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## Through Another's Eyes . . . The Life of a Galapageno

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Galápagos, Ecuador

October 20, 2017

### Through Another's Eyes... The Life of a Galapageno

What is life like on an archipelago of volcanic islands that are in the middle of the Pacific Ocean? What is it like to share your home with blue-footed boobies, marine iguanas, sea lions, and frigate birds? Few people know the answers to these questions and even fewer are lucky to grow up as a Galápagos Islands native, a Galapageno. I sought the answers to these questions as I chatted with Alex, my host brother who was born and raised on the island of San Cristóbal, Galápagos; he offered me insight of what his island life has been like for his past 20 years.

“Es hermosa a vivir en una isla” or “It is beautiful to live on an island” was the reply I received when I had asked Alex how he liked living in the unique place that he does. Since Alex was a young boy he had an interest in biology that guided him to pursue the general sciences track in high school. Alex is now fulfilling his strong passion for nature through his work as a naturalist guide. Unlike some high school graduates who decide to go to school on the mainland in Guayaquil, Alex decided to stay on his beautiful island. Alex, like many others on the islands, depends upon taking tourists on excursions to make a living. Not only is being a naturalist his job, it is also what he loves to do. After returning last week from escorting tourists on snorkel trips and hikes during an archipelago excursion, I do not think that I have ever seen Alex smile so big, not even when he is playing the sport that he loves, basketball.

Back in the day, Alex used to regularly change out of his high school uniform and into basketball attire to represent the island of San Cristóbal on an interisland squad. Now, as an older and post-high school player, he looks forward to when the clock strikes 4:30 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday because that means it is time to head to the outside court to play co-ed pickup on the weekends. Sports are a large part of the lifestyle on the island. Basketball and “futbol,” what Americans know as soccer, are the most popular sports on the island.

Contrary to the Galapago culture, Alex has dreams to someday leave the island and explore other countries. The first place that Alex is determined to visit is Germany because he has a profound fascination in the German culture. This dream opposes tradition because on the island it is not uncommon for people to live under the same roof as their parents until they are well into their early thirties. But, with a curious mind and an adventurous heart, Alex has different ideas.

I am excited to see where life will take Alex because I believe he has great things waiting for him on the road ahead. He has a bilingual tongue that has spurred from learning English at the age of six and from practicing the language throughout high school. Being bilingual reaps many benefits for Alex. He is happy that he chose to stick to mastering the English dialect in school, even when he could have rather spent the time learning Italian, or French. He uses his English a lot throughout his tourism job.

No matter where Alex journeys in life, he will always take with him his Galapagenos roots, something that will always become clear the moment he steps foot on the dance floor. From the time Alex could walk, his Dad taught him how to dance. Alex knows enough dances to keep you on your toes, literally. Whether he is guiding you along to salsa, merengue, or bachata, you will not second-guess his Galapageno identity.

Even more, if it is not his good dance moves that pinpoint him as Galapageno, then it must be his morals. The Ecuadorian culture highly emphasizes values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for your elders. After living with Alex for the past month, it does not go unnoticed the mornings that he is up at 6 a.m. helping him mom patiently with computer work. The thing that surprises me most about this culture is how family-oriented the people are. It is something I truly admire.

Now, as I come to the end of this writing, I am going to approach it as I would approach the end of an Ecuadorian conversation. I would rise from sitting and once on my feet, I would come within close proximity to where my cheek would make the slightest touch with yours and in a simultaneous motion we would both make a slight kiss sound. Given that, it is only right to end this essay with one word that is short and sweet and rolls off of the tongue. Just as a Galapageno would say... Chau.