Southeastern University

From the SelectedWorks of Jason R. Old

Fall October 5, 2011

Anthrotourist: An Improvised Journey Through Latin America (2nd Edition)

Jason R. Old, Southeastern University - Lakeland

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jasonold/2/
Anthrotourist
“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”
—St. Augustine

“...travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.”
—Miriam Beard

“One of the gladdest moments of human life, methinks, is the departure upon a distant journey into unknown lands. Shaking off with one mighty effort the fetters of habit, the leaden weight of routine, the cloak of many cares and the slavery of home, man feels once more happy.”
—Sir Richard Burton

“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“We travel just to travel.”
—Ernesto Che Guevara

“To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.”
—Aldous Huxley

“There are no foreign lands. It is the traveler only who is foreign.”
—Robert Louis Stevenson
About the Author

Jason Old is a full-time professor of Spanish and Latin American Culture at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. He is also the CEO and co-founder of The SurfShare, LLC, a surf-sharing social networking platform whose mission is to connect surfers and surf enthusiasts from across the globe to foster more enjoyable surf travel as well as to create economic sustainability in the coastal communities of the developing world. He has earned a Master’s degree from the University of South Florida in Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies, with concentrations in Anthropology and Spanish-American Literature.
When he is not teaching at the university, he travels around Latin America and enjoys the beauties of a region of the world that stole his heart almost 15 years ago. Jason has been fortunate enough to have lived in almost all of the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. When he is in Latin America, he is generally involved in one way or another with sport and development projects, field research, and extreme sports. Jason loves to travel and feed his never-ending desire to learn more about other cultures. He currently lives in Tampa, Florida.
# Table of Contents

Prologue ................................................................................................................. xv
Preface .................................................................................................................... xvii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. xix
Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

Part One: Honduras ................................................................................................. 6
   [1] Arrival in Honduras ......................................................................................... 6
   [3] Leaving Roatan Soon ...................................................................................... 30
   [4] San Pedro Sula ............................................................................................... 32

Part Two: Nicaragua ............................................................................................... 36
   [6] It’s Good to Be Back in Nicaragua ................................................................. 38
   [8] Life’s Perfect Days ......................................................................................... 50
   [9] Local Life ....................................................................................................... 52
   [10] Time Travel .................................................................................................. 58
   [12] Last Day in Popoyo ...................................................................................... 64
   [14] Day of Rest ................................................................................................... 71
   [15] Pura Vida ..................................................................................................... 73

Part Three: Costa Rica ........................................................................................... 83
   [16] The Land of Potable Water ......................................................................... 83
[17] Life Is a Tómbola ................................................................. 90
[19] Staying Longer ................................................................. 111

Part Four: Panama ................................................................. 129
[21] Costa Rica to Panama ....................................................... 129
[22] Sailing Koala ................................................................. 135
[23] The Kuna Life ................................................................. 141
[24] Mar Abierto ................................................................. 147

Part Five: Colombia .............................................................. 155
[25] The Freedom to Improvise .............................................. 155
[26] Loving Cartagena ............................................................ 160
[27] Islas del Rosario ............................................................ 164
[28] Adiós, Colombia ............................................................ 174

Conclusion ................................................................. 181

Glossary ................................................................. 185

Recipes ................................................................. 193
This book is dedicated to my family, who has supported me incessantly as an anthrotourist. This book is also dedicated to all of you who have a burning desire to see the world through other peoples’ eyes, to live a life of passion and fulfillment, and to inspire others to do the same.
Prologue

Written by Dr. Irvin Ziemann

Well over two millennia have passed since Greek poets and dramatists wrote of the mythological Jason, leader of the Argonauts, and his quest for the Golden Fleece. After an adventure-filled successful quest, Jason was able to return home by sailing around the world—the known world of his time.

In the twenty-first century A.D., another Jason—Jason Old, a Spanish professor from Southeastern University—undertook his own quest, also with hopes of claiming something of value, but in a far different way. Our modern Jason began his quest alone—as an anthrotourist.

Jason will give his own explanation of the term. It suffices to say that his trip took him through five Latin American countries, sometimes entering a country alone, but never leaving without having made new friends, some
of them people of the country and others anthrotourists like himself. In every case, he is able to enrich his personal experiences by sharing the experiences of others and hearing and seeing the diverse backgrounds from which his new friends come.

Although the account is written in a casual style, it is a serious work which contains not only artistic descriptions and anecdotes but philosophical and educational digressions as well—digressions ranging from thorough coverage of the making of coffee to the significant factors, positive and negative, in the forms of government. The reader will enjoy both the travelogue features and the “lecture sessions” and feel a strong desire to do his or her own brand of anthrotourism!
Preface

In all reality, this journey was not unique in the sense that I was not the first to encounter any new lands, new peoples, and/or new cultures. What makes it unique is that these are stories and vignettes written as the events unfolded during my personal voyage through Central America and Colombia. Allow me to add the following caveat:

This book originated as a series of blogs, and therefore the reader should understand that although the following chapters and subchapters are in chronological order, there are gaps in time that range from one day to one week. Due to certain circumstances in my travels (e.g., days without internet access, no computer, and/or being extremely tired), I was not able to blog on a daily basis. While you may perceive that there are gaps in time from one subchapter to another, the chronological events were recorded as I experienced them and that has allowed this
book to maintain its integrity as a travelogue and an account of impressions as I received them.

When one decides to take a trip such as this one, with a relatively flexible itinerary, it allows that person to go where the wind takes him or her, thus offering that person the option of veering off the beaten path and getting to know the local people within their own “comfort zones.” This, I believe, is what makes this type of travel so enriching: at any given moment, you can do whatever you want. You are in total control of where you will go, how long you will stay, and with whom you will travel. It is a liberating feeling to know that and to be able to take the path, or trajectory, that you choose at any given moment of your travels.

Those who have made this trek through this unique part of the world can attest to most of the things that are written in the following chapters. Moreover, they can empathize with the smells of the cities, the beaches, the unique villages, and the different languages, as well as the colloquialisms, idiosyncrasies, and dialects found in the Spanish language, not to mention the taste of the fresh produce that one finds in every nook and cranny of this beautiful region of the world.

Finally, I would be remiss if I left out one of the most amazing things about this part of the world: the kindness and warmth of people who, by and large, have suffered as a result of wavering politics and economic ideologies, natural disasters, and discrimination. Still, the people of Latin America have an onda (vibe) about them that transcends all of these problems. It is their hospitality
and sincerity that makes this part of the world such a special place to visit.

So, I welcome you to follow the journey of an anthrotourist through Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia, and you will see how this improvised journey helped me to renew my understanding of Latin America, and to see all of humanity in a fresh new way.
Preface
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks to all of those who read various drafts of this book. The incentive for this publishing project was partly provided by my good friend Tony Rosado, whose blog about his month and a half with me in Roatan, Honduras, during the summer of 2011 inspired me to start my own blog. That blog, which was called Anthrotourist, became the foundation of this book.

Many others, especially colleagues from Latin America and the new friends I met during my three-month journey from Honduras to Colombia, helped redefine my understanding of this part of Latin America.

There are too many people to mention; however, you all know who you are and I am forever indebted to all of you for your kindness, hospitality, and willingness to share this adventure with me. This experience would not have been possible without these people.

Special thanks are due to my good friend and colleague, Dr. Irvin Ziemann, for his continual support and
Acknowledgements

guidance during my travels and throughout the process of seeing this book concept come to fruition.

I would also like to thank Jesse Casanova, who provided me with invaluable insights and direction during the editing process. His ideology, albeit a bit contrary to mine on occasion, challenged me in such a way as to bring new perspective on many of the subchapters found in this book. I owe a particular level of appreciation to Jesse Casanova, Kristen Harris, Gospel Kim, Emily Sprecher, and Dr. Irvin Ziemann, who all provided critical feedback and assistance on this book during the editorial process.
Introduction

Since the 1980s, the concept of ecotourism has been explored in countries across the world, specifically countries that seek to create an infrastructure that allows ecotourists to enjoy the natural beauties of the host country. One of the objectives of ecotourism, aside from the ecotour itself, is to educate the tourist about the impact that human beings are having on the environment, therefore creating a culture of awareness regarding environmental responsibility and sustainability. In fact, I would venture to say that most people are very familiar with the term ecotourism; however, what many people may or may not be familiar with are the terms anthrotourism and anthrotourist.

The term anthrotourism, much like the term ecotourism, refers to traveling and experiencing the beauties of other cultures. However, whereas ecotourism refers specifically to ecological adventure and environmental awareness, anthrotourism refers to the idea of exploring the local culture beyond the formal borders of
Anthrotourist

tour guides and organized tours in order to get a true sense of the culture itself. Therefore, anthrotourism allows the anthrotourist to dive deeper into the actual cultural framework and traditions of the people with whom they come into contact.

In order to have a complete understanding of these terms, so that they can be used in their proper context, here are formal definitions of *anthrotourism* and *anthrotourist*.

**Anthrotourism** (*an·thro·tour·ism*)

*Noun*: A specific genre of travel whereby the anthrotourist makes a conscious effort to immerse himself or herself in the local community with the goal of deepening his or her cultural knowledge and awareness of a particular society. Anthrotourism represents a conscious effort to participate in the cultural framework of the local society in order to understand that culture more accurately.

**Anthrotourist** (*an·thro·tour·ist*)

*Noun*: A traveler who makes a conscious effort to understand as well as participate in the local cultural framework of a society in which he or she finds himself or herself.

An anthrotourist is a traveler who is looking for a more anthropological adventure, and while seeking adventure, also respects and appreciates the local customs and traditions of the place that he or she is visiting. Anthrotourism seeks to combine anthropology, backpacking, and tourism. Therefore, one gets the best of all three of those worlds.
By integrating anthropology into traveling, one comes to have a deeper understanding of the culture and the people with whom he or she comes into contact.

Backpacking, or similarly informal travel, is generally done by someone who is willing to improvise and has no specific plans—or a very flexible itinerary—with regard to his or her travel. Many backpackers tend to come into contact with the local people inadvertently, be it on the buses, or in the markets or local restaurants. This allows them to get a feel for the local culture. However, many of these backpackers do not understand the local culture itself; rather, they just know how to travel inexpensively.

Lastly, the traditional tourist is someone who is traveling with a relatively structured agenda, who knows, more or less, what he or she will do at all hours of the day throughout their travels. These tourists tend to avoid the buses and local restaurants because they feel that these places are “dangerous and unsanitary.” They tend to eat at restaurants that resemble the ones they are used to at home, take guided tours, and socialize with other like-minded tourists. This self-imposed isolation doesn’t lend itself to learning about the local culture, but it does resonate with the human desire to travel, see new places, and experience new things.

Anthrotourism seeks to combine all of the three different genres of travel in order to maximize the experience of the traveler, or anthrotourist. Of course, this type of tourism is not for everyone. The purpose of this book is to provide the reader with examples in traveling successfully as an anthrotourist. Personally, I feel that
anthrotourism coalesces three genres of travel by combining the academic and cultural knowledge of the anthropologist, the adventurous spirit of the backpackers, and the (relatively) safe/controlled environment that seems to be a prerequisite for the average tourist.

No matter what you do or where you travel, nothing is ever guaranteed to go as planned. Any time people travel, they must keep that in mind; otherwise when something doesn’t go according to plan, they will be disillusioned. Anthrotourism exploits this unpredictability as a positive thing: the goal of anthrotourism is to provide the travelers with a unique experience so that they can learn more about the culture and customs beyond the guided tours, and to experience the feeling that they have actually, to a certain degree, integrated into the local culture, even if it is only for a short period of time.

Naturally, there are pros and cons of traveling both as a tourist and as a backpacker, but the purpose of this book is not to criticize either one. Rather, the objective is to formally introduce the reader to a specific genre of travel that I have defined as anthrotourism. Since I would consider myself a little bit of all three categories (anthropologist, backpacker, and tourist), I think that many of you who are reading this will identify with certain characteristics in each of the stories.

The concept of anthrotourism in itself already exists simply because there are people who travel this way, be it consciously or unconsciously. However, the purpose of this book is to apply a formal definition to this already-existing concept. The concept of traveling and learning about other cultures is something that has existed since
time immemorial; nevertheless, defining this type of travel is what I intend to do in this book. By doing so, I intend to provide examples and suggestions of how to travel as an anthrotourist. In other words, I am not claiming to be the anthrotourist, but rather, an anthrotourist. I am not creating a new genre of travel; I am providing this specific genre of travel with an academic definition with the hope that the terms themselves will eventually find their way into mainstream travel vocabulary.

The reader will notice that many of the chapters are about traveling and tourism, whereas some of the other chapters are critical analyses of a certain community or ideology as it pertains to the culture itself. The idea of anthrotourism is to appreciate the beauties and idiosyncrasies of a particular country, while at the same time having the capacity to critically analyze that culture objectively without becoming overly judgmental or critical. The anthrotourist must remember that not everyone does things the same way as they are done in one’s own country, and therefore one should respect the things that are unique to these countries without assigning a preconceived value system to them.

The reader will quickly recognize that the routes that I took in this trip can be duplicated by anyone; however, what will always remain unique about my particular trip are my experiences and the people that I met along the way. That is the beauty of anthrotourism; each anthrotourist can embark on his or her own uniquely designed or improvised trip, and no two will be the same. That is one of the advantages of anthrotourism.
Part One
Honduras

[1] Arrival in Honduras

I attempted to leave Tampa, Florida in mid-May, with the intention of arriving a week before my family in order to finalize things for my brother’s wedding in Roatan, Honduras. Unfortunately, when one is traveling, things do not always go as planned. My plan was to leave Tampa, Florida, where I live, and fly via Spirit Airlines to San Pedro Sula, Honduras in mid-May, approximately one week before my brother’s wedding. I could have paid for the direct flight from Tampa to Roatan via Houston; however, I decided to go the “economical” route in order to save approximately $500 USD\(^1\). That meant that I had

\(^1\) USD: United States Dollar
to take Spirit Airlines from Tampa to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, spend the night either in the airport or a hotel, then take a TACA Airlines flight from San Pedro Sula to the island of Roatan the following morning at approximately 10:00 a.m. Traveling that way is much more time-consuming, but it saves you money in the end. However, when I went to check-in for my flight in Tampa, they informed me that my flight had been delayed due to inclement weather in New York, where the plane was coming from. As it turned out, I was not able to leave until the next evening around 10:00 p.m., which would eventually get me to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, at approximately 1:00 a.m. later that night. Thankfully for me, my schedule was flexible, so I simply made a couple of quick phone calls to adjust my flight from San Pedro Sula to Roatan.

Knowing how easily things can go wrong with this kind of travel, I had come prepared to sleep in the airport in San Pedro Sula. I had packed an extra sheet and a makeshift pillow so that I could sleep on the airport floor or on a comfortable row of chairs, but once I arrived in San Pedro Sula, I found there was a hotel near the airport that offered a free ride to and from the hotel as well as a free breakfast. Naturally, I couldn’t resist!

After a great night’s sleep and a good Honduran-style breakfast—eggs, tortilla, beans, fruit, and coffee—I rode to the airport and made it to the check-in counter just in time to be told that the flight I had a reservation for was full, and that I would have to wait for the next flight to
Roatan, which would not leave until tomorrow. So, as one would imagine, I was not exactly thrilled to have to hang out in an airport all day and night—again.

Luckily, after running around trying to find another airline to fly me to the island of Roatan, I ended up chartering a plane with a group of guys who had missed their TACA\(^2\) flight as well. This was the same flight that I was supposed to take that was “full.” However, it turned out that this group of guys had not been allowed to get on the flight because they had showed up late after being stuck in traffic due to an accident on their way to the airport. Unfortunately, even though they were only five minutes late and had gone so far as to call the TACA counter to inform them that they were stuck in traffic, they were still denied their boarding passes when they arrived at the airport. They did all they could to convince the lady at the counter that she should let them on the flight, but to no avail; the TACA lady still had no sympathy for them.

In any case, my new friends and I wandered around the airport, looking for another flight to Roatan, but the commercial flights were all full. It turned out that for approximately $115 USD per person we were able to charter a plane that would take us directly to the island of Roatan. In fact, that price was cheaper than the price of a one-way ticket on TACA Airlines to Roatan. So it actually worked out to our benefit because TACA agreed to give us

---

\(^2\) TACA is a Central American airline that services most of Latin America, and which is headquartered in San Salvador, El Salvador.
a refund for the tickets we had already purchased through them.

Before making our way to the terminal to board the plane, while I was standing around with my new friends, I happened to open my book bag, and they saw that I had a huge biography about Che Guevara. This got their attention and they questioned me about it: “Why are you reading a book about that guy?” I explained that I was interested in knowing more about his life and ideologies as a revolutionary because I was working on an analytical article that compared the revolutionary ideologies of Che Guevara with the revolutionary ideologies of Jesus Christ. It is quite entertaining to bring up a controversial figure such as Che with the people of Latin America, because the people of Latin America either love him or hate him as a result of his ideology, but almost no one is neutral. In fact, while a few of us decided to eat a croissant and drink a quick cup of coffee, I shared with them a little more about my analytical discourse regarding the ideologies of Che and Jesus, which I jokingly called “The Battle of the Beards.” One part of me did it just to test their personal worldview and ideology; however, I already knew where my new friends stood politically, at least regarding their opinion of Che. To them, Che was an arrogant rebel and a subversive who had no right imposing his Marxist ideology on the people of Cuba, Africa, and Bolivia.
Jesus has been an intriguing figure to humanity since his birth. In fact, as a result of a number of outside forces and factors, he was hidden from the Jewish king, Herod. Moving forward to his life as an adult and his ministry during the final years of his life, Jesus is believed to be the son of God, and therefore, part of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). This particular view of Jesus is not unanimous. His divinity has been heavily debated among skeptics, Jews, and Muslims to this day.

