

Day 1 & 2 (7/28 & 7/29/12)

After denying myself sleep for 36 hours straight due to my great anxiety about my first plane ride, I welcomed sleep like water in a drought my first night in Nicaragua. The 5 a.m. sun came entirely too early for my taste. In just my first two days here I have experienced new foods such like starchy plantains, gallo pinto, rice and beans served with every meal—including breakfast, and pollo frits—Nicaraguan fried chicken. Who would have known a Southern girl like me would touch down in Latin America and be served fried chicken and sweet tea? Sorry Nicaragua, that awful lemony tang I drank yesterday has nothing on momma's sweet tea, but your passion fruit juice is amazing!

Day 3 (7/30/12)

More amazing food to report: Eggs so fresh and clean that they are not even yellow. They are more of a pale orange. The Nicaragua coffee is out of this world and early this morning I tasted horchata, a bubble gum pink rice and pineapple juice mixture. I'm not sure if I'm a fan.

Day 4 (7/31/12)

Today, we navigated the streets of Esteli in a big, yellow school bus. Luckily, it is the equivalent of a tank on these streets where a traffic light is rare and traffic laws are nonexistent. In our tank we traveled to a women's cooperative, where a group of women are making paper by hand, out of organic material such as banana peels and coconut. While visiting, one of the main women named Augustina shared her life story of her during the war in Nicaragua. It brought us each to tears. We also visited public and private hospitals, which was a little stressful for us rural studies majors. The nursing students were in heaven.

After that emotional trip, we all had a few much needed hours in Estelí to shop. Along with the other ABAC students and Carlito, our guide who is now like a long-lost brother, we went to Café Don Louis for coffee and paninis. Café Don Louis beats Starbucks every time!

Day 5 (8/1/12)

Today was the pinnacle of amazing in my life. First, I held hands with the world's most precious child in a village full of homes with dirt floors and missing roofs. While we were conducting surveys with ERSIA in this village, the young boy followed us from place to place. This little boy, who was without shoes and covered in dirt, was the happiest child I've ever met.

After leaving the Somoto village, we floated down a canyon that could have come straight out of a movie set. I jumped off of cliffs into the Coco River and rode in boats through the canyon. It was something I will absolutely never forget.

Day 6 (8/2/12)

Whoah! I'm exhausted physically and mentally. After visiting the Padron factory, where they make the world's best cigars we traveled to La Chureca. La Chureca is the city dump where families of young and old work and live. We were each covered in 98% DEET in hopes of keeping the flies at bay while children

ran around us, unaffected by the swarms. And in the middle of the horror were people thanking God for their homes and work, even in the dump. The bus ride back to Hotel Cuallitan was both quiet and extremely loud. My voice was quiet, except for the uncontrollable sobs that rippled through me, but my mind was raging with thoughts of these people and how selfish I could be.

Day 7 & 8 (8/3 & 8/4/12)

Yesterday was filled with agricultural lessons, plates piled high with grilled pork and beef, and a little more shopping in Estelí. After returning to the hotel, some of us went out to experience the night life in Estelí and went to a club. People actually dance in Nicaraguan clubs—salsa and such!

Today, I met “the man with dreams.” We traveled to Tisey to visit Albeto Guterrez, the hermit artist. He was such a sweet heart and amazingly strong in his faith. We traveled up the mountain side visiting each of his murals, hand carved into the mountainside, and learning about his dreams.

Back in Estelí we visited the Nicaragua Wal-Mart called Maxi Pali for Oreos and personal favorites. It’s surprising how much you’ll miss food from home.

Day 9 (8/5/12)

We just arrived in Granda and Hotel Colonial is amazing although I cried much of the way here. Leaving Nicaragua is going to be difficult. Everyone is missing their families terribly, and while I do, in fact, miss my own, I am not ready to leave.

On our way from Esteli to Granada, I experienced another first while in Latin America—using the restroom in a hole! Wow! What an experience that was ...even for a South Georgia girl.

Day 10 (8/6/12)

I do not like Managua. It is hot and very urban. I miss the mountains of Estelí and its cool breezes.

Before leaving Granda this morning we took a boat tour of las Isletas and even saw an island full of monkeys!

We are now relaxing and swimming at the Las Mercedes pool in Managua. I do not want to go home.

Day 11 (8/7/12)

Today is a very sad day for me. I have found a second home in Nicaragua, family members in Carlito and Rodney that I did not know existed, and a region I will miss terribly. I could not control the tears while getting on the plane.