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Postcards from Abroad

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Mindo y Baños

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Cassie Klagge

Spring 2023

Ecuador

April 10, 2023

Mindo y Baños

¡Hola desde Quito

After two very long weeks of studying, projects, and exams, I was definitely ready for some fun! As a way to reward myself, I decided to take two weekend-long trips to some of Ecuador's most beloved towns: Mindo and Baños.

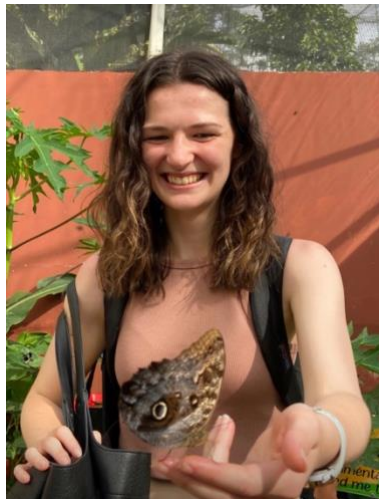
I have to say, I think that Mindo is my favorite place so far that I've traveled to! The best way to describe Mindo is a small-forest town that has a huge emphasis on nature and tourism. Not only did I enjoy the quiet serenity at all times (but especially at night), but also the comfortably warm weather. When planning this trip, I had a lot of guidance from friends and locals, as everyone had great insight and lessons to share from their experiences; with this knowledge, I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how to do it!

My friends and I kicked off this trip by first visiting a mariposario, which acts as a sanctuary for the varying species of Ecuadorian butterflies. Here, visitors are able to put a banana paste on their hands to attract and hold butterflies (of course with their consent and well-being in mind). This was both a cool, but terrifying experience, as I don't like insects and the only

butterflies I could attract were gigantic and moth-appearing. However, I felt very accomplished afterwards, which was the important part!



My favorite butterfly



My butterfly and I

After spending some much-needed time with the butterflies, we did a Yumbos chocolate tour, which depicted both the fermentation and production process of chocolate. Since Ecuador has a well-adapted climate for cocoa growth, they have become one of the world's leading producers in quality chocolate; one of these being the Lindt chocolate company. Throughout the tour, we were given varying samples of chocolate products, which was very much appreciated! Some of my personal favorites included their brownies, hot cocoa, and chocolate-mint squares.



Yumbos Chocolate tour



Us enjoying Yumbos

Our next (and final) day in Mindo consisted of doing horseback trails and hiking waterfalls! I was extremely excited about riding horses, since I hadn't been on a horse in at least 6 years. My horse, who was named Moro, was one of the most passive animals I think I've ever met; he just sat back and let the other horses, who were all dominant and wanted to be the "leader", take the lead. Even though I did enjoy horseback riding, I think my favorite part of the experience was the drive up to the horse ranch. We were taken up by a truck, which allowed us all to ride in the cargo bed. The 20-minute drive was very carefree, as we were just having simple conversations while enjoying the surreal scenery and light breeze of the wind. I can

confidently say that this experience has made it into my core memories abroad! My only regret from this trip is not staying longer in Mindo!



My new horse friend "Moro"



Another Mindo Waterfall

Now, onto Baños! The one thing I can say about this trip was that it was Chaotic! Thinking back, I definitely should've done more research on how to travel there (like I did for Mindo), but I do think my group and I still made the best of our experience. One thing I wish I had known before traveling was how spread out all of the activities are from the town-center of Baños. Due to the very long travel times, my group and I were only able to do two activities during our weekend getaway. In addition to the tourist system that is very potent in Baños, many

of the activities had short time limits, which meant we had to be very strategic (and sometimes even pushy) about how we spent our time at each attraction.

When arriving at Baños, we decided our first task of the day would be to take a bus up to Casada El Pailón, which is a smaller hike that leads to a very popular waterfall. I absolutely loved this hike, as it was simple, but also contained some unique aspects. In order to get up close to the waterfall, we had to cross two wooden sky bridges, which looked over the tops of forest trees; I felt very close to nature during this whole process! Sadly, however, due to the time constraint we had on completing the hike and returning (40 minutes), we weren't able to finish it entirely, but we did get some awesome photos!



Us on the Baños “party” bus



Cascada El Pailon

The next day, we decided that we wanted to see Las Manos de Dios, which is a mountain ledge that is “supported” by the two hands of God. As we were traveling to this site, we also had the opportunity to see similar ledge sites, which had some very good photo opportunities! Along the way, I also had the opportunity to try rambutan, which is a traditional Asian fruit that has become very beloved in Ecuador; Originally, I was going to buy this fruit, but the vendor actually gave it to me for free, which made me very happy! Once arriving at Las manos de Dios, we actually didn’t end up going onto the ledge. Instead, we waited to go on this swing that rests near a canyon (for photographic reasons, of course!). However, we didn’t end up going on this either because a group of 4 people cut in front , and because of this, we ran out of time.



One of the many popular swings in Baños



Ecuador REALLY loves Shrek lol

Getting ready to head back to Quito was eventful and a bit interesting. As my friends and I were walking, a random Ecuadorian guy first comes up to tell me that I smell like blue cheese, and then proceeds to ask if I'm from France, which was such a weird conversation (In case anyone was wondering, I do not, in fact, smell like blue cheese). Then, for the entire duration of the bus ride home (which was 3 hours), these two Ecuadorian kids kept staring at my friend Ryland and I. It even got to a point where they would talk about us and take photos of us, which made the bus ride a bit unsettling. After getting through this bus ride, we were happy to get an Uber and head back to our host houses. This happiness didn't last long though as we were scammed by our Uber driver, who said that we only imputed one stop and that we needed to pay more in order to all get home. Once I managed to get home, I was so physically and mentally tired that I just went to bed.

Although I had some very questionable moments in Mindo and Baños, I don't regret going to either place and also do plan to revisit Banos just to spend a little more time there!

¡Chao!

Cassie Klagge