For example, whereas the foundational principle of Christianity is to accept Jesus as the Son of God and God in the flesh, sent to earth to save humanity from its sins, the Jews and the Muslims do not share that belief of Jesus. The Jews accept Jesus as a historical figure. He was believed to be a rabbi and a prophet. Similarly, the Muslims accept Jesus as a historical figure, and they see him as the prophet who preceded Mohammed.

Jesus’s revolutionary ideology, in itself, was one of peace. In fact, in the Gospels, we see Jesus constantly speak of forgiveness, love, and equality. At this particular juncture in history, the Romans ruled over Israel and established their rule and their law over the Jews. Be that as it may, Jesus’s ideology in itself was not necessarily viewed as a threat to the Romans, but rather to the Jewish priesthood. The reason for this was because Jesus’s followers claimed he was the Messiah. He established a new precedent on how people should be treated, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jew) alike. Under this ideology, the
Gentiles, who were accustomed to being ostracized by the Jews, began to feel a sense of empowerment, and therefore began to listen to, and even follow, Jesus. Ideologically, Jesus spoke of love—not just the idea of love in itself, but rather the action as well.

Additionally, Jesus spoke of forgiveness and a kingdom that was not of this world. What made Jesus unique as a revolutionary, ideologically speaking, is that he did not promote war or violence in a time when the Jewish people were waiting for a revolutionary leader who would free them from the oppressive Roman rule. In fact, he said that he, personally, was going to lay down his own life, not only for his friends, but also for his enemies. Therefore, the idea of bloodshed in terms of Jesus’s ideology was a reality, insomuch as it required him to personally lay down his own life and ultimately shed his own blood; an ideology and example that eventually gave rise to a group of people who adopted this love ideology and in the beginning were derogatorily named “Christians,” or followers of Christ.

On the contrary, Che Guevara, with regard to bloodshed and his revolutionary ideology, believed that the only way to true revolutionary change was by armed struggle, which would ultimately cost many lives both for Che’s revolutionary forces and the opposition. However, before delving into the descriptive details of Che’s revolutionary ideology, I would like to offer a brief introduction to the life of Che himself.
Che, unlike Jesus, grew up in a relatively well-to-do family. He was part of a family that—although they found themselves moving for much of Che’s young adult life—was fortunate enough to provide him with a stable upbringing. Additionally, Che was able to study medicine and ultimately become a physician. That, however, was not enough for Che. Working as a doctor and living in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was not the “ideal” lifestyle for him. In fact, the more he began to be exposed to humanity through a variety of trips through Latin America, the more he began to see the disparity between social classes and the oppression that, according to Che, was a result of the hegemonic, imperialist power to the north, the United States of America.

As Che began to travel, live, and work in various parts of Latin America, he found himself more and more exposed to the reality and the severity of the struggles of the lower classes. He began to grow angry with the situation and the lack of respect for humanity that he witnessed.

Although this became the driving force behind grooming Che into “El Comandante” and sparking his violent revolutionary ideology, he had not always been that way. Che grew up admiring Gandhi and respecting his pacifism. It was not until he began to witness the oppression and lack of equality throughout Latin America, as a result of his travels, that he began to search for a solution to fight this inequality, eventually concluding it would have to be achieved with violence. He found himself
reading literature from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, and other leftist thinkers and revolutionaries, thus helping to formulate his mentality and ideology as a revolutionary—an ideology that ultimately labeled his followers as “Guevaristas,” or followers of Che Guevara’s ideology.

Both of these iconic figures found their sense of identity in their ideology. As I have previously mentioned, Che’s revolutionary ideology was rooted in Marxist principles and a sense of growing anger toward the imperialist nations of the time: the United States and the Soviet Union. Ironically, even though Che himself did not agree with the ideologies of the Soviet Union, primarily because of their imperialist hegemony, Cuba ultimately found itself partnering with them at the end of the Cuban Revolution.

Che’s ideology, albeit rooted in Marxist principles, began to take on an identity of its own as Cuba found itself at the threshold of a new era—an era that would last to the present day. Unfortunately for Cuba, Che would not live to see what it has become. I would argue that it is not the Cuba that Che dreamed of when he first stepped off of the Granma\(^3\) with more than eighty other Cubans to fight against an oppressive, U.S.-backed dictatorship. Nevertheless, the image of Che as the figurehead of the

---

\(^3\) Granma was the name of the boat that Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and approximately 80 other Cuban revolutionaries navigated from the coast of Mexico to Cuba in 1956.
Cuban revolution remains to this day in the streets of Cuba, on its money, and on the shirts of people across Latin America: an image that has come to represent idealism and hope for many people, not only in Latin America, but also in the rest of the world. Che as a person—and an ideology—is a dividing line between social classes across Latin America. Those that find themselves benefiting from the social injustices that plague Latin America feel threatened even at the mention of his name. However, those who have found themselves on the other side of social injustices revere Che as someone who has offered Latin America a hope that leads them to believe that it is possible to bring about social change.

In the same way, the name of Jesus has served as a hope for many across the world. Jesus, just like Che, found his sense of purpose in his ideology. Moreover, Jesus, as a human, offered people a sense of hope towards a better life. Jesus’ ideology was rooted in peace during a time when the people who suffered social injustices under the imperialists of their day, the Romans, were looking for someone who would come and bring about change through war. Jesus, through his ideology, offered both Jew and Gentile a solution that would be rooted in non-violence, and would not only give them hope in this life, but also of peace in the afterlife. Therefore, it would be a fair assessment to say that both Jesus and Che confronted the most powerful empires of their time, Rome and the United States.
One could also allege that Che, just like Jesus, was motivated by injustice and was passionate about effecting change. Of course, as history has told us, they went about it in very distinct ways. As I have noted, Che believed in and promoted armed revolutions across Latin America and Africa, whereas Jesus’s revolutionary ideology was that of peace. And although both of them sought to bring a sense of equality to the people of their day through their ideologies, the way in which it was carried out put their ideologies in direct opposition.

Che’s Marxist ideology has left its mark on Latin America, and, in fact, has been the spark that has given rise to numerous leftist political parties and leaders such as the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) in El Salvador and the FSLN (Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional) in Nicaragua, as well as inspiring other prominent leftist leaders such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia.

On the other hand, after Jesus’s death, his followers began to evangelize and carry out his ideologies across the world in order to promote peace, equality, and a kingdom that transcends any earthly and political movement or ideology. They encouraged anyone who chose to adhere to this ideology to seek out a personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe and become transformed from the inside out.

According to Jesus’s ideology, a peaceful, spiritual shift was the only way to true revolutionary change that would transform humanity as a whole, while Che’s
revolutionary ideology encouraged people to rise up and kill their fellow human beings if necessary, in order to bring about a change in humanity.

No one can debate whether or not Che was passionate about the oppressed people who suffered as a result of political or socioeconomic injustices. However, his ideologies encouraged the oppressed to band together and participate in acts of violence against the oppressor. One could assert that a peaceful, nonviolent revolution bears better, longer-lasting results. On the other hand, whereas a bloody revolution could, in theory, bring about positive social change, its longevity is very precarious. In fact, even though an armed revolution or a violent revolution might bring legitimate change, it has also historically been proven to beget more violence and spawn other violent acts of retaliation that ultimately result in more bloodshed. That is simply the nature of violence.

Thus the longevity of social change through violence is extremely uncertain, and is consequently met with violent resistance from the opposition. A nonviolent revolution, as seen in the case of Jesus, seems to bear better long-term change because this type of ideology did not necessarily require a change in the formal government structures of the time; rather, it referred to a spiritual change that required people to change their worldview from the inside. In other words, it was a movement that suggested that humanity needed to look inward for change. Whereas this type of ideology is not a quick fix, I personally think that it offers more longevity because its
ideologies are not predicated on any system of government; rather, it is a system of beliefs that is predicated on an individual’s personal decisions to seek a spiritual change in his or her own life and therefore bring about change, one individual at a time. Naturally, this approach to revolution is a much longer process; however, I would like to suggest that it is the better of the two options, given its track record throughout history.

After my discourse about the “Battle of the Beards,” which was really only a ten-minute conversation, we made our way to the terminal to look for and board the plane that we had chartered. One could romanticize about the idea of chartering a plane; however, in order to keep the reader from romanticizing too much, I have to admit that the plane was far from luxurious. It was a two-prop plane that had just enough seats for the ten of us that were on board. I am not entirely sure how they managed to get our luggage inside the plane because I do not know where they found the room to store it.

All that separated us from the pilots was a small sliding door. I was in the front seat and almost felt like one

---

4 The use of “Jesus” or “God” in any manipulative way does not negate the fact that Jesus’s ideology, albeit rebellious in theory, was one of peace. It’s important not to blame this ideology for atrocities such as the Crusades and other racist or “religious” agendas or ideologies who use the “Word of God” as a tool to manipulate the masses and thereby carry out violent acts against humanity such as the Inquisition. Please be careful not to associate these historical blunders with the ideology put forth by Jesus as seen in the New Testament of the Holy Bible.
of the pilots because I was so close to them. I was glad that I wasn’t the pilot, because after seeing all of the little buttons and switches on the control panel, I was amazed that they could operate this tiny plane at all. Nonetheless, the flight, albeit a bit turbulent, was a quick and easy 45-minute jump from San Pedro Sula, Honduras over the Caribbean Sea to the island of Roatan.


Once I made it to Roatan, after dealing with my airport fiasco and “living” in the San Pedro Sula Airport for what seemed like an eternity, I was able to take care of the on-the-ground arrangements for my brother’s wedding, which turned out to be an extraordinary experience. In fact, this type of destination wedding takes the concept of anthrotourism to a whole new level.

It had all started with my brother, Justin, calling me while I was still in the United States and announcing to me that he and Brittany, his fiancée, were getting married and that they wanted to have the wedding in Roatan.

Of course I was happy to help; however, I had never put together a wedding in my life, and quite frankly, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Nevertheless, I said, “Yes,” and began to make phone calls and to send emails to all of my friends in Roatan to see how to go about
making this wedding something that they would never forget. He’s my brother, so I wanted it to be out of this world. Once my friends found out that it was my brother who was getting married, they were eager to make this destination wedding a reality. Let me add the fact that Brittany had never been to Roatan until three days before the wedding. So, as anyone who has dealt with arranging a wedding for the bride can imagine, the pressure was on.

To make matters worse, the only responses that I got from my brother and Brittany were, “It’s whatever” from Justin, and “No matter what you do, it will be special because I am marrying your brother” from Brittany. Anyone who has orchestrated a wedding knows that these are not the things you want to hear. I needed details and specifics about flowers, food, music, etc., because I didn’t want to take the liberty of making those decisions as if it were my own wedding.

Thankfully, my friends, with whom I had spoken from the United States, had already been working diligently on putting together the wedding, which made my life a whole lot easier. Three days before the wedding, the wedding party arrived, and that’s when I really felt the pressure. Just like any good host or wedding coordinator, I wanted to make sure that everyone was comfortable and that everyone was having a good time. Now I know how the mother of the bride feels.

For those of you who have never been to a place as laid-back as Roatan, you need to understand that things do
not operate the way things do in the United States. Even though you call people three or four times, you still need to go by their house and make sure that everything goes as planned. This includes checking up on the pastor who will be doing the wedding, the musicians, the people bringing the food, and the people doing the decorations. Nevertheless, everything went according to plan, even though the pastor showed up a bit late, as did many of the guests. That’s how it goes in most of Latin America.

In recognition of this fact, we intentionally set the wedding at an arbitrary time so that we could start approximately one or two hours “late,” which almost guaranteed that everything would be set up “on time.” Flexibility and patience are virtues that you are obligated to embrace when trying to put together a destination wedding in a developing country. It is really not a big deal, because it takes away the pressure of being “on time” and allows you to embrace the moment just as one should.

Eventually the wedding started. The ceremony was set on a private, white sand beach that was adorned with palm leaves, conch shells, and tropical flowers. It was just as one would imagine it to be. It was perfect. After the ceremony, everyone walked up the hill to the reception area, which was set around an infinity pool decorated with tables covered with bowls filled with candles, Birds of Paradise, and white sand from the beach at the bottom of the hill. In fact, my friend Marvin’s wife Shahira, who did

5 Developing country is the politically correct term used to describe a third-world country.
all of the decorations, went so far as to hand-carve, out of Styrofoam, two swans kissing to put in the infinity pool, which we anchored down with conch shells.

The entire wedding reception overlooked the Caribbean Sea, and as if that was not enough, there was a bar and lounge area that boasted even more exquisite decorations, while leaving enough room for the Garifunathe Garifuna\textsuperscript{6} dancers to give a performance for all of the guests. They danced Punta, a native dance exclusive to the Garifuna. And in addition to trying to get everyone else to dance Punta, they sang and played music on tortoise shells, bongo drums, and conch shells, which are essential instruments in their traditional music. Most of the Garifuna dancers were part of the wedding party, and showed up to enjoy the ceremony as well.

After enjoying the dance show, we had Delphus, the wedding musician, serenade everyone with live Caribbean music during the wedding dinner. And just when the bride and groom thought their wedding was over, there was a fire show where Paul, the fireman, his girlfriend, and even his daughter performed for the guests. They twirled fire around, lit the ground on fire and danced around the flames, and even hula-hooped with fire, leaving the bride and groom beyond satisfied and grateful for

\textsuperscript{6} The Garifuna are a group of Afro-Caribbean people who currently inhabit the Bay Islands of Honduras, mainland Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize. They escaped from the British slave trade and left the island of Saint Vincent in the late 1700s and eventually made their way to what is now called The Bay Islands of Honduras, mainland Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize.
having come this far to have their wedding in beautiful Roatan, Honduras.

After the wedding, I was able to take my family around and show them the island, a place that had stolen my heart ten years earlier. My father had never had the chance to travel around Latin America with me, so it gave him the opportunity to experience anthrotourism firsthand, as I took him to parts of Roatan that very few tourists have the luxury of visiting.

There are essentially two reasons why the average tourist is scared to go deeper into a developing community: (1) the fear of being robbed and (2) the fear of contracting some disease due to unsanitary conditions. Many tourists prefer the safe, sanitized places when they are traveling, even though deep down inside they leave with the desire to learn more about the community, city, or country in general; and as my dad likes to put it, experience something “authentic.”

Unfortunately, many of these “authentic” places tend to be full of trash, and look dangerous because they are totally unknown and “foreign” to the tourists; thus, they play it safe and never leave the guided tours, the expensive hotels, and the clean restaurants. By choosing to stay “safe,” they never get to meet the genuine people of these communities and never get to see what daily life is really like in these places. Many of the Caribbean islands, such as Roatan, boast beautiful beaches and resorts that attract tourists; however, what these areas fail to show is the extreme poverty that plagues so many of these places.
These resorts give you the “no worries” feel, as if all of the local islanders enjoy countless hours in hammocks, eat fresh lobsters and fish every day, and drink *Cuba Libres* (rum and coke) at sunset. This is a façade that these resorts sell to the tourists to give them the “island feel.” Yes, most islanders are tranquil, friendly people; however, they have worries and concerns like any other human being. The difference between most of them and the tourists is that the islanders (or average Honduran for that matter) concern themselves with what they are going to eat on a day-to-day basis and how they will make enough money to take care of their family, which is quite contrary to the illusion seen by most tourists who wish they could “live the islander life.”

I was able to show my father the real Roatan so that he could see how the average locals live in their day-to-day life. In fact, as we walked through some of the communities on the eastern side of Roatan, I shared with him some real-life stories about people I know who had no other option but to get into drug trafficking or prostitution. I shared with him stories about kids that I know who have gone days without eating and secretly suffer from hunger pains, but walk around with a smile on their face so you will not know that they are starving. Additionally, I told him stories about mothers who have had to prostitute their daughters to people who come in on the cruise ships just so that they can make enough money to buy food. Or about
friends who got involved with drug trafficking and were ultimately killed or incarcerated as a result. These stories are not unique to Roatan; in fact, these are relatively common stories that you might hear throughout the developing world. Stories of child slavery, child prostitution, and drug trafficking are some of the realities that must be dealt with if we are to continue to develop as a society and as a human race.

I took my dad into some of the houses of my friends who live in these neighborhoods, and I also took him to the heart of the community, the soccer field. He was able to meet people and socialize with people in communities where most tourists will never even consider visiting. It is unfortunate for these tourists, because I consider the eastern end of Roatan to be where the real culture exists.

This part of Roatan is home to approximately four different cultural groups\(^7\) that all live within ten square miles of one another. For example, Punta Gorda is home to the Garifuna, or Black Caribs (or Garinagu\(^8\)) of Roatan.

The Garifuna have a very interesting and unique history, in addition to a fascinating culture and language.

---

\(^7\) With regard to the cultural groups that live in Roatan, I chose to exclude the influx of foreigners who have moved to this island to retire, for investment purposes, or both. Also, I chose to not include the small group of Mayan Indians who work on the western end of the Island of Roatan because they are primarily from Guatemala. They are primarily there to sell artisan crafts to tourist in West End and West Bay.

\(^8\) Garinagu is the term that the Garifuna people use on occasion when referring to themselves. The term itself means “black people” in Garifuna.
They are escaped slaves of the British who managed to flee San Vincent Island in the southeastern Caribbean. From there, they made their way to the Bay Islands of Honduras, as well as the mainland of Central America in Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. They have managed to keep their language and tradition intact for over 200 years, which I personally find to be quite extraordinary.

Just across the mountains from the Garifuna community of Punta Gorda, in the township of Oak Ridge, the black English-speaking Bay Islanders, also known as Native Bay Islanders, live in a place called Pandy Town. In fact, these Native Bay Islanders could have been related to the Garifuna at one point in their history, but they were enslaved by the British, forced to speak English, and to work as slaves for the British who inhabited this part of the Caribbean until approximately 140 years ago, when the Bay Islands became part of Honduras. The only way to tell the difference between a Garifuna and a black English-speaking Bay Islander is that the Native Bay Islander’s first language is English instead of Garifuna. Physically they have very similar features because both groups are probably descendants of the same group of African slaves from San Vincent.

