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Person to Person in Ecuador

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Whitney Brittingham
Quito, Ecuador
December 4, 2014

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Ecuador

Having been studying in Ecuador for nine months now, I have already noted many differences between my own culture and the culture here, but it was still interesting to discuss this with another student my age. Remembering back to my first few months here, there were several things that I found surprising. It was hard to adjust to the habit of greeting everyone with a kiss, and my Ecuadorian friends and classmates have noticed that it is difficult for Americans in particular to act comfortable with this in the beginning. The student I interviewed, Andres, also mentioned that he believes one of the biggest differences is the focus on family in Ecuador. For example, most Ecuadorians live at home until they get married, and this was also something that was surprising to me because I went to boarding school and haven't lived with a family since the age of 14.

In regards to cultural similarities and differences, both Ecuadorians and Americans have pointed out some interesting characteristics. Americans are much more likely to be very direct in their speech, which is often regarded as rude. Something funny that Andres told me is that Ecuadorians think the taste of root beer is like cough syrup, they find it to be disgusting. Interestingly enough, I think that their drink of choice called Inca Cola is similarly unappetizing because it is too sweet. Aside from taste, you could also say that Ecuadorian values are very different from American values. The family is placed above all else, and personal decisions need to be approved of by your family. For example, Andres had to decide with his family what his major in college would be instead of picking it alone. Individualism is much more important to Americans and this can often come at the sacrifice of our relationships.

While none of the things discussed in this interview were a surprise to me, I think that in order to learn about a culture it is really important to speak to a variety of people so that you don't start to make sweeping generalizations about a country or a group of people, which can be easy to do at the start of an experience in a foreign place. I have also found that people really enjoy learning about other cultures and that these discussions are really important to create intercultural understanding.

Interview: Andrés Villacís