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Letter to the Next

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Letter to the Next

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Let me introduce you to Papá Ramiro, Mama Sandra, and their daughter Majo (short for Maria Jose); they—and son Ramiro David, who wasn't home when this picture was taken—have been an excellent host family to me!

To my host family's next exchange student:

I don't know who you are, but I hope we get to meet. There's a part of me that can't wait to share all the ins and outs of life here, but also a part of me that would rather fuss around packing perfectly than actually face the fact that I'm leaving. (And leaving SOON.) There's another part of me that wants to keep blithely living as if the end of my semester abroad is still as far away as it seemed at the beginning of March, which is in conflict with the part of me that wants to do everything, right now, so I don't leave here with any regrets. But the biggest part of me just can't wait to be smothered in the hugs I know are coming as soon as I walk through familiar doors. Oh, to be free of the challenges of translation that keep me from speaking so many things that come to mind, to wear shorts on a hot day and run barefoot in the grass, to drive! Ecuador, it's been fun—it's been amazing, really—but I'm ready to go home. Or at least I think I am; I know I'm not the same Lexy who left, and I can almost guarantee that you, dear next-semester-student, will also be changed by your time here.

Credit for a good study-abroad experience goes, in large part, to the Oregon staff; aren't Julie and Jennifer great? And just wait until you meet Franco and Marleen! All of them will bend over backwards to do what you need, and I've found their help invaluable in many ways. You have wonderful support; please try to make their job—taking care of you—easy.

Also, I highly recommend actually reading any and all preparatory literature they or Veronica Castelo

send your way. If I had, I would not have left slippers out of my suitcase—you'll want them—and would have had a lot more language-learning strategies in mind from the very beginning. That book they gave you at orientation? I wish I'd finished it before yesterday. Please do yourself a favor and take the help you're given there!

I'll also add a strong recommendation that you bring four or five rolls of quarters, Benadryl cream, and a quick-dry or microfiber towel, because all of them are dead useful here. And DO NOT EVER leave home without a light raincoat and blank paper of some kind; I think that habit might come home to the States, too. If you're female, don't underestimate the value of a good pair of heels for dancing—they apparently do wonders for turns—and of cute, comfortable (and waterproof!) boots.

But those are things I would tell any exchange student headed to Ecuador. For you, headed for Las Toronjas y Av. El Inca, you are in luck. For one thing, your home-for-the-next-few-months (I kept saying 'home' and then self-correcting to 'Ecuahome' for whatever reason) is very easy to find...every cab driver in the city knows where 6 Diciembre and El Inca intersect, and the bus terminal you need to get to Cumbaya for classes is a 15-minute walk if you go at the usual leisurely Ecuadorian pace. The dogs on the way don't bite, and, though you might be instructed to take the bus from the corner near Yolita's house, you're probably fine walking.

And when you walk, keep your eyes out for Galo. He works as a security guy at the Pan de Vida *panadería* (bakery) every afternoon except Monday, unless his schedule's changed. Once he realized that Marnie and I were *gringas*, Americans (really kind of a misnomer for people from the States, since the USA is not the only country in the Americas...I like *estadounidense* and wish English had a term to match), Galo started giving us a thickly accented, "Ha-lo. Hau are you?" when we walked past. If you have the time, he'd love to chat—probably has a pretty boring day, standing guard over a bakery—and if you're up for the challenge, offer to continue teaching him English. He's pretty good at numbers, and I introduced "to have" in our last little lesson. You'll find he's an excellent, eager student and a thoughtful friend. At the very least, tell him Lexy says hi.

I learned halfway through the semester that there is indeed hot water for your shower, if you turn on the tap just a little bit at a time. (Be careful, it's finicky...but I learned that things like that are worth the potential awkwardness to ask about!) And the brown chairs in the second *sala* upstairs are wayyy comfier than any of the chairs on the first floor, but the wireless is less than stellar pretty much anywhere outside the office/work room. Additionally, it's worth it to just walk down to one of the many little shops on El Inca for any necessities, rather than angling for the westernized convenience of Supermaxi...I hit the roof when I finally looked at the receipt and how high the taxes are to shop there.

If you're like me, you'll get the house key mixed up with your *habitación* key every time you try to put one of them in a lock. You'll notice the 'Quito my heart' on that ring, the little key that used to open my luggage lock before that got broken in the arrival process. And as a parting/well-wishing gift, I left you a calendar in the top drawer under the TV in your room; it's for keeping a record of your adventures in Ecuador. I have a 'Lesson of the Day' for the last four months that's going in a calendar of my own once I get home. Enjoy that little pun and all of the memories you'll make...I recommend going to Mindo, Quilotoa, and Cuenca especially. Take the chance to see to the jungle. And if you summit Ruco Pichincha, bring a rock from the top back for me. Not going back to finish that hike is one of my very few regrets looking back on this semester.

There's so much more to say—this is the four most recent months of my life we're talking about!—but just come look me up sometime and we can talk. I'd love to share it all with you. I asked previous students so many questions, but, looking back, I think that just being prepared to handle new and different things in general was a more helpful asset than anyone's attempt to explain those things prior to me actually experiencing them. We'll all see it a little differently. And I'm going to be seeing home differently now, too. But mostly I'm excited I'll be seeing home SOON!!

Love, hugs, and best wishes,

Lexy