Another group that lives within the township of Oak Ridge is the Mosquito people who have come from La Mosquitia (the Mosquito Coast of Honduras) to live on the island. They are also called “Sambos” as a kind of nickname, and speak Spanish as well as an indigenous language that is native to the Mosquito Coast of Honduras.
and Nicaragua. The Mosquito Coast is located on the northeastern part of Nicaragua and the southeastern part of Honduras along the Nicaraguan border.

The white English-speaking Bay Islanders live in Oak Ridge, as well as in the township of Jonesville. They are also referred to as “Caracoles” and are said to be the descendants of the British. In fact, some could perhaps be descendants of the pirates that frequented the waters of the Bay Islands in the 1800s. Nevertheless, they are now integrated into Roatan society and also live on the eastern end of the island.

The last group is the Latino, or Ladino. They are sprinkled across the island, and were the last of these groups to come to Roatan. They arrived when The Bay Islands became part of Honduras in the mid-19th century. They generally came in search of jobs and what they perceived would be a better life. Many of the Latino people on the mainland have bought into the misconception that jobs are easy to find on Roatan and that you can make lots of money there. Though that might be true for approximately three percent of the islanders, it is certainly not a luxury that everyone is granted upon arrival to the island. That luxury is reserved by and large for the white English-speaking Bay Islanders (and the occasional Native Bay Islander and Latino).

I was excited to have introduced my dad to his first anthrotourist experience; however, it did not end there. Since my dad is a big fan of fishing, I made a couple of phone calls to some friends and had them hook me up (no
pun intended) with their friends so that I could take my
dad, my brother, his wife, my cousin, and my friend Tony
on an all-day deep-sea fishing adventure. Unfortunately
for my dad, we were almost skunked: however, luckily for
us, when we were on our way back to shore, a three-and-a-
half-foot barracuda decided it would take the bait from one
of our trolling rods. I let my dad reel the barracuda in so
that he could tell his friends back in North Carolina, USA,
that he caught a fish when he went fishing in the
Caribbean. Thank God we did not walk away empty-
handed. Well, actually, we did technically walk away empty-handed, because we gave our captain the fish to
take home to enjoy with his family. I spooked my dad by
telling him that there are times of the year where the
barracuda has mercury in its meat and therefore it is not
recommended to eat it. However, I let him know that we
could test it before we ate it, just in case he was interested
in eating barracuda. I explained to him that the best way to
test it is to cook the steaks and then put a piece outside. If
the flies land on it and the ants are willing to eat it, then it
is safe for us to eat too. It’s as simple as that. Apparently
that wasn’t reassuring enough for him, so he opted to give
the captain the fish for his family. All in all, I think he was
just happy to have been out all day in the Caribbean on a
boat; catching the fish was just icing on the cake.

One of the other reasons for my stay in Roatan was that I
was doing work with our nonprofit organization, CAN
Fútbol Foundation, Inc. (CANFF). CANFF is a nonprofit organization that I co-founded in 2007; it operates under the auspices of Intensive Heart Ventures, Inc. The reason for CANFF’s inception was to address the need for young soccer players to stay in school. The idea of CANFF is to use the sport of soccer as the vehicle to promote education, public health, and community development. I co-founded this organization with my close friends Tony Rosado and Joseph Natale. Tony has been my roommate and teammate for over six years and Joseph has been a colleague of mine for over ten years and also happens to be the president of Intensive Heart Ventures, Inc. In fact, I came to know Joseph by coming to work as a volunteer for Intensive Heart Ventures, Inc., as well as playing soccer for the team that he owned in Roatan in 2001. It was because of this experience that I was driven to start a nonprofit organization that would inspire the youth of this island to take education seriously as an option for upward mobility. Something Ernesto “Che” Guevara said to the people of Cuba during the Cuban Revolution really resonates with me: “A people who cannot read or write are a people who are easily deceived.” So in order to help prevent these youth from growing up and becoming deceived by politicians with personal interests in mind, I needed to help them take their studies seriously. Because the only true solution to breaking the curse of poverty that has plagued this part of the world since the Spanish Conquest is education.
It would be overly idealistic to assume that CANFF will cure this epidemic of poverty; however, if through CANFF we can give these young student-athletes hope, then we have been successful in planting a seed of ambition in their lives. In its three and a half years of existence, CANFF has become well-known on the island of Roatan and has brought over $50,000 USD in soccer equipment, computers, and school equipment to the community of Oak Ridge, Roatan. This alone has motivated the youth of this community to embrace this sport and development\(^9\) approach by taking education seriously, as well as working as a group in order to slowly but surely clean up their neighborhood and rid the community of epidemics such as malaria and dengue.

This is another facet of anthrotourism: the idea of creating sustainable development in communities through development projects in order to offer the people of these underprivileged communities a solution to their problems that they themselves can take ownership of.

\(^9\) Sport and Development is a term that I use to refer to the model employed by CANFF that seeks to use the sport of soccer as the vehicle to promote education, public health, and community development. Additionally, it is the use of the sport as the vehicle or medium to carry out large-scale change, and is not the idea of just playing the sport for its own sake. “Sport and Development” is the idea that the sport itself can be used for more than just exercise. In this context, it can be used as the motivating factor that encourages everyone involved to take other facets of personal development seriously. For more information on this development strategy, visit the International Platform on Sport and Development.
I am convinced that by embracing the idea of anthrotourism and assuming the role of anthrotourists in communities such as these, we as humans will truly come to understand the needs of other people. When we can combine this type of indigenous knowledge of a community with our own personal education in development strategies then we are able to help make the world a better place. It is not the government of these countries that will help solve these problems, but rather anthrotourists and humanitarian-minded people who see a solution to the world’s problems, and act to make it a better place for all to live, not just a select few privileged people or countries.

[3] Leaving Roatan Soon

As I was sitting in my apartment in Roatan overlooking the Caribbean Sea and reflecting on the past month, I was filled with two emotions: one part of me wanted to stay, and the other part of me was ready to continue to travel south through Central America. My time in Roatan was filled with life-changing experiences. In addition to these unforgettable experiences with family and friends, we had been doing extraordinary work on the eastern end of this island with CANFF. Of course, as always, it was full of TICA\textsuperscript{10} moments. Nevertheless, being in Roatan is a sort

\textsuperscript{10} TICA is an acronym that stands for “This Is Central America.” It is a term that I use to “explain” unexplainable and illogical mishaps in Central America. In other words, TICA refers to something that should have worked out
of homecoming for me. I always look forward to kayaking and snorkeling in the reefs, playing soccer in the different communities across the island, visiting friends and hanging out, and occasionally, just sitting on the porch and staring out into the Caribbean Sea and realizing how thankful I am just to have woken up to live another day.

I personally feel that grassroots movements such as CANFF are just what the developing world needs to give their communities a sense of hope. We all “speak soccer,” and through that, we can begin to combat issues such as malaria, dengue fever, HIV/AIDS, substandard education, unemployment, and public health care. These are by no means quick fixes; however, using the power of soccer, or sports in general, to carry out these large scale initiatives is a legitimate roadmap for positive, large-scale social change in the developing world. Through education, we can offer people a vision of a brighter future. At least, that has been my observation since the inception of CANFF in 2007/08. Now, here in Roatan, we are beginning to see hope in people who at one point felt hopeless.

So, needless to say, leaving the island for me is always bittersweet. I know that I will return to continue to oversee our work with CANFF and to begin to watch the communities in which we work continue to take ownership efficiently or smoothly; however, contrary to what one may have expected, this particular scenario or event did not work out in a logical or rational manner.
of this movement; yet, it is still hard for me to leave this place. One thing that makes Roatan unique in Central America is its diversity. Of course, Central America in itself is full of diverse cultures; however, Roatan, a thirty-three-by-five-mile-island, hosts over four different distinct culture groups: the Garifuna (Black Caribs), the Caracoles (White Islanders), Black Islanders (Native Bay Islanders), and Ladinos (Latinos). Of course, as I have already discussed earlier in this chapter, they all have their own distinct communities and cultural uniqueness, but the one thing that unites all of these groups is soccer. In fact, soccer fields here, just like in most countries across the developing world, are the heart of the community. And when the soccer field throbs to the beat of a soccer game, nothing can be compared to the atmosphere that you live in when you are part of it.

[4] San Pedro Sula

Upon our arrival in San Pedro Sula, Tony, Luis,¹¹ and I hit the ground running. We knew that we only had one day to get all the preparations together for the CANFF soccer and education event that we were hosting. Having that in mind, we landed ready to get to work. However, before we even got out of the airport, we had already lived a TICA moment.

¹¹ Luis is CANFF’s on-the-ground director in Honduras.
Before I went to Roatan, I had a small issue with TACA (as noted in a previous subchapter) and I had been expecting a refund for the ticket I never used. At this point, a month had already gone by and I still had not received the refund. So, I figured I would try to change the name on the ticket and give it to Luis so that he could fly back to Roatan for free. Well, just when we thought that was going to work, the lady working at the counter asked me, “Are you expecting a refund?” I told her that I was, but I had not received one yet. And after wasting more time hearing her explain their return policy to me for the second time, I told her that I would just wait for the refund because it wasn’t an urgent matter. By now, approximately 30 minutes had passed and we knew we needed to get moving. Besides, our taxi driver was waiting impatiently because he had bought a bunch of meat products at the grocery store before picking us up and he needed to get them home so he could put them in the refrigerator. So I told the lady at the TACA counter, “It’s okay, I’ll just buy him a plane ticket.” Then she looked at me and said, “We are closed now. We cannot sell a ticket.” I honestly thought it was a joke, but apparently she was serious. The only thing I could do was laugh as I looked over at Luis who was just as perplexed and dumbfounded as I was.

After that fiasco, and after finally making it to our hotel, we asked the receptionist of the hotel to hire us a taxi to drive us around San Pedro Sula for our errands. We knew that we had limited time because Tony and I needed
to buy our bus tickets for Nicaragua and we needed to do that before 5:30 p.m. or we would not get to go to Nicaragua in the morning. Having the taxi drive us around all day long cost us less than $75 USD, so it was definitely money well spent. However, just when we thought things were going smoothly, I went to a bank to take out money at an ATM to pay people for the things we were buying. Apparently no one likes credit cards in the “industrial capital” of Honduras, and you have to do just about everything with cash. In another true “TICA” moment, my credit card was “eaten” by the ATM machine.

I went into the bank to ask them to get my card and the girl told me that there was nothing she could do, and that the maintenance guy had already come today and that he only comes twice a week. After wasting about ten minutes talking with her, I told her that we were going to resolve this, and if she couldn’t help me, then to please put me in touch with someone who was capable of solving problems. She sent the manager over, and the manager told me that she would take care of it and that we should come back in an hour. In my heart, I thought that the bank manager was just saying that so that I would leave and they could wipe their hands clean of this situation because in all reality, they were going to be closing in an hour anyway.

Nevertheless, it was a relief to at least hear her say that she was going to “try” to help. So we hopped in our taxi and went to the bus station, only to find out that we were not able to buy a ticket without our passports, which
we had left at the hotel for reasons that escape me now. At this point it was about 3:30 p.m. and we needed to go back to the bank, go back to the hotel to get our passports, then pay people for the merchandise that we bought for the soccer tournament and still make it back to the terminal to buy our tickets before 5:30 p.m. Fortunately, our taxi guy knew what he was doing (and was a bit *loco*\(^{12}\) behind the wheel), because we managed to pull it off and finish doing what we needed to do. However, when I checked my account later that evening, I found that the ATM that ate my card also charged me $210 for the privilege. Apparently that was the fee it charged to eat cards. Of course I resolved that with my bank later. However, in all honesty, I was just happy to get my card back from the bank as promised by the bank supervisor.

\[12\] *Loco:* Spanish for “crazy.”
Part Two
Nicaragua


We dragged ourselves out of bed in San Pedro Sula at approximately 3:30 a.m. and called our taxi driver to make sure he decided to wake up in time to take us to the bus station. And just like the “obedient” gringos we are, we arrived at 4:00 a.m., just as the appropriately-named Tica Bus employee had asked us to do the day before. Of course, that meant that we were the first people to arrive. Well, except for the employee who asked us to show up at 4:00 a.m. Maybe he was bored and knew he would need someone to talk to. I am not sure whether he even slept, given his weathered demeanor, so you can imagine how happy I was to find out that he was not the driver.

In any case, we got our bus tickets and took off from San Pedro Sula to Managua, Nicaragua, and having
only consumed a plate of fruit and some orange juice on the entire fourteen-hour bus ride, we arrived in Managua relatively tired and extremely hungry. Normally the bus ride from San Pedro Sula to Managua does not take quite as long; however, when the driver has to get out and change a tour bus tire in the rain, you can generally expect a delay in arrival time. So, we left Honduras at 5:00 a.m. and arrived in Nicaragua at 7:00 p.m. From the bus terminal, we took a taxi to our hotel, which was across the street from the international airport in Managua.

The taxi was in need of repair: as we drove, you could feel the car shaking and swaying from side to side. Nevertheless, we made it safe and sound to our hotel and wasted no time checking in. After dumping our stuff in the room, we went to the restaurant and had quite possibly the best meal I had eaten thus far in my travels. I am not sure whether it was because the food was so good or because I was famished from not eating for fourteen hours.

Nevertheless, the plate of steak with *chimichurri*¹, plantains, rice and beans, water and Nicaraguan coffee was just what the doctor ordered; *un plato típico de Nicaragua* (a typical dish from Nicaragua).

---

¹ Chimichurri is a pesto-like condiment from Argentina that's made with parsley, garlic, and olive oil and is used as a topping for steak.
[6] It’s Good to Be Back in Nicaragua

Every time I come back to Nicaragua, I realize how awesome this country is. Of course, it is not free of political and economic problems; however, there is just something about Nicaragua that I love and that always draws me back. Maybe it’s the people, the landscape, the food and coffee, the beaches, or maybe it is all of the above. In any case, Tony, Jeanette (Tony’s girlfriend, who arrived the night before from Florida), and I woke up this morning and had an amazing Nicaraguan breakfast that consisted of gallo pinto\(^2\), fresh fruits (papaya, pineapple, and watermelon), an omelet, croissants, coffee, milk and fresh orange juice.

After breakfast, we walked across the street to the airport and rented a 4×4 truck and then headed south to a little beach town called Popoyo, about two and a half hours from Managua. The best way to get there is to do the following: Make a few rights at the roundabouts (near the giant signs of Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua’s president), then a left or two at the stop signs (near more signs of Ortega), and then go down a dirt road for about 45 minutes where you drive across a few rivers, before arriving at a town called Las Salinas. Then you go over a bridge and drive about three minutes due west and there you are in Popoyo. Seems simple, right?

---

\(^2\) Gallo Pinto is a typical dish served in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and consists of rice, black beans, and occasionally chopped up tomatoes and onions. This dish is generally served at breakfast; however, it can be eaten at any time of the day.
On the way to Popoyo, we made a little detour and I took Jeanette and Tony to the Masaya Volcano. The Masaya Volcano, also known as Popogatepe (“Burning Mountain,” in Chorotega\(^3\)), is an active volcano near Managua. It seemed a bit more active than normal this time, and was pouring out a significant amount of sulfuric smoke. During the pre-Colombian period before the arrival of Christopher Columbus the local indigenous groups believed that when the volcano was overly active, it meant that the gods were angry; in order to appease the gods, they sacrificed children by throwing them into the mouth of the volcano.

Walking around at the top near the crater with all the smoke swirling around was like breathing in pure sulfur. Nevertheless, we still decided to walk around a bit and then climb the 184 stairs that led to the summit of the volcano; there is a cross posted there at the summit that looks down into La Boca del Diablo (The Devil’s Mouth\(^4\)). The cross, named La Cruz de Bobadilla\(^5\) (Bobadilla’s Cross) by the Spanish priests, was the Catholics’ attempt to exorcise the volcano, as it was a place for indigenous ceremonies and sacrifices. The Masaya Volcano continues

\(^3\) Chorotega, also known as Mangue, is an indigenous language spoken by the people of Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua.

\(^4\) La Boca del Diablo, or Devil’s Mouth, was the name given to the crater by the Spaniards during the colonial period in Nicaragua.

\(^5\) La Cruz de Bobadilla, or Bobadilla’s Cross, was named after Father Bobadilla, a priest during the colonial period in Nicaragua.
to be extremely active to this day, and the views from the summit are breathtaking.

The trip from Managua to Popoyo is always an interesting ride. This time it was particularly interesting because we were fortunate enough to have rented a rugged, 2011 4×4, as the dirt roads were a little muddy from the rain. So as soon as we hit the dirt roads and locked in the 4H (occasionally 4L to get through the rivers), it was 45 minutes of pure off-roading.

Once we made it to Popoyo to the place where we were staying, Rancho Amanecer, we unloaded our stuff and then took off to spend the last moments of daylight sitting in a natural hot spring, just relaxing our bones from the long bus ride from Honduras to Nicaragua the day before and the three hours of off-roading we had just experienced.

The hot springs are nearly impossible to find unless you know the area. What is so unique about them is that they are heated by a volcano that is over 20 miles away, Volcano Mombacho. The locals made a concrete pool-like structure, so that as the water comes up from the ground, it is trapped in the “pool,” thus creating a place for people to hang out, bathe, and even wash clothes. There are smaller pools for washing clothes, and in fact, this is the only source of hot water for the locals of Las Salinas. Approximately 99.9% of the townspeople do not have hot water in their homes. So this natural resource provides the
community with hot water for washing clothes and bathing.

As soon as the sun set and it began to get dark, we made our way back to our house to fix dinner, hang out, enjoy a quiet evening in Popoyo, and hope the power didn’t go out on us in the middle of the night, something that happens around here with relative consistency.


