with my host family.

One cultural difference is the heavy bias towards the Catholic religion in Costa Rica. I was not raised in a religious environment but while my host family is not super religious, they do consider themselves Catholic. The influence of this religion is very apparent in the views of my host family. For example, while my host family states that they don't care about a person's sexual preference, they also say that they wish gay people weren't so obvious about it. Another cultural difference is that racism is still very present in Costa Rica. I will be taking a trip to Nicaragua soon, and my family has warned me that Nicaraguans, in general, are very aggressive and that I should be very careful. I also took a trip to the Caribbean side of Costa Rica, where there is a large population of black people, and again my host family made comments about watching out for black people and making sure to watch my things closely. I don't know what I will experience in Nicaragua, but the people in the Caribbean were very nice, and seemed even more relaxed than the people in the Central Valley, where I live. A cultural

similarity is the importance that Costa Rica and the United States place on family, although I think this might be more apparent in Costa Rica.

Interviewing my family made me realize just how much our upbringing and the influences around us, like the media, school, and religion affect our views. I was very surprised at my host family's attitude towards the black population in Costa Rica, Nicaraguans, and the LGBTQ population. They don't believe that they are homophobic or racist, and by the standards of the culture in Costa Rica, they aren't. However, being brought up in the U.S. and being taught to accept all people equally regardless of race or sexual orientation, the comments that my host family has made seem very strange. This has been eye opening in my understanding of this new culture.

I interviewed my host family, which consists of my host mother, Annia Mendez, and her sister Isa on November 6th, 2015.