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Palenque - Templo de las Inscripciones (Temple of Inscriptions)

On April 28th we began our week-long trip in Chiapas, the state south of Oaxaca. We left in the evening to get on a bus, where we spent the night. It was supposed to be around 10 to 11 hours long, but due to a blockade we encountered around 2 am, the trip ended up being close to 17 hours long. We finally arrived in San Cristobal around the middle of the day. That afternoon, after lunch, we went to a textile museum not too far from our hotel. In one room, they had clothes on display from different parts of Chiapas. For most of them, there were at least two sets, a male and a female version. Our museum guide informed us about each set as well as about some of the different tools used in the regions. In other parts of the museum there were animal pelts, handcrafted items, and photos of people who had helped give medical assistance to people in Chiapas. Our guide also took us into a different room to show us photos of different indigenous groups and their traditions in Chiapas.

The next day we adventured to Toniná, Cascadas de Agua Azul (blue water waterfalls), and stayed at a hotel in Palenque. After a short walk from the park entrance, we reached the Mayan ruins of Toniná. There we had the opportunity to walk in a labyrinth, explore varying structures of the ruins, and climb to the top. The view from the top was amazing with the surrounding hills in view. There was also a small museum we could visit and after, we returned to the van to travel to the Cascadas de Agua Azul. Here we saw waterfalls on top of waterfalls with beautiful blue water. There was an area to swim in there (below the falls), but I went with a few people of our group on a short hike to see the falls at different angles. We ended our night in the town called Palenque to stay at our hotel.

The following day we felt as if we were exploring a jungle. After riding in the van for a

while, our group climbed into two small boats in a river called Usumacinta so that we could view the Mayan ruins called Yaxchilán. On one side of the river was Chiapas, Mexico while on the other was Guatemala. Our boat driver pointed out some wildlife along the way for us as we traveled towards the ruins. He spotted some spider monkeys located on the Guatemala side for us to take pictures of and pointed out a crocodile closer to the Mexico side of the river. A jungle surrounded the ruins; in the trees above we could see and hear spider monkeys, which have surprisingly loud voices for their size. The first part of the ruins we walked through was a labyrinth. Unfortunately, this one had bats, a snake, and a giant spider, so we moved through it quite rapidly. Due to the size of this Mayan ruin site and the amount of time we had, we did not explore all of its buildings. After the labyrinth, we entered one of the main parts of the site, which happened to be spread out. The giant stones we saw around the site with images carved into them made me think of the movie *El Dorado*. After exploring the site, we returned to our boats and journeyed back to our van. Our next visit was to Bonampak. Here was a smaller Mayan ruin site than the others that we had visited so far. One of the highlights of this site was a building with three rooms. Each of these rooms was painted to be different scenes. The ceiling and all sides of the rooms were painted.

After another night in our hotel in Palenque, we then had the opportunity to visit the ruin site of the largest Mayan city, which is called Palenque. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit all of the buildings because a few of them were closed off, but we were still able to climb several pyramids and explore a few of the buildings. Next, we had a bit of a hike down to the museum that displayed some of the Mayan artifacts that had been discovered. Along the way, we saw a waterfall and more spider monkeys. Our next adventure was to Misol-Ha, where there is a main waterfall and a few smaller ones nearby. There we could walk behind the fall as well as swim in a designated area. We ended our day by returning to the hotel we stayed at previously in San Cristobal.

Our last day in Chiapas was spent exploring the town of San Cristobal. We first went to a Mayan textile museum and then had the opportunity to learn the basics of weaving. We then went to two different stores that sell a couple of common rocks/minerals of the area, jade and amber. At the jade store, they had a museum of various items made of jade and we could then also look at the store. At the amber store, we were given a presentation on how to identify real amber as well as had the opportunity to shop around. We then had some free time to shop or explore the town (there was a market going on nearby) until we had to get back on the bus for our long trip back to Oaxaca. Fortunately, our return trip was much shorter than our first one and I was able to sleep a little better.

As you can see, our trip to Chiapas was full of many adventures and beautiful sites. It will be a trip that I will not forget from my trip here in Mexico. I am glad to have had this opportunity.

--Until Next Time, Shelby