Over the last ten years of my life and more, I have spent a majority of time living in or visiting Latin America, specifically Central America, and I have noticed that generally what has accompanied development has been the increase in crime. I know that may seem logical; however, my question is: Why are people not doing anything to prevent the crime that seemingly evolves and emerges as a result of development?

When I mention the term “development” in this subchapter, I am referring to the type of development that is a result of outside investors. In other words, I am referring to a kind of development that has a capitalist mindset. In fact, just so I am abundantly clear, what I am not referring to is the type of grassroots development that generally happens as a result of nonprofit or development organizations such as USAID, UNICEF, Habitat for
Anthrotourist

Humanity, and other community-based development organizations.

The purpose of this subchapter is to try to understand how and why, in coastal surf towns of Central America, there seems to be an increase in criminal activity, specifically petty theft and robbery, once a certain level of development is attained in these previously underprivileged communities. It helps to understand the evolution of crime as a result of development so that in the future, developers can successfully integrate the local people into the development process in order to do the following: (1) lower the crime rate between locals and foreigners, and (2) create a more even distribution of wealth among all the people in the community. Studies have shown that the lack of proper distribution of wealth is one of the key elements in the increase in criminal activity targeted at foreigners in developing countries.6

It is not development in itself, necessarily, that is the culprit; however, there is definitely a certain cause and effect that comes as a result of development. In addition, it does not mean that development is bad; rather, what it means is that the current method of development we are seeing in these costal surf towns does not take into account a group of marginalized players who become even more

6 For more information related to this topic, read “Theories of crime and development: An historical perspective” from the Journal of Development Studies, 1989.
marginalized as a result of the development of these particular tourist-oriented surf towns.

Let’s use Nicaragua as an example. We are going to use Las Salinas and its local beach town named Popoyo as the case study. This particular “surf town” is located in Southwest Nicaragua about one and a half hours north of the border with Costa Rica.

Approximately ten to twelve years ago, just after the Sandinista Revolution, these towns were simple towns where the local people worked in the salt flats, owned pulperías (convenience stores), or jumped on a bus to ride up to three hours to work either in the capital city of Managua or in the nearest developed town of Rivas. In this scenario, there were very few outside influences in terms of development. In fact, this community was relatively underdeveloped by most people’s standards, with few jobs and very little infrastructure.

This is not to say, however, that this society was a Utopian society during this time, where everyone lived in harmony. Nevertheless, the types of temptations and crimes that I am referring to are distinct and generally evolve in areas such as Las Salinas once a certain level of development is reached. Let’s call it a Developmental Critical Mass.\(^7\) What I mean by this phrase is that an

\(^7\) Developmental Critical Mass is the point at which development creates a noticeable dichotomy between the local population and the “outsiders” and as a result, one begins to notice a rise in crime associated with the poor distribution of wealth.
underdeveloped community, when it begins to develop, will reach a certain point where the “locals,” people indigenous to the community, will begin to see a dichotomy between themselves and the people who are developing the community. The people who come in to invest and develop these communities tend to be foreigners or wealthy nationals. In this part of the world, they are generally North Americans, many of whom do not speak Spanish, the local language. This is when the dichotomy begins to occur.

Popoyo’s development began with the arrival of surfers seeking perfect, uncrowded waves. Typically, the surf culture begins with people coming here and actually integrating, to a certain degree, into the community because they need local access, or knowledge, to find these uncharted waves. As time goes on, word generally gets out and other foreigners begin to come, explore, and even purchase land. Logically, no one is able to keep a secret, so someone tells a friend about an opportunity to buy cheap beachfront property in the tropics, and they in turn tell their friends, and so on and so forth. We all know how that goes.

Additionally, it is only natural that the people of these communities own the land, and sooner or later a foreigner will offer them a large sum of money—by local standards—to buy land. Of course, the locals do not know the international market value for this type of land, nor do they know for how much money these foreigners can sell this land to other foreigners. We have to remember that many of the people who live in these types of communities
only make approximately $250 per month. In Nicaragua and many other countries in Latin America, that is the monthly minimum wage.

So these foreigners buy the land at a very low rate, all the while knowing what type of investment can be made with this type of property, because the average market value for beachfront property in the USA is outrageous. Therefore, buying and selling beachfront property in the tropics is a lucrative business. So the one purchasing the land knows this before he or she chooses to make his or her investment, but does not share this information with the seller.

As time goes on, more foreigners buy more land—generally near other foreigners because they feel “safe”—and begin to develop it, or even sell off certain parcels to recuperate their investment and therefore turn a profit. In the world of capitalism, there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, that is the epitome of capitalism.

Unfortunately, the locals who sold the land did so without understanding its fair market value, and whatever money they made on it pales in comparison with what they see their buyer is able make from it.

As time passes and development begins to take place, more and more foreigners begin to invest in this area. Now, one would think that this is a good thing

---

8 $250 USD is the minimum monthly wage for most of Central America and many countries in South America such as Colombia. For more information regarding the minimum wages of Latin America and other economic indicators such as GPD and income per capita, visit the CIA Factbook online (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/).
because it stimulates the local economy, which it does, and this happens to be one of the positives of development. However, this subchapter is not about the positives of development; rather, it is to explore the evolution of crime as a result of development.

Therefore, as development begins to increase, its visible signs are larger houses, nicer cell phones, and nice automobiles. The local people begin to take note of the rising distinction between those that “have” and those that “have not.” Generally those that “have not” tend to be the locals. In fact, many of them are the ones who sold the land in the first place. Naturally, the “have nots” begin to want what the “haves” have, and therein lies the downfall of development. As I have already said, it is not development in itself that is the culprit; rather, it is the development strategy that is the culprit. Generally, foreigners come to towns like Las Salinas and Popoyo with the mentality that they are going to start a business, hire cheap labor, and live it up. They generally view the labor force as an expendable commodity instead of a group of people they would like to include in their development strategy and planning, thus failing to offer the local population an opportunity of upward mobility.

As more outsiders infiltrate and develop these areas, we begin to move towards what I call the Developmental Critical Mass. This happens because foreign businesses and investors come into a place that is underdeveloped, and in many respects, lacking most, if not all, of the amenities that many North Americans have grown accustomed to having on a day-to-day basis (e.g.,
nice phones, nice surfboards, cars, spacious houses, and surf clothing). Unfortunately, these are not attainable commodities for most people in the developing world and therefore become coveted items, but most locals don’t earn enough money to purchase them. Therein lies the problem. You have a certain standard of living that has infiltrated a place whose standard of living is much lower; yet, there is still the innate human desire to want.

This subchapter is not going to explore the infiltration of drugs as a result of this; however, one must take note that this also plays a role in crime. Logically, if you are addicted to drugs and need money, then you will resort to stealing (i.e., crime) to get the money to “get your fix.” Furthermore, a lack of upward mobility, or a way to earn a decent living, breeds the desire to seek out alternative, often illegal, ways of earning a living, such as dealing and/or trafficking drugs.

What development does, by and large, is introduce a much higher standard of living to a group of people who are accustomed to a much lower standard of living. This, in turn, creates jealousy with regard to the “haves” versus the “have nots.” It is precisely at this juncture in development where you begin to see a rise in crime as a result of development. Additionally, there is very little risk of getting arrested in these types of underdeveloped communities because the police are not paid well either,
and therefore are easy to bribe. This heightens the risk for the “haves” because the “have nots” know that the risk of being caught or prosecuted for this type of behavior is highly unlikely.

I know that many people who travel to developing areas like Latin America, Africa, and Asia feel as though they can do whatever they want and nothing bad will ever happen to them. Having lived through a number of “heavy” experiences in Latin America, I can say with authority that going into a developing country with that type of naïve mentality is ignorant and quite possibly dangerous. You must always be on high alert and never become too comfortable or complacent with your living situation or the community where you live, work, and visit.

As a “gringo,” you are highly visible, and you must, at all times, realize that. This is not to say that everyone is going to rob or hurt you; however, it is to say that you are a foreigner and you must always keep that in mind. The reality is that, in comparison, you have a lot more than 90% of the world, especially those in developing countries. You may not seem rich compared with other Americans; however, flaunting your iPad, iPod, or i-whatever is just asking for trouble.

Gringo is a term that is given to tourists from the United States. Depending on the context, it can be a term of endearment, a nickname, or it could be used as a derogatory term towards people from the United States (or Caucasian people in general).
So for those of you who are reading this and intend to travel to the developing world, please take precautions! Even if you are traveling to Costa Rica, which many tourists think is a Utopian society where gringos live without worries and problems, guess again. Even in Tamarindo (Tamarindo), there are issues with crime.

In summary, taking into account the communities of Las Salinas and Popoyo, I have personally seen a rise in crime as a result of the development that has taken place over the last ten years. In fact, I would say that Popoyo and Las Salinas have just recently begun to reach their Developmental Critical Mass, and one should expect that more criminal acts, such as petty theft and robberies, will be on the rise unless the people who are doing the development find a way to integrate the community into the developmental framework of their native lands. In order to lower crime, one must offer the population of the surrounding communities a sense of involvement, upward mobility and jobs, infrastructure, and hope for a better future, not only for themselves, but for their micro-society as a whole. Only by taking these aforementioned steps into consideration will an area’s sense of harmony be restored and crime be drastically decreased. Once you have reached a Developmental Critical Mass, it is hard to reverse the repercussions.
There are times in life when you have a day that you would consider, in your own opinion, a perfect day. It’s not to say, however, that it is “literally” perfect; rather, for you it’s perfect. It’s one of those days when you just have no choice but to be grateful for being alive. Days like that remind me that living a life that is predicated on making lots of money and living a “comfortable” life is quite honestly the most unappealing thing that I could imagine.

I am not criticizing people who have chosen that path; rather, I am simply saying that for me, that is not truly living. In fact, I would even suggest that many of the people living that lifestyle are not fully content and would prefer a less structured life that offers them a sense of adventure. Perhaps I am wrong, but at the end of the day, we are left to make our own decisions: Cada quien, lo suyo (“To each, his own”).

Nevertheless, I do not believe that humans were simply meant to conform to the comforts and the boundaries put forth by their society. Moreover, I do not think that that type of structure necessarily “protects” us as humans; rather, it exacerbates the looming spirit of the fear of failure that lurks and paralyzes people from truly reaching their goals. Let me assert that we all have a divine purpose in life; however, it is the fear of failure that keeps many of us from realizing our true destiny.
I have a quote that I came up with one night after being up too late and having too much coffee: “Life’s greatest tragedy is not when great people fail, but rather when great people conform to mediocrity.” I truly stand by that quote because I believe that we are all destined for greatness. Greatness does not necessarily mean lots of money and fame; rather, greatness is a relative term and could apply to someone who dedicates his or her life to a cause greater than him- or herself. At the end of the day, greatness for an individual, in my opinion, is seeking, finding, and living out one’s passion. That, to me, is personal greatness, as well as being a life of purpose and fulfillment. Discovering your God-given passion is one of life’s greatest gifts.

I would just encourage those who are reading this to ask themselves a few key questions with regard to their life and their passions:

1. Are you happy with the life that you are living?
2. Do you feel like you have a purpose that is driving you to wake up in the morning?
3. What are you passionate about?
4. What are you doing about letting your passion “out of its cage”?
5. If you could do anything, starting tomorrow, what would it be and how does it pertain to the passion you have deep in your soul?
6. **What is holding you back from doing this thing?**

Don’t let society’s spirit of fear keep you from living out your passion and offering humanity something that it’s missing. Your life’s purpose fills a piece of life’s destiny, so don’t be scared to fail. Give it a shot. What is the worst thing that will happen? You will fail and end up right where you are right now. So what is there to lose? As they say in gambling, “You have to play big to win big” (I am not a gambler, but I think that saying applies to this analogy). We only have one life to live and God has built a passion in us that is customized, and is ready to be used to make the world a better place.

In our busy lives, we need to remember to get out and explore the world. There are so many beautiful places to discover, and I just want to encourage people to explore the beautiful world that is ours to enjoy. Additionally, I want to encourage anybody reading this subchapter to seek out your passion and go for it.

*[9] Local Life*

Now that I have explored the idea of development and the influx of tourism that has infiltrated this part of Nicaragua, I think it would be a good idea to open the reader’s eyes to the “actual” way of life of the local population.

Of course, with any town that is in a process of development, many locals will find a job working with a
new business. When I refer to a new business, I am referring to a business planted here by an outsider. These outsiders tend to be people from another country, such as the United States or Canada, or even well-to-do Nicaraguans from the capital city of Managua. This can prove to be a good thing for the community; however, there are cases where development can prove to be a deliberate attempt to monopolize valuable land and/or resources (e.g., the United Fruit Company).

Thankfully for the people of this particular part of Nicaragua, the United Fruit Company has not dug its capitalist claws into these peoples’ resources. The United Fruit Company focused mainly on creating banana plantations around the Caribbean coasts of these countries, not so much on the Pacific coast.

I am making this assessment as a result of my observations over the last five years. I have not officially done an academic case study on this topic. However, there are some basics that all Americans should be familiar with.

The United Fruit Company (UFCO) was an American-owned company that had built a business empire based on the cultivation and export of bananas in Central America. It had operations in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Because these countries were very poor, the UFCO was able to exert undue influence on the local governments. Their effect on local governments and ability to influence them gave rise to the term “banana republic”—a term
that implied corruption and poor government of poverty-stricken countries.

For economic reasons, UFCO had a great deal of support from the U.S. government, and a great deal of power within Guatemala. 77% of all Guatemalan exports went to the United States while 65% of all Guatemalan imports came from the U.S. The United Fruit Company owned all of Guatemala's banana production and exports, as well as its infrastructure: the country's telephone, telegraph, and almost all of its rail systems.

UFCO was even more powerful because of strong ties within the U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his New York law firm represented the company, and Allen Dulles, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) served on UFCO's Board of Trustees and owned shares of the company.

In The Guatemalan Revolution of 1944, Ubico, the right-wing dictator resigned, and Guatemala elected Dr. Juan Jose Arévalo to the presidency. The new government approved a constitution based closely on the U.S. model, built over 6,000 schools, and improved Guatemalan health care. In 1951, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz was elected as Arévalo’s successor in democratic elections.

Arbenz extended political freedoms allowing Communists in Guatemala to participate in politics. Although only a tiny fraction of Guatemalans identified as communists, this took place during the height of the Cold War, causing concerns in the U.S. When President Arbenz proposed “Decree 900,” which was intended to redistribute undeveloped lands owned or controlled by
large property owners to landless farmers, the U.S. became even more alarmed.

The United Fruit Company, which controlled a great deal of that undeveloped land, demanded compensation beyond what the Guatemalan government could afford. When Guatemala declined to pay the company what it demanded, UFCO pressured the U.S. government to act in its interest, though it was contrary to policies supported by the Guatemalan people and their government. The company depicted this attempt to alleviate mass poverty as a major communist move that had to be contained.

The United States called on the brand-new Central Intelligence Agency—which was headed by Allen Dulles, with his economic interests in United Fruit—to remove Arbenz in a covert operation. The CIA chose a disgruntled military officer, Carlos Castillo Armas, as the replacement for Arbenz.

Armas moved against the Arbenz government on June 17, 1954, with full support of the CIA—and thus, implicitly, the U.S. government. The CIA broadcast propaganda messages through their own secret radio station, at the same time jamming Guatemalan radio signals. American pilots were sent on a bombing mission over Guatemala City. CIA spies undermined Arbenz's authority, making it impossible for the Guatemalan government and military to fight back effectively.

Arbenz was unaware that the coup was being orchestrated by the CIA under the auspices of the U.S.
government, so Arbenz turned to the U.S. for help that was never provided. On June 27, 1954, President Jacobo Arbenz abdicated his office and left Guatemala. Armas took control as a military dictator and held power until he was assassinated in July of 1957. He was followed by a series of dictators, and Guatemala's political problems continue to this day.

With regard to the people’s way of life, many of them work in *el campo* (the fields), in construction as a result of development and post-war rebuilding, in the salt flats, or in the local fishing industry. In fact, the average way of life for someone living in these communities is very simple. This community in particular is approximately three hours by bus from Managua and approximately one hour by bus from the nearest “developed” city, Rivas. Therefore, as one would assume, there are a limited number of local jobs, as this area is out in the “middle of nowhere” on the coast of southwestern Nicaragua. Thus, it is an ideal place to develop and build surf camps and beach resorts, because it offers tranquility and exclusivity for the surf-tourist who wants to get away, surf great waves, and relax at the beach.

Nevertheless, there are not enough jobs for the whole community, or even the majority of the community. Most have to continue to work within the local infrastructure, earning approximately 100 Córdobas a day, which is approximately five USD per day. For example, people in communities such as these tend to make their
living hauling grass or salt by ox cart, working in the salt flats, as day laborers, or working in construction. The few ambitious, business-minded locals open up pulperías or fruit stands. Other people herd cattle, work as “watch men” (for five to ten USD a day you could hire an armed guard), or sell homemade food to the rest of the community. Of course, there are more jobs in the community; however, most of them will only pay approximately $250 USD month. This is the daily reality, and continues to be the way of life for most of the people in these communities.

According to UNICEF and other sources, “Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere with an average per capita income of approximately $3,000 USD annually.” That means if you add up all of the salaries of the country from highest to lowest and divide that number by the country’s population, you get their median income, which statistically for Nicaragua is approximately $3,000 USD. Now, don’t fool yourself, there are multi-millionaires in this country, so that tells you what type of disparity between rich and poor we are dealing with. In this case, that dichotomy is between the wealthy Nicaraguans and the poor Nicaraguans, not between the locals and the foreigners that I mentioned in the previous subchapter.

