
2017-18 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

3-10-2018

A Trip to an Indigenous Village

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Recommended Citation

Roseke, Sydney, "A Trip to an Indigenous Village" (2018). *2017-18 Postcards*. Article. Submission 16.
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Sydney Roseke
Quito, Ecuador
March 10th, 2018



A Trip to an Indigenous Village

Armed with two types of painkillers and Ecuamiel (Ecuadorian cough syrup), I woke up at 5 am to go on a weekend trip to Salasaca Village after my fourth day with a fever and the flu. This would be my second and final trip with the director of the Linfield program. We departed from a random street that was a twenty-minute Uber ride from my house and started our trip. Our first stop would be a city called Ambato that is also known as the Garden of Ecuador. There it celebrates the famously known Festival of Fruits and Flowers, especially their natively grown peaches.

To experience some of the flora of Ambato, we visited La Quinta de Juan Leon Mera, or a Botanical Garden. The garden felt like a zoo because it was so enormous, featuring all sorts of flowers, cacti, palm trees, ferns, and brambly bushes. The girls from the program and I spent time climbing big trees and taking pictures. There were also two museums of homes that were once considered to be country houses, including the house of Juan Leon Mera and La Casa Museo Martinez-Holguin. Inside the country houses, there were life-size replicas of the family members, who were many occupations including geologists, painters, mountain climbers, geographers, and more. Juan Leon Mera himself was the writer of the Ecuadorian National Anthem.

Next, we took a pit stop in one of the best Pizzerias in all of Ecuador at La Fornace. Their menu featured wood fired pizza made with all natural and fresh ingredients. Mine was tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, garlic, and oregano with a strawberry batido (kind of like a smoothie, but not quite). We finished off the meal with some gelato from the downstairs ice cream shop. Salasaca, a small Incan village, is where we spent the majority of our trip and is the portion of my stay that I found truly life altering. Our host family spoke Quechua and Spanish only. The hostel was a farm: not only did they own cows, chickens, lambs, goats, sheep, a husky puppy, and a kitten, but also, all of our food was organically grown including the herbs. In the morning, we went on a hike to a sacred altar that has been visited by the family through centuries. Along

the way, we picked some fresh eucalyptus off of a tree for our sore throats and stuffy noses. To do this, you break a couple leaves and put them between your teeth and breathe them in, which clears your airway in seconds.

While we walked, the little indigenous girl, only 7 years old and I became fast friends. Her name was Estrella, or star, and I marveled at how without the Spanish language, we never would have been able to communicate. However, with the beauty of language we talked all about her life. She loved to draw, watch Princess Sophia cartoons, and ride horses. She also asked me if I could sing, admitting to me that her dream was to be able to sing one day. After that, we began to make a bouquet of wildflowers and herbs, as she explained each new addition. We even found a small mint plant.

At the altar, our guide began to speak in Quechua, performing a sacred religious ceremony on us to clean out the bad spirits. He took a handful of special herbs and flowers, first hitting us in the face with them, then rubbing them all over us. Lastly, he had us spit on the plants to rid ourselves of the spirits

The last experience that we had before leaving was learning about the family's artisanal crafts. They showed us how they spun thread, loomed their own clothes, and dyed their fabrics. One garment took about a year according to the mother. To dye the clothes purple, they removed what at first appeared to be white fuzz from a cactus. After squishing the white fuzz, beads popped dying it purple. To change the color to red, another dye color, they added a few drops of lime juice, which reacted with the chemicals. Overall, between a few life-changing conversations and spiritual experiences, the experience made me feel renewed. I will certainly never forget the pueblito of Salasaca.

Besitos de Ecuador,

Sydney