Jo Buckley

Study Abroad in Nicaragua: Winter 2018

Over winter break, thanks to the Honors Program Enrichment Award, I was able to travel to Nicaragua as part of a CSU study abroad program. From the 1st to the 11th of January 24 of us spent time in both the rural and urban areas of Nicaragua studying fair trade coffee production and the current state of Nicaragua after histories of dictatorship, revolution, Neoliberalism, and recent politics. I used and expanded upon all three of my majors, International Studies, History, and Spanish, during the trip. Traveling to Nicaragua made everything that I was learning much more real and impactful because I met the people behind the books.

I was very glad to know Spanish and have studied the Spanish major during the trip. I became the translator at many times during our trip, especially within the host-families. Whether it was relaying the information for making the most amazing nacatamales and homemade tortillas or discussing feminist economics following neoliberalist policies, we had a lot of great conversations during the trip that were even more impactful to me because I heard them in Spanish and in English. I learn languages because I like to connect to people and it was such a gift to connect others using the skill I have been working on all of college.

The second major I study is history. I had taken Latin American history classes as well as U.S. Foreign Relations classes which prepped me for the historical context I was entering. Everything I had learned was applicable to the situation but hearing personal stories made the information much more real and impactful. My host families generously shared with me their experiences of the revolution from fighting, losing friends and family, and how their lives have changed. Having these conversations and making these connections has been invaluable for my education.
My third major is International Studies and this trip was an incredible opportunity to connect information from four years at CSU and apply it to the Nicaraguan life I experienced. Neoliberalism had a much more complex meaning to me once I was able to connect it to the free trade zone we walked through filled with factories and tens of thousands of people flooding in to work every day. Political ecology felt less theoretical once I visited the neighborhood were the city landfill was placed and heard how the people there lacked access to clean water and air and secure employment. Also, in study, I considered fair trade process to be the ‘good’ in a somewhat black and white situation. However, after talking to fair trade producers I realized that it can cover up inequitable practices in some situations. Seeing what I have been studying in person added complexity and meaning to what I had learned in the classroom.

This trip also developed my professional goals because it was a great taste of what I hope to be doing in the future. I would like to work in community organizing internationally. I even met a CSU alumnus working as a Peace Corps Volunteer who was able to answer many of my questions and has inspired me to pursue the Peace Corps post-graduation. I am so grateful for this study abroad opportunity that has acted as a capstone of my paths of study at CSU and even launched me forward into my next pursuits.
Me meeting with my host mom for Managua. This would be the best host stay experience of all my travels so far.
Our CSU group plus Matt, the Peace Corps volunteer, in Managua.