10 Hiring an armed guard is not recommended for anthrotourists because it goes against the spirit of anthrotourism.
As I have suggested in the subchapter about development, something needs to be done to include more locals into the emerging infrastructure that is inevitably going to come along with the outside investors and the new development. The Nicaraguan people of this area are extremely friendly, hard-working, and anxious to get involved, perhaps even start their own business. Development, however, should not erase their way of life; rather, their campesino (farmer) lifestyle should be embraced, preserved, and included into the framework of the neo-development\textsuperscript{11} that is already on the rise.

\textbf{[10] Time Travel}

Over the past few days, during this leg of my travels, Tony and I were blessed with amazing surf. Although the swell had been dropping, it started off pretty big (approximately six to eight feet with ten-to-twelve-foot sets and offshore winds all day long). Let’s put it this way: if you were to dream up your perfect surf trip, in terms of waves, this would have met your expectations without question.

So as one would imagine, after three days of overhead plus swell, we were pretty worn out. Our daily schedule had been simple: wake up, eat breakfast and drink coffee, go surf through the early afternoon, come

\textsuperscript{11} Neo-development, or new development, is a term I use to describe the new influx of development in these coastal communities in Central America.
home and eat lunch, then go to the hot springs and/or surf an evening session, eat dinner, and then go to bed.

**Warning:** Anthrotourism can lead to heightened levels of enjoyment, extreme satisfaction, and a lifestyle that will make you jealous of yourself—if that is even physically or psychologically possible.

Once the swell had dropped a bit (it was “only” four to six feet, offshore and glassy), Tony was able to teach his girlfriend, Jeannette, how to surf. For the first couple days of the trip, since the surf was so big, she just sat on the beach soaking in the beautiful views of the Nicaraguan coastline and taking pictures of us surfing.

Aside from the world-class surf, it was great to catch up with friends whom I had not seen in two years. It’s always interesting to see how people change in that amount of time—myself included. On the other hand, in some ways it seems as if time had frozen while I was away. It makes me abstractly think of traveling as a modern-day form of time travel.

Now, I know that sounds a little strange, but let me explain myself:

Let’s say that you live here in a small coastal village in Nicaragua like Popoyo, and your friend leaves for two years and has a bunch of life-altering experiences over a period of two years. Then, he or she comes back to
this small town and, for all intents and purposes, nothing has changed.

Logically, things have changed; however, in terms of large scale, noticeable things, they have not changed much. Maybe someone had a kid or someone else got married, but in terms of observable infrastructure, things have really not changed, relatively speaking.

So, one could say that time, to a certain degree, has stood still, in the sense that not much noticeable change has occurred. While the person who has spent the last two years traveling has lived through a plethora of potentially life-changing and life-altering experiences, the people who live in this small town have continued to live a relatively unchanged reality during the same two years. Naturally, this is an abstract thought; however, the notion that traveling for an extended period of time and therefore altering your reality, or normal monotonous daily routine, could be perceived as a modern-day form of time-travel.

In other words, where someone who is part of the normal, daily routine would not perceive things as changing, your experiences traveling have offered you a trip into a new world and have therefore altered your sense of reality, by taking you out of the normal routine, that you could say that, for a given period of time, you have “time-traveled.”

In this respect, my concept of time travel is to “freeze” your reality and live another reality or experience for a given period of time and then return to your reality as
if nothing has changed. I would like to suggest that outside of a few variables such as a death in the family or any catastrophic or traumatic event that has happened back home, it would be possible to say that through your travels, you have, in essence, time-traveled.


Although I have made it abundantly clear that there are numerous things that I love about Nicaragua, such as the waves, the food, the people, and the breathtaking landscapes, one thing that I will never grow to love (in fact, I despise it) are the rolling blackouts that occur about three times a week or more. We experienced them in Honduras as well. Perhaps it is the electric companies’ way of sucking money out of people who really don’t have that much to spare. What happens is that, on occasion, the community will experience a power outage for an extended period of time.

I should add that the monthly bill is not any lower as a result of the power outages. I would even make the assumption that it is a deliberate attempt to make some extra profit at the cost of other peoples’ comfort. Unless I am mistaken, the rolling blackouts are a strategic attempt to save the power company money by periodically turning the power off in a given community. There are cases, of course, when lightning strikes a power line or a power line has been knocked down; however, what I am referring to
A good example occurred while I wrote this. It was 4:15 a.m. and the power had been out for about eight hours. It actually went out while we were eating dinner tonight; so Tony, Jeannette, and I had a candlelight dinner on the beach—not by choice, but by obligation. I have to admit, sitting there on the beach eating pizza by candlelight and watching the lightning show was pretty entertaining. Perhaps this particular power outage incident could be attributed to a lightning strike because there were plenty of them amidst the onslaught of rain showers.

Once we got home, we were able to turn on the generator for a few hours, long enough to get ready for bed and to fall asleep. You know when the generator has turned off because you wake up and are sweating profusely because your fan has not been working for the last hour or so. Your body wakes you up because it is so hot, and typically you cannot get back to sleep until the power comes back on, which could be sometime between 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. or later. I myself jump in the shower and take a cold-water shower to cool myself down enough to get back to sleep. Sometimes it works, and other times I just end up lying in bed, staring at the ceiling fan and waiting for it to turn back on.
Imagine if you were a local Nicaraguan and had to be up for work around 5:00 a.m. and you could not get a good night’s sleep as a result of these power outages. Not only do you have to work in the heat the whole next day, you have to do it on a lack of sleep.

Regarding the rolling blackouts, I would understand it if they turned off the power because the community at large was not paying their electric bills on a consistent basis; however, that is not the case. In fact, the gringo community here in Popoyo actually pays considerably more per kilowatt than the surrounding Nicaraguan communities. In other words, Gringo Hill (the nickname given to the community made up of Americans here at Popoyo) subsidizes the electricity for the surrounding communities. I am completely okay with that because many of the people who are benefiting from this only make, on average, $250 a month. So that is one less expense they have to be concerned with. For them, living is all about survival. Therefore, I have no problem with the expatriates\(^{12}\) and tourists (including myself) subsidizing the communities’ electric bill. There is nothing wrong with a little socialism every once in a while if done correctly.

What I do have a problem with, however, is when the expats and tourists are charged substantially more for their electricity and the electric company still continues to cut the power off on a weekly basis, for hours at a time. It

---
\(^{12}\) An expat or expatriate is a person from one country who is living as a permanent resident in another country. A good example would be an American citizen who has chosen to take up permanent residence in Nicaragua.
is possible that I am wrong in my assessment and it is just faulty equipment; however, I am not naïve enough to believe that this is the case a hundred percent of the time, especially since not that long ago we experienced that type of power company corruption when I was living in California. I am fully confident that the Californians remember those days too.

Moreover, I find it appalling that certain human beings can be so greedy that they would intentionally manipulate someone else’s power supply and deprive them of a service that they are paying for, just so the company can earn an extra dollar. It would be one thing if it was a deliberate attempt to thwart tourism so tourists would get angry and therefore not want to be here; however, that too is not the case. Rather, it is a deliberate attempt to make money from people who have no other option but to deal with it.

[12] Last Day in Popoyo

Tony, Jeanette, and I woke up early in the morning and had a delicious pancake breakfast with coffee while we waited for our friend Daniel to show up with three horses so we could go for a two-hour horseback-riding adventure down to the beach, along the coast, and through the countryside of Popoyo and Las Salinas. In general, I am not a big fan of riding horses; however, it is hard to say no to a cool adventure like that. So when Daniel showed up, we left our place and headed down to the beach. Since it
was low tide, we were able to go pretty far along the beach with the horses. It was the perfect place to let them sprint. Well, my horse, Buster, was pretty lazy so we didn’t sprint very fast. Nevertheless, it allowed me to roll “solo” for almost the entire two-hour journey, and soak in the scenery, as we traversed the coastline and the lush mountainside near our house. After we finished horseback riding, we cooked an amazing lunch. Actually, Jeannette and Tony made up an amazing lunch and I took a nap in a hammock. I washed the dishes since they did all of the cooking. And since they cook better than I do, it was a natural fit.

After we ate lunch, we all relaxed for about two hours before making some coffee and going surfing. The swell had dropped a bit, but it was still fun (about four to six feet, glassy, offshore winds). There were only four of us out, including Tony and me, so we got every wave we wanted. We stayed out there surfing from about 2:00 p.m. until dark, which around here is approximately 6:30 p.m. Although we were worn out, after a brief rest, we met up with some friends for a goodbye dinner at a local pizza place here in Popoyo.

The following morning, we woke up and met up with everyone at church. This is not your typical church; it is just, literally, an empty building where people meet for church service. All of the people that come, usually about 20 to 30 people, sit on plastic chairs or the concrete floor.
The “praise and worship band” consists of a couple of people—at the most—playing guitars and singing in Spanish. However, the beautiful thing about this type of rustic church service is that it is free of pretentions and Christian elitism. What I love about it is that it has a purity and an innocence about it that gives the worship and the sermon a sincerity that is hard to find in many churches in the United States.

After church, we packed up and headed out of Popoyo and went to Granada, Nicaragua, to meet my friends Fifo and Ellen. Granada is a colonial town in Nicaragua that was burned down by Nicaragua’s first and only American president, William Walker. Yes, Nicaragua actually had an American citizen as a president in the late 1800s. He was a de facto president who tried to implement slavery in Nicaragua once it had been abolished in the United States. Obviously that did not go over well, and they eventually kicked him out of the country. However, before he left, he decided to burn down Granada. Unfortunately for him, he only made it as far as Honduras before he was captured and hanged. Since then, Granada has been restored and is beautiful. This is a place I would highly recommend to any anthrotourist.
Fifo, Ellen, and I dropped Tony and Jeannette off at the airport around 11:00 p.m. so they could head back to the USA. Tony and I had been traveling together for approximately one and a half months and it had been an amazing adventure. Nevertheless, they had to head back to the USA. However, before they left, we gave them a proper goodbye in a true soccer player fashion.

It just so happens that the retreat center where we were staying had its own private *futsal* court. And as luck would have it, we happened to have a brand new futsal soccer ball. Not to mention, just behind the property, was a mini coffee plantation—two of my favorite things in one place. Needless to say, with regard to playing soccer, all we had to do was mention the phrase *partido de fútbol* (soccer game) to the local community and it was no problem finding people to come play a pick-up soccer game.

We simply walked through the community that was adjacent to the retreat center where Fifo and Ellen work and talked to people. This was a twofold mission: naturally, we wanted to find people to play soccer, but we also wanted to walk around the community to get to know the people with whom Fifo and Ellen work. Many of the residents in the adjacent community work at the retreat

---

*Futsal is a style of soccer that is played on a smaller playing surface with a soccer ball that is significantly smaller and heavier than the average outdoor soccer ball. The word *futsal* is a combination of the two words in Spanish, *fútbol* and *salón*, which loosely translates, “hall football.”*
center as cooks, maintenance people, and groundskeepers, so it was a pleasure to walk around and get to know them.

During our stroll, I found out that Gildan, a tee-shirt company from Canada, has a *maquila* (a pretty Spanish word for sweatshop) in this community. Of course, when a person hears the word “sweatshop,” a number of images come to mind involving long work hours and poor work conditions. Although I have not been inside the building itself, I can say that those images may perhaps be true, at least the part about long work hours. In fact, according to the people I spoke to, the employees generally work from approximately 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. So this job essentially consumes their lives. However, before any of you consider boycotting Gildan, ask yourself this question: What would happen to these employees (whose livelihood is contingent upon the existence of these types of companies) if there were to be a unanimous boycott of such companies as Gildan? Naturally, no one likes the concept of *maquilas*, except for the people benefiting from this type of business. However, as I have mentioned, if we boycott such companies, then they will ultimately pack up and leave; thus leaving the people of these communities without a way to sustain their livelihood, albeit a humble existence.

*I have been told that Gildan in particular offers good health insurance to their workers. It is not so much the long work hours that frustrates me about this type of business enterprise (although I am definitely an advocate*
for limiting the hours an employee is obligated to work to a reasonable amount of time); rather, it is the lack of respect for the workers and their rights. It is the lack of respect for human dignity that drives people to boycott such companies. Let me remind the reader that I do not have any empirical evidence suggesting that Gildan is guilty of committing the stereotypical atrocities associated with sweatshop working conditions and employees. So, let’s not make any assumptions regarding this company in particular.

I don’t want to get overly Marxist in this particular subchapter; however, one of the complaints that Karl Marx had towards capitalism was the way the employer views the employee.\textsuperscript{14} When a human being is viewed as an expendable commodity and not as someone who should be treated with respect and dignity, capitalism crosses the threshold from being a positive approach towards perpetuating and bettering the human species to an inhumane and demoralizing path towards perpetuating the stratification between rich and poor. Of course, Marx is much more articulate and analytical in his theory; yet, the bottom line is that when capitalism loses its respect for human dignity, it is ethically wrong.

Unfortunately, the problem is that many multinational corporations become so large that they

\textsuperscript{14} Marx made reference to a class war that he saw between the proletariat, or working class, and the bourgeoisie class, or wealthy class; however, for the sake of my analysis, I use the terms employee and employer with regard to this perceived class struggle.
Anthrotourist

effectively become untouchable; therefore, they feel like they can treat people however they want, because at the end of the day, it is all about the bottom line, making more money! Personally, I think that this theory is wrong on a number of levels, not the least of which is on a humanistic level. We are all human beings with the right to live a life of dignity and deserve to be respected as such. The place you were born, what job you have, who your family is or any other discriminatory factors do not make you better than anyone else. They may make you more privileged than someone else; however, they do not make you better as a human being.

Moving on to a Less Serious Theme...

Before we played our soccer game, we needed to eat lunch and also get our truck cleaned before returning it to the rental company. The rental truck was covered with mud, so I figured it would be a good idea to have someone detail our truck. Detailing an automobile inside and out cost approximately 60 Córdobas (three USD). However, we were (un)fortunate enough to experience another TICA moment when we came back from lunch to pick up our truck.

Before we had left, we had asked the guy cleaning our truck to try to fix our truck antenna that had been bent and was essentially broken. We were going to have to pay to replace it. So, assuming that this guy would be able to
Nicaragua

apply some super glue to it to fix it after he finished washing our car, we asked him to fix it and left him alone. However, when we came back, he had the antenna in his hand and told us that he broke it when he was cleaning the roof of the truck. Apparently, breaking it completely off was his way of “fixing it.” Nevertheless, we paid him the three USD and took the truck home and fixed the antenna. To make a long story short, the antenna stayed in place and we returned the truck to the rental car company and they never knew the difference. Also, I have to add that the radio was still working spectacularly, so it’s safe to say that we fixed it perfectly. Finally, we (Fifo, Ellen, and I) said our goodbyes to Tony and Jeannette and headed back to San Marcos.

[14] Day of Rest

That next morning I was finally able to actually sit back and relax all morning until Fifo and Ellen finished working. It was one of the first mornings that I did not have to get up and surf or play soccer, so I was enjoying the fact that I had absolutely nothing to do. After lunch, we went to Managua to buy our bus tickets for our upcoming trips: Fifo and Ellen were traveling north to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and I was traveling south to San Jose, Costa Rica. Everything worked out well and we all bought our tickets. For me, this was going to be leg three of my trip
through Central America. And I had no idea where this journey would lead me.

After spending the day in Managua, we headed back to San Marcos; however, when we were heading home, a motorcyclist was passing us right about the same time a dog decided to cross the street. I’m not going to be too graphic; however, you can only imagine what happens when a motorcycle going about 60-70 miles per hour T-bones a dog. Thank God for the biker, he was wearing a helmet and gloves, not to mention that he seemed to be pretty acrobatic. He flew off the bike right in front of us, rolled about eight to ten times on the ground, and the only thing that really happened to him was that he lost his shoe in the process and got a little scratched up. As for the dog, well...

Of course we stopped the car to see if the guy riding the motorcycle was okay and if he needed us to call an ambulance; however, all he asked of us was to get him his shoe that had flown off when he fell. He said he was going to call someone. As we were talking to him he pulled out an (almost) unscratched iPhone from his pocket to call someone to come get him. He lived right down the street, so that was good. Not to mention that about 30 people came out of nowhere to see what happened and to make sure he was okay. So we felt comfortable we were leaving him in good company. It was an unexpected incident that unfolded right in front of our eyes about five minutes from home. They do say that most accidents occur a short distance from home. I guess this is proof of that theory.
A lesson to all of you motorcyclists: Wear your helmets and keep your eyes peeled for random dogs crossing the road!

[15] Pura Vida

I have realized that being around la gente popular (non-rich) of Latin America makes me feel closer to the human race. I know that sounds a little strange given that I have said in previous chapters that we are all humans, which biologically and anatomically is a hundred percent correct; however, I am referring to the sense of sincerity that I get from riding around with taxi drivers, talking to maintenance workers and groundskeepers, and being on local buses. For example, I was just dropped off in Managua by my taxi driver, Efrain, who for $25 USD drove me one hour from San Marcos, Nicaragua, to the capital city, Managua, to drop me off at the bus terminal so I could catch my bus for the eight- to nine-hour ride to San Jose, Costa Rica.

I am a very loquacious and verbose person and therefore I love to talk; however, that desire to talk is accelerated when I have drunk about two to three cups of coffee. Therefore, I was ready to chat when Efrain arrived at my house. Good thing for me, he was someone who enjoyed talking about politics, religion, and so on—all of
the supposed *faux pas* of conversation when traveling in foreign countries.

As I said in the beginning, hearing the sincerity in people such as my taxi driver made me feel like I understand humanity a little bit better. It was an amazing, one-hour-long conversation where he would ask me what I thought about the current Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement), the Sandinista Revolution, the war in Iraq, US hegemony, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, a universal system of money, the United Nations, a world without borders, and we even managed to squeeze in a conversation about Jesus. Essentially these are all of the things that I love to talk about.

We eased into these conversations one layer at a time. I instigated the conversation by asking him what he thought about the progress in Nicaragua. He began talking in terms of the roads, health care, and houses for the poor. When there is a government that declares itself to be socialist, those are the improvements you expect to hear. I was not able to quantifiably verify all of these supposed improvements; however, one thing is certain, the *Danielistas* (followers of Daniel Ortega) seem to be pleased with his tenure as president of Nicaragua. In fact, we also made the joke that because the opposing party is currently divided, it is making it easy for the FSLN (*El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) to become re-
Nicaragua

...elected. Remember the words of Abraham Lincoln? “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”15

Daniel Ortega is currently trying to be re-elected. That would be okay in the USA because we allow back-to-back terms; however, here in Nicaragua, you were not originally allowed to do that. A president was allowed a term of five years with no consecutive back-to-back re-elections. It was permissible to be re-elected to a second, non-consecutive term, but no more than that. So he was acting contrary to the constitution.16

Nevertheless, as I said to Efrain, if the country (or 38% of the country)17 is so content with the current direction of the country and chose to reelect the FSLN party, then that is great; however, I am not a fan of dictatorships. I think that the current leader should train someone, or have someone under his tutelage, so that he will have someone to whom he could pass the torch.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that will be the case here in Nicaragua, especially since Ortega is being influenced by two other famous militares (military men), Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, who both suggest that he not offer free elections and that he remain in power. I

15 This is also a verse in the Holy Bible (Mathew 12:25). “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.” (NIV, 1973)
16 These term limits were lifted in 2014 by a large legislative majority of 64-25. The influential argument was that it was preferable to limit presidential power than limit terms. However, so far, no additional limits were placed on presidential power.
17 For more information related to the past elections in Nicaragua, see the New York Times article “Nicaraguans’ Votes Are In, and Ortega Is Back,” Nov. 7, 2008.
don’t think he is taking their advice entirely, because he is allowing for free elections, albeit elections that he is destined to win. After talking a bit about Ortega, we began to talk about how Nicaragua has been a puppet of the United States for the last 60-plus years. What I find amusing, however, is how indecisive we can be as the puppet master. Let me give you a brief history of what has happened since the 1920s:

Contrary to popular belief, the USA is perfectly fine with dictators; however, the stipulation is that they must be “obedient dictators.” The only dictators we vilify are the ones who either have a paradigm shift in their view of U.S. foreign policy after being put in power by the U.S. Government (e.g., Manuel Noriega in Panama and Saddam Hussein in Iraq), or dictators whose ideology is contrary to ours (e.g., Fidel Castro).

The United States helped the Somoza family come to power by establishing the Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional (National Guard). The father, Anastasio “Tacho” Somoza, was the leader of the National Guard, so that made it convenient to assume power by force. The USA made sure that the Somozas stayed in power for as long as possible; Tacho and his two sons, Luis Anastasio Somoza Debayle and Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza DeBayle managed it for approximately 50 years, from the 1920s until the 1970s. Then along came Jimmy Carter, who supported the growing Sandinista movement (named after Augusto C. Sandino, a Nicaraguan nationalist from
the early 1900s) and therefore encouraged them to spark a revolution, now known as the Sandinista Revolution.

After the Sandinistas overthrew Tachito at the end of the 1970s, Nicaragua had free elections and Daniel Ortega won (does that name ring a bell?). However, at the beginning of the 1980s, you may remember a man by the name of Ronald Reagan, who became president of the United States of America and quickly made it a top priority to get the Sandinistas (FSLN) out of power. Thus, he funded the opposition in what came to be known as the Contra-Revolution. In fact, there is still debate as to whether or not the United States Government covertly sold weapons to Iranian radicals to help get U.S. hostages out of Iran and in turn, used the proceeds from the sold weapons to fund the Nicaraguan Contras.\(^\text{18}\) This became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

Eventually, my driver and I segued away from politics and began to talk about religion—about Jesus, in particular. I have to admit, I was a little critical of “average American Christians” and stated that their approach to Christianity goes hand-in-hand with their innate tendency towards capitalism. For instance, it could be that many American Christians do good things because, according to

\(^{18}\) The Contras were the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan insurgents who were trained by the U.S. and supplied with weapons in order to overthrow the recently-elected Sandinista Government.
the Bible, they are expecting a prize in Heaven. The Bible refers to it as a “Crown.”

Now, my question is: Where is the altruism? Can you, in fact, be altruistic with that type of “gimme” attitude toward God? In other words, would the average Christian employ this type of “service” attitude if he or she were to find out that heaven does not exist? What I mean is, I personally feel that the motivation should not be based on the fact that Christians are expecting “gifts” upon arrival into heaven. I would go as far as to say that if God were never to bless the human race again, He would have already done more than He should have done by sending Jesus to die for humanity’s sins—an ideology that is foundational in Christian theology. So, why do many Christians walk around with a sense of entitlement? What are they entitled to? They have already, theoretically speaking, been given a gift that transcends all understanding and transcends all other earthly gifts, or heavenly ones for that matter.

My point is that you do not deserve any crowns, even if there are rewards offered in heaven for “acts of service.” Quite simply, we should have a heart for humanity because people are our fellow human beings and

---

19 This ideology is not only employed by many American Christians, but is also employed by many poor people across the developing world and is quite possibly the motivating factor behind many of their seemingly altruistic actions. In fact, one could ascertain that this theology or ideology is what has given rise to the “Prosperity Gospel.”
therefore deserve to be treated as equals. After all, according to the Bible, all humans were created in the image of God. So, let me repeat myself by rephrasing this question: Why do many Christians employ their capitalist framework into a very non-capitalist ideology? God is not confined to anyone’s economic or political ideology, and therefore the very thought that one deserves compensation for having done good works, which we should all strive to do anyway, is absurd.

I would like to suggest we try something: what if we begin to live our lives being appreciative of the gifts God has given us, as opposed to living our lives with a sense of entitlement for having “helped” God make humanity better. Helping others and seeing God’s love manifested on earth is something that—as people who are seeking a spiritual connection with God—they should already be striving to do “because Christ loved us first” and not for any “crown.” I understand that the crown imagery insinuates that Christians will be co-heirs in heaven; however, personally, I would be content being a slave in heaven, because the reality is that none of us even deserves that luxury. Be grateful for what you have been given, not for what you think you deserve.

Finally, once I arrived at the terminal in Managua, I walked in, and to my surprise, I found out that they had free wireless internet, which allowed me to send a couple of emails and get some nonprofit (CANFF) work taken care of before we departed. As I was sitting there, I found myself talking to a Costa Rican by the name of Victor.
Victor was on his way back to San Jose, Costa Rica, from Nicaragua. He works in the coffee industry, so as one would imagine, we immediately had something in common to talk about. Of course I had to make fun of him for his Costa Rican accent. For those of you who do not know, the way Costa Ricans pronounce their “rr” in Spanish is similar to how gringos sound when they pronounce an “rr” in Spanish. In other words, they do not roll their “rr.” I find it quite amusing.

After sitting in the waiting room for about an hour, we finally boarded the bus and headed south towards San Jose on an eight- or nine-hour bus ride. As we were driving south from Managua to Peñas Blancas (the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border), I noticed that there were massive wind turbines in southern Nicaragua. I was fascinated with the fact that the Nicaraguans were taking advantage of such an amazing natural resource. As many times as I had driven in southern Nicaragua along the Pan-American Highway, I had never noticed the wind turbines. However, this time, Victor pointed them out to me and I was able to take a picture of them. Seeing the windmills on the hillside instantly evoked imagery from Miguel de Cervantes’ masterpiece Don Quixote de la Mancha.

On the ride, we met a Salvadorian woman by the name of Bea who had been traveling all day, having actually left

---

20 Grammatically and linguistically speaking, in the Spanish, you are supposed to “roll” an “rr” as well as “roll” any word that starts with the letter “r.”
San Salvador earlier that morning. That is a ten-hour bus ride in itself, so she was slightly sleep-deprived when we met her. Victor and I “officially” met her at the border of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. We came to find out that we had a lot in common. She was working on a Master’s degree in Political Science and her thesis work was related to studying the impact that Western society has had on the indigenous groups of Ecuador. Later I learned that she had abandoned that project and decided to make her way to the Amazon because, according to her, the indigenous groups had already sold out to the Western worldview. Therefore, she decided to seek out a culture less influenced by Western society.

When Victor and I met Bea, she told us that she was *en route* to San Blas, Panama, where she was planning to go to Cartagena, Colombia via sailboat, and then make her way alone through Colombia towards Ecuador. The three of us spent most of the whole nine hours talking, which made the time fly.

There is an interesting dynamic that happens when you travel alone. In fact, I feel like the word “alone” is misused. In reality, when traveling, you are typically never “alone,” in the real sense of the word. Whether you travel by plane, train, bus, etc., you are usually surrounded by people. Moreover, there is a distinction between being “alone” and being “lonely.” It is very possible and quite normal, when traveling alone, to be lonely; however, it is very rare to be technically “alone,” because unless you go to the most remote places on earth, you are always among...
people. Therefore, a skill that must be developed while traveling without an official companion is the capacity to overcome the sense of loneliness you will inevitably encounter while on the road.

After finding out that I was going to be staying in a hostel in San Jose, Costa Rica “alone,” Victor offered me a place to stay at his house with him and his Dominican wife, Margarita. They have a roomy house in Heredia near San Jose and offered me a place to stay for the weekend in order to cut down on travel costs. Of course, I accepted the offer without hesitation.
Part Three
Costa Rica

[16] The Land of Potable Water

Costa Rica has impressed me on two levels: potable water (agua potable) and transportation.

Potable Water:

The fact that I can simply go to the sink—or even the toilette if I were totally desperate—and fill up a glass of water and drink it without the worry of getting sick is amazing. This fact is impressive even for developed countries, and Costa Rica is technically part of the developing world. Moreover, potable water is not exclusively found in San Jose and its surrounding cities such as Heredia or Alajuela; rather, it is nationwide. It is found even in underserved communities across Costa Rica. That is something that is unheard of in most other
countries in the developing world. Some places have no water at all, much less, drinkable water.

I was walking around La Avenida Central (Central Avenue) in downtown San Jose where all the shops, restaurants, and banks are located, and as I was walking around, I decided to go into a random coffee shop to have lunch. I ordered a cup of coffee and two croissants filled with ham and cheese, and as I was paying, I asked the lady if she could give me a glass of water. Because of my travels, I am used to drinking out of jugs of purified water as a result of the lack of potable water due to poor water sanitation infrastructure. There is a reason most people tell you, “Don’t drink the water.”

However, that is not how it works here in Costa Rica, thanks to God’s great gift of potable water to this beautiful country. Instead, the lady turned around and made her way to the sink and filled up my cup of water, albeit a tiny cup; nonetheless, it was a cup of water—and it was straight from the sink! I just stood there and laughed for a minute because it caught me off guard. I am sure that she was wondering why I was laughing. Nevertheless, I grabbed my lunch, my coffee, and my (sink) water and sat down to enjoy my meal.

Another time, while I was in Tamarindo, in the northwestern corner of Costa Rica, I was thirsty and had no money, no bottle of water, and there were no stores anywhere to be found—not that I could buy anything without money anyway. Nevertheless, I asked the security
guard working at the resort that was in front of the surf break to let me go in to ask the bartender for a glass of water.

Unfortunately he was not authorized to let “outsiders” go in; however, what came next made up for not letting me in to “beg” for a cup of water. As I was waxing up my surfboard to go surf, he called after and I turned around to find that he had a glass in his hand, which he told me to go fill up at the faucet under the shower. This particular faucet under the shower happened to be where the guests wash their feet after being in the water. Nonetheless, it was “agua potable,” so I indulged, and it made my surf session that much more enjoyable because I was now adequately hydrated.

**Transportation Infrastructure:**

The bus lines and transportation infrastructure here in San Jose are pretty well organized, and clean, as well. While I was in San Jose, I spent a few of my days taking buses from Heredia to downtown San Jose and I have to say, it was a very pleasant experience. The local bus lines (not the infamous overcrowded and slow “chicken buses”) that run between these two cities are very inexpensive and, moreover, they are clean and efficient. As I have said in past subchapters, I thoroughly enjoy traveling by bus. It allows you, as an anthrotourist, to appreciate the town’s or country’s “movement,” and you learn a lot about people’s daily life—although, it is pretty comical when you are
sitting on a bus at a stop light with the bystanders staring at you on the bus as if you were some kind of fish in a fish tank.

In any case, the transportation infrastructure around these cities is really well organized, so it quickly became my preferred form of transportation, at least while I was in San Jose.

Around San Jose

When I wasn’t riding the bus, I was walking around downtown San Jose. As soon as I stepped off the bus into the Avenida Central, I felt as though I had been magically transported to el Microcentro\textsuperscript{1} of Buenos Aires, Argentina, or even to downtown Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. It would be a smaller version, though, because 14 million people live in Buenos Aires, and only about 350,000 live in San Jose. Of all of the capital cities of Central America, downtown San Jose had that impression on me the most: people out on park benches reading, vendors selling DVDs and other products, musicians, coffee shops, places to buy fruit and vegetables, and small side streets made of stone.

My main objective was to check out the Museo de Oro (Gold Museum) in downtown San Jose; however, I found myself walking toward the Museo de los Niños (Children’s Museum) that was, according to the lady I

\textsuperscript{1} Downtown
asked, about 600 meters\(^2\) away. It was more like 1,200 meters, almost a mile, but hey, who’s counting? Anyway, I finally made it to the museum, and found there was some sort of celebration going on there. One thing I love about Latin America is how many celebrations they have, between state and church holidays and saints’ days, so I just bought my ticket and went into the museum. Unfortunately for me, it was a party for kids, and the museum was not at all what I was expecting: it was like going to a much smaller version of Excalibur Casino in Las Vegas, where they were having a kid’s party that was a combination of Chuck E. Cheese and a clown show.

I made my way upstairs, praying that there would be something educational or cultural to read or see upstairs. Fortunately, there were paintings to see up there; however, most of the rooms were closed for some reason. Perhaps it’s because they were concerned that thousands of rambunctious kids would destroy them. That’s definitely something to consider when hosting the type of event I witnessed. I spent about thirty minutes in the museum and left. The yelling and screaming inside made the busy streets of downtown San Jose seem like a quiet library.

One of the other things that really impressed me about Costa Rica, outside of the potable water and efficient transportation system, is the fact that they are very progressive in their approach to education. According

\(^2\) 1 meter is equal to approximately 3.3 feet.
to UNICEF, they have a literacy rate of approximately 96%.\(^3\) Additionally, they have no national army; instead, they invest that money in their education and health care systems. This was a very risky move when they initially implemented this approach around fifty years ago. As it turned out, this “risk” is why Costa Rica is more developed in this regard, while most of the other countries in Central America have had the misfortune of having to deal with other issues such as civil wars and wavering political and economic ideologies. Although the Costa Ricans did have a civil war, their developmental success is because of a paradigm shift in their government spending practices. Another fact worth mentioning is that Costa Rica is home to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.\(^4\)

My only complaint thus far in Costa Rica is that it’s the most expensive country to live in—or visit—in Central America. Thank God I was able to stay for free with my new friend Victor and his wife. Given that Costa Rica is tourist-friendly, it has been very welcoming to neo-liberal practices, and therefore San Jose, in some aspects, seems like another U.S. city, as it is adorned with fast-food restaurants and other American franchises and multinational corporations such as Wal-Mart. Victor was extremely excited to tell me that all of these wonderful

---

\(^3\) For more information regarding Costa Rica’s literacy rate and other statistics, visit the CIA Factbook or UNICEF.

\(^4\) The Inter-American Court of Human Rights is an autonomous judicial institution based in the city of San José, Costa Rica. As part of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS), its purpose is to uphold and protect basic rights in the Americas.
restaurants were near his house and all over San Jose for that matter; however, I think he found it pretty funny when I told him that I was not a fan of those types of places.

He was bragging to his suegra (mother-in-law) about how much of a minimalist I am and how much I sound like an Argentine when I speak Spanish. Of course, that ultimately turned into a conversation about the upcoming Costa Rica vs. Argentina Copa America soccer game on Sunday. In Latin America, it is easy to relate everything to soccer because it’s something that most Latin Americans are passionate about.

Above all, Costa Rica treated me well. While I was there, I introduced myself to a new way to travel, “couch surfing.” Actually, there is a whole group of world travelers who do this and there is even a website for it. Technically, I was not couch surfing because I was staying in a beautiful house, enjoying the luxuries of having my own bedroom with a private bathroom (with hot water), and a live-in maid. This is not typical couch surfing; however, you have to start somewhere, right? In fact, this type of luxury travel could quite possibly disqualify me as an anthrotourist. But then again, even anthrotourists can reserve the right to live it up on occasion.
During my stay in Costa Rica, I had the opportunity to live with a family in Heredia, Costa Rica. Heredia is a city outside of San Jose and has a self-sustaining infrastructure; it is full of fast-food restaurants, a university, gymnasiums, restaurants, bars, and a central park. It is also a thriving city full of history. I had the good fortune of spending my time in Costa Rica living with a family who originally invited me to stay with them without even really knowing me; Victor and I had sat beside one another on a bus from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, and that was all.

It is normal to assume that there is a level of danger associated with taking someone into your house without really knowing them; however, there is also a certain level of danger accepting the offer to do such a spontaneous thing. Nevertheless, as luck would have it, it turned out to be a totally positive experience. Hey, at the end of the day, “life is a tómbola.” Sometimes you just have to take the risk and see what happens.

Victor, his wife Margarita, and Margarita’s mom and dad were amazing hosts. In fact, while I was there, I found out that Margarita’s mom and dad lived in the Dominican Republic during the tyrannical reign of Rafael Trujillo, who managed to go down in the history books as quite possibly one of the bloodiest dictators Latin America has ever seen, killing women, black Dominicans, and

---

5 Tómbola is Spanish for the revolving drum that is used in a lottery.
Haitians, among others. Trujillo was a *caudillo*\(^6\) and dictator that ruled the Dominican Republic for approximately 30 years, from the 1930s to the 1960s. Even to this day, he has left behind his tyrannical ideology for his disciples to follow.

I found out that Margarita’s mom was a revolutionary in her day, standing up to the tyrannical reign of Trujillo and marching against his dictatorship. In fact, she marched hand in hand with the Mirabal sisters. These four valiant women stood up to Trujillo for women’s rights to an education and women’s rights in general. Three of the four were eventually killed on the orders of Trujillo himself. There has been a book written about them, called *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2010, Algonquin Books).

---

\(^6\) *Caudillo* is the Spanish term for a political or military leader. The term can be translated into English to mean “strongman,” or a leader who governs by exercising his military force or clout. *Caudillo* has been the term used to refer to many historical leaders within Latin America.
he was such a man and was as tough as he acted to be, then he should unload the gun on her. Well, obviously, he didn’t do that because she is alive to talk about it; however, this shows you what type of times they were living in. I would encourage anyone who is reading this book to investigate this part of Dominican history. Of course, according to Margarita’s mom, the book *In the Time of the Butterflies* does not divulge a number of the hardships they faced during this time; however, it gives you an idea of the abuses women and black Dominicans faced as a result of Trujillo’s reign.

It’s hard for me to put into words what it was like to hear this woman become so passionate about this part of her life. She was filled with youthfulness as she recounted to me the way the police would handcuff them, strip them naked, and beat and torture her and her friends, who of course included the Mirabal sisters. To this day, she is friends with the only sister who survived the tyrannical rule of Trujillo. She survived primarily because she was not as involved as they were with the political movement. Now she is alive to share with the world about her sisters and friends who stood up for their rights, not only as women, but also as human beings.

The way life works and comes together in scenarios such as this makes you realize that there has to be something greater at work in our lives. It’s so interesting to see how two lives or more can run parallel for a time and then part ways. It is such an amazing
opportunity that life gives us to learn from one another and become that much closer to the human race. That is the beauty of anthrotourism.

A good example is how I stayed in a house with Victor, his wife, his mother and father-in-law, and their maid. Victor is a Costa Rican (or *Tico*, as Costa Ricans are commonly called), his wife and her family are from the Dominican Republic, and Angelita is a Nicaraguan. It is such an amazing dynamic, because they all come from different countries, different cultures and *life paths*, which at that particular juncture brought us to one place to enjoy life together. It was amazing spending time with them and getting to know each one of them on a personal level. Victor is like an older version of me in a lot of ways, except for the fact that we disagree in our opinions on Ernesto Che Guevara and fast food.

Victor enjoys the United States’ “great gift” to humanity: fast-food chains such as McDonalds. As for Che, well, Victor and I just differ in our ideologies. Nevertheless, it was great to talk to him about politics, the United States, and coffee. He was a terrific host, and although he claims to be a bit of a workaholic, he went way out of his way to make me feel like I was with my own family. His wife Margarita is a beautiful Dominican woman, and she and I share a love for Bachata, Merengue, and Salsa music. I have to admit, though, that she dances probably a million times better than I do. It was wonderful getting to know her as well, not to mention that I think I made her day by teaching her about grooveshark.com, a
website that allows you to listen to your favorite bands for free.

Margarita’s mom and dad introduced me to, as they called it, “revolutionary music,” while we were cooking out and hanging out one evening outside on the patio in their front yard. Also, there was an immediate musical connection we all shared in Juan Luis Guerra; he is a Dominican musician known worldwide for his Bachata, Merengue, and Salsa music. They had me put on some old-school Bachata music from the Dominican Republic so they could reminisce about when the two of them fell in love. It is a beautiful thing to see couples such as this one, more than fifty years later, still just as much in love as ever.

Angelita is a wonderful Nicaraguan woman who has worked for Victor and his wife for a few years. She is a dynamic woman who has seven children, all beautiful girls, and came to Costa Rica to work after her husband left her for another woman. The last thing she heard about him was that he had two novias (girlfriends). What a great role model for his seven daughters!

Having a maid, albeit a luxury anywhere in the world, is a common thing in Central America for people of a certain social class. At this particular household, Angelita is considered part of the family, whereas in some households, they are simply “servants.” Angelita lives here with them, and does many of the services that one would imagine that a maid would do, like cleaning, laundry, and cooking. Still, she is not looked down upon by any of them as a result of her socioeconomic status or the fact that she
is Nicaraguan. Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans do not generally get along well. Nicaraguans are generally discriminated against by the Costa Ricans, much like Mexicans are discriminated against by people from the United States. Of course, this is a generalization; however, there is definitely an undertone of racism with regard to how the Costa Ricans view Nicaraguans, be it the ones here looking for jobs, or Nicaragua as a country in general. Nevertheless, as I have already said, Angelita is not treated that way in this household in the least.

After dinner one evening, I had the luxury of spending some time with Angelita and learning more about her and of course, telling her how much I love her country. She is from Leon, Nicaragua, which is north of Managua, the capital. She had recently come back from visiting two of her daughters, who now live in another part of Costa Rica. They found jobs here as well and enjoy Costa Rica, so I am assuming they will stay here indefinitely.

All in all, my experience with this family was one of the highlights of my trip. And although I am not a fan of Central American capital cities, I was able to see what it is like to live in a city such as Heredia, Costa Rica. It was a blessing to live in Victor’s house as if I were part of the family. Victor and I laughed about how this all came to pass. He told me how, in the bus terminal in Managua, when he first spoke to me in English and then thought I was from Argentina, he felt like he insulted me by
assuming I was a *gringo*. Apparently, to him, and many others, I have a slight “Argentine twang” to my Spanish. I guess that isn’t a bad thing; people seem to love that particular Spanish accent.

Another highlight of my trip thus far was when I went to *Volcán Poás* (The Poás Volcano) with my friend Paula and her friend Pablo. I met Paula in Tamarindo on another trip to Costa Rica; however, she lives in Alajuela, Costa Rica, which is near San Jose. I contacted her when I knew I was coming, and she told me that she was going to take me to Volcán Poás and show me around. Well, she fulfilled that promise, and she and Pablo picked me up and took me there, about one hour outside of San Jose.

To get to the volcano, you have to leave the city of San Jose, pass the international airport, and begin to ascend a mountain that eventually, 2,300 meters later, will take you to the national park for the volcano. As we made our way up this mountain, I took notice of the change of foliage as we ascended. At the bottom, it was the classic, tropical Costa Rica that everyone dreams of or sees on the television commercials; however, once you reach approximately 1,000 meters above sea level, you begin to see the flora and fauna changing. It changes from tropical foliage to highland foliage. The palm trees begin to disappear and eventually become non-existent, and the ferns and pine trees become the predominant trees. In fact, Costa Rica is known for exporting ferns, and a majority of the exportable ferns are grown on this mountain, which is also home to Volcán Poás.
As we made our way to the top of the mountain and began to get closer to the entrance of the park, we noticed that there were a number of people in the street, and the buses were stopped, and people were getting out of the buses. Once we got closer, we could see that there was a sloth above us, on the cable line that ran down the mountainside.

Apparently, sloths are slow when they are not on the attack; however, when they are being aggressive, the hands that they use for scaling trees or, in this case, crawling across cable lines, convert into huge claws and they are quick to attack. In fact, I was told a story about a sloth that attacked a human here in Costa Rica. According to the story, a group of drunk American tourists were provoking a sloth, assuming that it is “slothful” all the time. To their surprise, the sloth became angry and attacked the tourist. Furthermore, it attacked him in his privates, and did so much damage that this particular (drunk) tourist needed to go to the hospital and have his privates surgically sewed back on.

From what I have heard, the sloth’s bite can be relatively dangerous as they have something in their bite that can be life-threatening if not treated immediately. I guess it is safe to say that the sloth is only slow when it is not provoked and not in the process of hunting food. Nevertheless, it is still an interesting creature because of its seemingly mellow demeanor.

After taking pictures of the sloth, we made our way to the crater of Volcán Poás. It was a clear day and therefore we were able to see the crater, which is full of
turquoise-blue water. It is only about 108 degrees Fahrenheit, so it would make for a nice hot spring—except for the sulfuric smoke that pours out of the crater.

According to Paula, this crater is one of the largest craters in the world. In person, it was hard to get a sense of how large the crater was, because there is no good point of reference, as the crater is adorned with rocks. Furthermore, the fact that people were not allowed in the crater made it hard to truly appreciate the grandeur of the crater itself. Nevertheless, the crater and its turquoise lagoon in front of a backdrop of mountains and blue sky made for a picturesque photo.

The other thing that is amazing about the volcano, aside from the world-renowned coffee and gigantic crater, are the strawberries. I am not sure if they were truly some of the best strawberries I have even eaten, or whether they tasted so good because I was so hungry from wandering around the volcano all day long. Whichever it was, these strawberries are definitely world-class. As you descend the volcano and the mountain, people are selling strawberries and other fruits and veggies the whole way down. As we descended, I had Pablo stop so I could buy a bag of fresh strawberries. I ate so many of them and I ate them so quickly that I was (almost) not hungry for lunch when we stopped at the bottom of the mountain.

After traveling around central Costa Rica, I had planned to take a bus to David, Panama; however, I had to skip out on my trip to David and Boquete, and head straight to
Panama City in order to be on time to catch my sailboat to Colombia. I had planned to spend a couple of days in Boquete before continuing south to Panama City and ultimately to Carti on the Caribbean coast. However, since I ended up spending so much time in Costa Rica, I ran out of time and needed to get to Panama City, because from Panama City I was going to take a 4×4 truck across the country to the Caribbean coast where my sailboat captain was waiting to take me to Cartagena, Colombia.

[18] The Gringo Card

Let’s take a minute to think about some of the advantages (or disadvantages) of being a gringo traveling through Latin America, specifically Central America:

Throughout all of my travels, I have to admit that I have benefited from the proper use of the “gringo card.” In fact, in Chesa Boudin’s book *Gringo: A Coming of Age in Latin America* (2013, Scribner), when referring to the use of his “gringo-ness” to his advantage during his travels, he uses the term “Gringo Wild Card,” which I think is a good term when referring to the way gringos employ the use of strategic essentialism⁷ in Latin America; however, I am

---

⁷ Strategic Essentialism is a term coined by Indian literary critic Gayatri Spivak, and it refers to when a person uses his or her identity in order to create a socially advantageous situation for him- or herself or to achieve certain goals.
simply going to refer to it as the “gringo card” for short, and to give my own “spin” on the term itself.

I guess before diving into this theme, I should explain what I mean by the use of the term. The phrase refers to all of the socially advantageous things that accompany being a gringo in Latin America—that is, all of the things Americans get away with because of their passport and nationality. Being a gringo in this part of the world also has its disadvantages; therefore, pulling out the gringo card in certain situations can turn out to work to one’s detriment. However, before going into the disadvantages of being a gringo, let’s look at a few examples of how being a gringo can be advantageous if you know how to use the “card” properly. Moreover, it is very similar to the use of strategic essentialism in order to benefit in certain social situations.

First and foremost, and always a good “get out of jail free card” is to reference the U.S. Embassy. When in doubt or when dealing with the national police of Central America, you can generally get out of trouble by telling the police that “the U.S. Embassy told me not to (fill in the blank).”

I was in Nicaragua and was stopped by the National Police, which happens quite frequently, especially if you have a surfboard on the top of your car (which screams, “Target!”). Nevertheless, when this happens, it is a good time to use the gringo card. They stopped me as I was
making my way from Managua, the capital city, to southern Nicaragua, towards the Costa Rican border.

The wages for a police officer in most of Central America and Mexico are extremely low, which in turn makes it very tempting for them to find other (potentially corrupt) ways of supplementing their income, like extortion. What they generally do is stop you and act like you have done something wrong, even if you have not, and then scare you into thinking that you are going to lose your license, or worse, that you are going to jail. This is a common scare tactic that they use in order to extort money so that they will let you go. This technique is even more frightening if the gringo does not speak Spanish and therefore has no clue what is being said. In those scenarios, they try to extort even more money out of you because they have you so scared that you are imagining you will end up like the people you see on Locked Up Abroad; thus, you give them an even greater quantity of money in order to pay for your infraction.

I knew, before we were officially stopped that it was going to happen. Why? Because there were three other gringo rental cars in front of us with surfboards that had been stopped. These police officers were not even being discreet in their attempt to extort money from newly arrived gringos who are just looking to get to the beach and go surfing with as little fuss as possible.

So, we stopped, just as the national police officer, toting a shiny AK-47 assault rifle, signaled us to do. He came to the car and asked for my license and the registration for the car. I gave it to him without argument.
Then he walked away and began to walk around the car, clearly looking for something to find wrong with the car or us. At this point, he had no clue that I spoke Spanish. He then came back to the car and told me that it was illegal to drive barefoot. I was, in fact, driving barefoot; however, that was not an infraction worthy of what came next. He then told me that he was going to write me a ticket, take my license, and I would then have to go to court in Managua to get my license back.

Now, I would completely understand if that was legitimate protocol—if driving barefoot was a realistic infraction of the law. But it wasn’t, and was, on the contrary, a bogus attempt to extort money from me. So, then I began to speak to him in Spanish, after I laughed at him for trying to tell me that I was doing something wrong in a language that, at times, sounded like broken English. In reality, what he wanted was for me to bribe him. His price was around 100 Córdobas, approximately one-fifth of his daily salary. Similar scenarios have also happened to me in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Venezuela.

I proceeded to ask him why driving barefoot is so illegal if people were allowed to literally stand on top of moving buses as they drove down the Pan-American highway, which is genuinely dangerous. These buses were passing us as I was talking to the officer. He was taken aback by the fact that I spoke fluent Spanish, and he stood there, frozen like a deer in headlights, as I called him out for what he was trying to do—extort money—and told him that I used to live here and that I know what they are doing. Then—here comes the gringo card—I told him that I
was going to report him to the U.S. Embassy for doing what he was doing. He practically threw my license and registration into the car as he told me to “just get out of here.”

The thing that shook him up was when I threatened to report him to the U.S. Embassy. So, the lesson to be learned here is how to properly use the gringo card when dealing with corrupt cops in Central America.

The use of the gringo card, in this scenario, was to “one-up” the police, who for all intents and purposes were trying to take advantage of the fact that we were tourists. So take note that this scenario also shows you how being a gringo can be a disadvantage. Nevertheless, if handled properly, the gringo card will always prevail, if you have not actually broken the law.

The gringo card is null and void if you have legitimately broken the law and therefore deserve to suffer the consequences of your crime. You cannot assume, nor should you even expect, that simply being a gringo will make you above the law. Then again, I suppose that if you do actually break the law, then you can always offer to give them “gas money” to let you go. That is between you and your own personal ethical beliefs. However, the point is, in that particular case, the gringo card is irrelevant.

Another example of how the gringo card works (not that it’s right or wrong; it just is what it is) is with
people in the tourist industry. They know that you have dollars and therefore you are someone with whom they want to do business. In these scenarios, the customer (you) is always right. Being a *gringo* in these scenarios gives you leverage in terms of buying and negotiating power. It can, on certain occasions, get you an upgrade in a hotel, an exclusive table at a restaurant, a nicer rental car, and so on. In other words, in these scenarios, being a *gringo* can be perceived as prestigious, or perhaps, a way for the business owners to brag about the fact that a *gringo* has chosen to eat at their restaurant, stay at their hotel, or rent their car. Average middle-class Central Americans do not, by and large, get these types of privileges, even though they are socially in the same category as the *gringo*.

I am not condoning this type of behavior, or the benefits associated with being a *gringo*; I am just telling you what I have experienced as an anthrotourist.

---

*I should add that speaking the language is half the battle, and is highly recommended if you expect to thoroughly enjoy your travels through Latin America. I am convinced that the only way to become truly intimate with a culture is by speaking the native language. You will always be a foreigner; however, speaking the language will provide you with an “in-pass” into the hearts of the people that you would not get otherwise. Having a working knowledge of the local language is strongly recommended for all anthrotourists.*

*So, take the time and learn the language!*
With regard to the “in-pass,” I am not going to go into detail as to how being a gringo helps you with getting to know Latin people of the opposite sex; however, I will leave the reader with some things to consider before you let yourself think that all of these women or men are in love with you because you are the most good-looking thing Latin America has ever seen.

Many travelers tend to find themselves in ecotourist friendly places that tend to be in, or at least near, underprivileged communities. Many of those guys and girls are looking for a way out and they see you as a way towards upward mobility. Now, you may be the best-looking person in the world; however, how do you know that a guy or girl is interested in you because of your looks (or your cute, broken Spanish accent)?

Yes, there is a strong possibility that he/she is attracted to you because, you come from a different culture and have different facial structure, perhaps even lighter eyes and lighter hair, which could be perceived as more attractive to the local population; thus, you could, in fact, be perceived as extremely attractive. Nevertheless, do not let your ego get the best of you and allow you to be someone’s route to a “green card,” leaving you scratching your head as to why someone would leave a handsome person such as yourself after their U.S. residency “kicks in.”

Financially, you make much more in two weeks than some of these people make in six months (or possibly a full year depending on where you are). The median annual income for someone from Nicaragua is
approximately $3,000 a year and is approximately $11,300 USD a year for someone in Costa Rica, which is the wealthiest country in Central America with the highest per capita income. So, if you start thinking you may be the best thing that ever happened to that community, you should check your ego and analyze the situation a bit. Don’t let your gringo card lead you down a road towards a broken heart (or a broken ego).

I am not discouraging cross-cultural relationships. Quite the contrary; I think that these types of relationships can be very fruitful and mutually beneficial. However, with regard to the gringo card, you have to be aware of the reality of who you are and where you are from, and where you are geographically in terms of relative socioeconomic status and the people’s perception of you as a foreigner. Nevertheless, the gringo card in this scenario can help you find a beautiful partner that in other circumstances would be way out of your league (I am saying that with a hint of sarcasm, but with a hint of truth too).

Now, let’s talk about how the gringo card can actually be a disservice to you as a “foreigner.”

Currently, the political climate of Central America (and Latin America in general) is not exactly, for lack of a better term, siding with U.S. foreign policy, and for good reason. They have been victims of the hegemonic ideology of U.S. foreign policy and capitalist cowboys, who have instigated civil wars, backed neo-liberal agendas against the will of the people, turned a blind eye to mass killing by
U.S.-backed dictators, etc., all in the name of freedom and democracy, but in reality promoting the spread of U.S. capitalism and their neo-imperialistic ideologies.

Now, taking all that into consideration, you can understand what the political climate is, and what their views are on U.S. foreign policies in places like Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua; but what you may not realize is that some people will assume that you, as a gringo, agree with your government. Naturally this is not always the case. In fact, Latin Americans are not all as easily manipulated by the media as the average American. However, there are a lot of people that judge gringos and other foreigners according to their government’s foreign policies, much like many gringos judge people from China, France, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and so on, assuming that everyone from those countries agrees with their government’s foreign policy towards the USA. Nevertheless, it is our job as anthrotourists, and cultural ambassadors of the USA, to redeem our country’s reputation and help people realize that we do not all agree with our government’s perspective on foreign policy, and certainly not with their hegemonic ideology.

The USA is an amazing country that has offered me personally the opportunity for an amazing education and upward mobility. Furthermore, I have had the luxury of having a U.S. passport since I was a teenager, and it has allowed me to explore places outside of my own country in order to get a different perspective on life. I am, in fact, very appreciative and proud to be from the USA. However,
that does not mean that I agree with many of the decisions that my country’s leaders make with regard to foreign policy and overall neo-liberal approaches to development in Latin America. I think it has been detrimental to their national solidarity in many ways.

Let me end this subchapter with a couple of anecdotes about how people politically stereotype us as gringos as well as how the use of the gringo card has its disadvantages:

I was in a museum in Tigre, Argentina, in 2007, just walking around and admiring the paintings and the historical literature related to Argentina.

Tigre is a beautiful town outside of the centro of Buenos Aires, yet still part of the providence of Buenos Aires. It is a town that is full of old British architecture and beautiful northern European homes. It was also home to Domingo Sarmiento, who was famous for his ideology as published in Civilization and Barbarism (1845), where he argued that Argentina needed to be more like Europe and less like “the barbaric Americas.” His ideology promoted his hatred towards the caudillo mentality, the gauchos, and the indigenous groups, or anything nationalistically Argentine, which he describes as representing “barbarism” while “civilization” is represented by Europe and North America.

After walking around and listening to people discuss the artwork in the museum, I decided to sit down. I
happened to sit down next to two older women who were probably in their late 60s. They asked me, “¿De dónde sos?” (“Where are you from?”). I answered them by telling them that I was from Los Estados Unidos (the United States). As soon as I told them that I was a gringo (actually we are called Yankees in Argentina—actually pronounced “shankies” because of their Argentine accent), they immediately replied by telling me how much they hate the USA.

Naturally, this didn’t sit well with me, as I knew exactly what they were trying to say; however, apparently they were not articulate enough to tell me that it was our government that they “hated” and not the American populace. In fact, they had never even been to the USA, nor had they ever had a gringo friend to speak of. Still, they felt the need to tell me how much they hated the USA. Nevertheless, I sat and talked to them for a while and helped them understand that just because I am a gringo, that does not mean that I agree with everything my country does. I think that we came to an understanding, and I like to think that I helped them see the flaws in what they said.

---

8 Sos is the second person singular conjugation of the verb Ser that corresponds to the subject pronoun Vos. The subject pronoun Vos is used in place of tú in some parts of Latin America such as Argentina, Uruguay, El Salvador, and Honduras, just to name a few.
Let’s not forget that many gringos have this same arrogant/ignorant attitude towards other countries. So before you judge these women for their ignorance, think about the last thing you said or heard someone say about Venezuela, North Korea, Iran, China, and/or France.

Another time that the gringo card backfired on me was in Chile. I decided to take a trip to Chile with my graduate school colleague and roommate, Zack, to visit a close Argentine friend of ours, Ariel, who was the director of a study-abroad program in Viña del Mar, Chile. Zack and I had been traveling all over South America and finally made our way over to Chile before returning to Buenos Aires, Argentina. In any case, we were both excited to get to Chile and visit Ariel. So, after we flew across the continent from Argentina to Chile, we showed up in the airport, ready to grab our bags and take a bus to Viña del Mar to meet Ariel, when, to our dismay, we had to pay a $100 USD entrance fee to get into Chile. They called it reciprocity.

Because the USA charges Chileans a certain sum of money to buy a visa in order to visit the U.S., they now feel justified charging us. Honestly, it is not all that bad, and in fact, I cannot blame them. Nevertheless, it came as a shock to me as I never had to do that before. For that moment I wanted to be Mexican because they only had to pay $15 USD to get in the country. Unfortunately the eagle on my passport and the words that read “United States of America” did not allow me to fool the Chilean Customs agent. If Chile charges us for the opportunity to enter into
their country and try to exercise our right to use the *gringo* card on Chilean soil, what can I say? After what the U.S. government did in Chile by helping Pinochet overthrow Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 (note the interesting irony in the date), I am surprised they let us into their country at all.

So, as the old Kenny Rogers’ song goes (with regard to your gringo card), “You have to know when to hold ’em, know when to fold ’em, know when to walk away, know when to run.”

[19] *Staying Longer*

I found myself falling more and more in love with Costa Rica the longer I stayed. In fact, my intentions were only to spend the weekend in San Jose *en route* to northern Panama. However, I made the executive decision to postpone my departure date to Panama for a number of reasons, not the least of which was because I was enjoying every minute I was in Costa Rica. Also, I wanted to be there to watch Costa Rica play Argentina in the Copa America. It was a pivotal game for both teams, so I could not miss the opportunity to make my way to a sports bar to watch the game with all of the *Ticos* (nickname for Costa Ricans), even though I was rooting for Argentina. Of course, I had to keep that to myself to a certain degree,
even though I was sporting an _albiceleste_ (sky blue) shirt, which is the color of the Argentine team jersey.

To make matters even more exciting, I found out during the game that Costa Rica is not immune to TICA (“This Is Central America”) moments. About 15 minutes into the game, and just when everyone had arrived and was totally captivated, the power cut off. One can only imagine how the people reacted. Thank God the power came back on approximately two minutes later, because if it had not, there probably would have been rioting in the streets—no exaggeration. This game was important because if Costa Rica won, then they not only would have moved on to the second round, but they would have knocked out the host, Argentina in the first round of the Copa America. This would be impressive on a number of levels—not the least of which was that Costa Rica’s level of soccer is nowhere near the level of a team such as Argentina, whose selection is star-studded with world-class soccer players. In addition, they were playing against Argentina in Cordoba, Argentina. Unfortunately for Costa Rica, Argentina ended up winning 3-0, and as a result, advanced to the second round of the Copa America.

Nevertheless, the excitement and the anticipation of this game was enough to convince me to stay here in Heredia for another three to four days with Victor and Margarita. In addition, given that I was going to be in the ecotourism capital of Central America, I decided to take
advantage of the amazing ecotourism tours that Costa Rica offers. All I had to do was go on the Internet and within one hour I had booked a whitewater rafting tour for $100 with a company that would pick me up, feed me, take me rafting, and bring me home.

Whitewater Rafting Adventure

What really captivated me, aside from the food that was included in the whitewater rafting package, was the fact that the Pacuare River is among the top five rivers in the world for whitewater rafting, according to the Ticos—and it is hard to debate that, for two reasons. First, I have never whitewater-rafted before and have no way of comparing it with any other place in the world. Second, the experience was so memorable that they definitely had me convinced I spent my six hours of rafting Class II, III, and IV rapids among some of the most picturesque scenery I have ever seen in Central America.

The actual tour starts with a 6:00 a.m. pick-up from San Jose and then a two- to three-hour drive to the Pacuare River, which included a breakfast stop at a restaurant that was about halfway between San Jose and the Pacuare River, and sat at 3000 meters altitude in the picturesque highlands of Costa Rica. The breakfast was an all-you-can-eat place that was in the scenic highlands of Costa Rica, en route to the river. In fact, as we ate breakfast, we watched the low-lying, tropical rain clouds as they passed
across the picturesque highlands as if watching a scene from *Jurassic Park*.

“We” is me and my two new Californian friends, Jason and Michelle, who were on their honeymoon. They had arrived the night before from Los Angeles. I was eating lunch and rafting with them. They were a fun couple and great teammates on the rafting tour.

After having *gallo pinto*, eggs, orange juice, and coffee, we made our way towards the Pacuare River. Once we got close to the drop-off spot, our bus driver realized that the road down to the river was too muddy for our bus to make it to the “put-in” site, so we all got out and walked about a quarter mile to the drop-off spot, traversing a relatively steep, muddy hill until making it to the river. Once we got to the put-in site, we all geared up by putting on life jackets and helmets and grabbing our oar of choice. Then, we jumped in with our guide, Alex, for our 18-mile rafting tour through some of Costa Rica’s most magnificent scenery.

Alex was a skilled guide who knew the river inside and out, because he does this tour every day. As he was quick to tell us, he never gets tired of it, because it is so full of adventure. Now I understand what he meant. He was telling us how much fun we were about to have. Mind you, I had never whitewater rafted in my life, much less on a river that was home to Class IV rapids. Nevertheless, I got geared up and jumped in the boat, ready for the challenge that lay ahead.

The put-in site allows you to get a slow start and to warm up to what’s to come; however, “what’s to come”
was not far from the put-in site. As we began to traverse the rapids, Alex would tell us “forward” or “hold,” which dictated how Jason and I would paddle. There was the occasional miscommunication as we found ourselves fighting against the rapids. Alex, sitting in the back, would yell commands to us at the front, but sometimes it would be hard to hear him over the sound of the water when we were traversing some of the more fierce rapids like the Class III or IV rapids. After about three hours of rafting and after traveling about ten miles downriver, fighting rapids of all levels, we stopped at a predetermined calm spot to eat lunch.

Now one might think that since we were on a raft and in the middle of nowhere, our lunch would be lackluster; however, this was one of the best lunches that I had eaten throughout all of my travels thus far. It was a full spread of chicken, pasta, papaya, pineapple, and watermelon—not to mention that I was happy to wash all of that down with a drink that was a blend of sugar cane juice, ginger, and orange juice. As if that was not good enough, I sat by myself on the shoreline and stared out into the raging river and beautiful, lush flora and fauna that rose out of the sides of the mountains and were adorned with more species of tropical trees than one could count on a hundred people’s fingers and toes, or so it seemed.

After this delicious lunch, we continued downriver, traversing more Class IV rapids, waterfalls of all sizes and heights, and rafting through caverns that were adorned with rope bridges created by the indigenous people who lived in the surrounding mountains.
At one point, Alex told me that I could jump out and actually ride the rapids on my back, outside of the raft. I wasted no time jumping into the water and riding the Class II rapids on my back. Being a surfer, I am used to the movement of water, so I knew how to handle the shifting currents and rapids in order to stay afloat. This is not something I would recommend to a person who is uncomfortable being held under water, or someone who is not accustomed to strong currents.

As we made our way downstream, we continued to ride world-class rapids as well as float under waterfalls of all shapes, sizes, and heights, and which came out of every nook and cranny of the mountainside. This had to have been one of the most breathtaking adventures I’d had since starting my journey through Central America in May. Seeing the canyons and lush mountains rise out of the sides of the river, the flora and fauna that grew on the mountainside, the seemingly endless world-class rapids, and the fact that we were relatively alone in the adventure made for an unforgettable experience. The only thing that I could manage to say to Jason, who was paddling to my right, was “How awesome this is.” Of course, he mumbled something similar back to me as we laughed and manned the front of our raft down the Pacuare River.

Having an adventure like this with friends like Michelle and Jason really renews my “stoke” for the beauties of Latin America. In fact, simply hearing how excited Jason got at breakfast by seeing the low-level
clouds pass through the lush, green mountains just outside our window reminds me how much I take this beautiful region for granted. However, it also reminds me how blessed I am to be able to call places like this “my second home.” It often saddens me that many Americans are “scared” to come live these types of experiences. In fact, it boggles my mind that people can stay in their hometown their whole life and not get out and enjoy the beauties of this part of the world. For Americans, a trip to Central America is only a hop, skip, and a jump from most cities in the United States.

So, my question is: What are you scared of that is keeping you from coming out of your shell and realizing that there is a world out there that is beyond anything you have ever imagined? Don’t let life pass you by and only live these types of experiences through someone’s travel blog or book.

My wish for the people who are reading this book, and for the human race in general, would be for them to have experienced what I have experienced at the Pacuare River. I can honestly say that this was one of the most monumental moments of my trip. And the crazy thing is that I was yet to get to Panama and sail to Colombia.

Real life is not being trapped in an office making “comments” on Facebook or other social networks, or being a slave to some capitalist business owner who sees you as a means to make him or her wealthier. No, life is all about feeling alive and exploring a world that God has
given us to see and experience, even if it may put you in harm’s way.

In fact, during this adventure, as I was passing through one of the rapids, I found myself laughing at the thought that theme parks have poured millions, if not billions, of dollars into trying to emulate places like the Pacuare River and its rapids. The Pacuare River is adorned with God’s handiwork, from the flora to the fauna, from the animals that inhabit the area, to the landscape that makes this place the fifth best place to do whitewater rafting in the world. It would be virtually impossible for any engineer or theme park owner to replicate a place so unique and naturally perfect in all senses of the word.

My advice: Get out and live life and enjoy the natural beauties that God has put in our backyard!


Interview with coffee industry representative, Marcos

Given that I was traveling through a part of the world that is known for its world-class coffee, I figured that it would only be logical to talk about its process. When I refer to the process, I am referring to how the coffee goes from the coffee plant to your cup. This subchapter will also discuss

---

9 The name has been intentionally changed to protect this person’s anonymity
the capitalism of coffee and the distribution of capital during this process.

However, before going into detail about the capitalism of this “comfort drink,” I wanted to talk about why this part of the world is known for its good coffee. Central America reaps the benefits of being part of the Ring of Fire, meaning that it is located around the Pacific ring, which is volcanically a very active part of the world. As a result of this volcanic activity, the area is blessed with great soil for cultivating coffee. Additionally, the volcanoes provide this region with mountains of the proper altitude to harvest quality Arabica coffee.

There are two varieties of coffee, Arabica and Robusta. For coffee to be considered Arabica, it must be grown at a certain altitude and latitude, between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and is more difficult and more expensive to cultivate. It is the better of the two types of coffee and has a higher price, as it is considered a commodity. Robusta, on the other hand, can be grown at a lower level and in a warmer climate. Moreover, Robusta is less expensive to cultivate and produce, and does not taste as good to the coffee connoisseur. However, with regard to the capitalism of coffee, some companies want to produce higher quantities of lower-grade coffee, and therefore use larger quantities of Robusta. This, in turn, allows these companies to cut back on production costs and maximize profits at the expense of their consumer.

With regard to the capitalism and resale of coffee, there is no such thing as pure Arabica. Generally, that is too expensive, so the only option is to make blends. In
other words, much of the Arabica coffee that you and I drink is mixed with Robusta coffee or other lesser-quality coffee from the coffee mill.

Let’s look at an example in order to understand what I am referring to. Most people have heard about Kona coffee from Hawaii; however, very few of you have drank pure Kona coffee unless you went straight to Kona to buy the coffee, or you pay an extremely high price for specialty Kona coffee. Pure Kona coffee would be way too expensive for the average consumer who just wants to have a drink of relatively high-quality coffee, and feel that kick from the caffeine. So, what many of the roasters or retailers do, in order to lower the cost of your one pound bag of coffee, is blend it with something that is not as good. It is like adding water to the milk to increase the volume of what you already have, but thereby diluting it in the process.

That is the case for virtually all of the coffees in the world; they have been “diluted” in order to (1) lower cost for the consumer and (2) make the product last for the producer. This is why you buy a “blend” of coffee. Nevertheless, you will still see on the bag of coffee the name of the place where it was produced. This is not to say that they are lying to the consumer; rather, they are simply telling you where the majority of the coffee comes from. In fact, many of these producers find a blend that is unique to them by mixing different types of coffee so that they can market that “taste,” therefore making themselves more marketable to the retailer. Many times, with regard to Kona coffee, they will have the percentage of Kona coffee
on the bag so that the consumer knows how much of it is “pure.” Furthermore, there are cases where the pure coffee of a particular region is extremely acidic and therefore would not be enjoyable for most coffee drinkers. For example, Tarrazu in Costa Rica is known for its acidity. Therefore, in order to counteract some of the acidity associated with this particular coffee, the roaster uses it to raise the acidity of other coffee blends. Thus, sometimes good coffee is used to improve another type of coffee in order to create an even more palatable blend for the consumer.

When you hear the phrase “Colombian coffee,” that is just a marketing technique used to get the consumer to buy into the idea that “all” Colombian coffee is amazing. The fact is that even in the same coffee fincas\(^\text{10}\) where world-class coffee is grown, there are bad beans.

In Florida, where we are known for our world-class oranges, there are a variety of types of oranges that grow on the same tree. Some are good for retail at your local grocery store, others for making orange juice, and others are for throwing away. Naturally, the ones that will make their way to the store will be the best-looking oranges, whereas the ones that make it to the “fresh squeezed” orange juice aisle in the supermarket were probably almost as good, but just didn’t have the same coloration as the

\(^{10}\) When referring to coffee plantations, the word finca simply means plantation or farm.
ones which were fortunate enough to make the final cut and find their way to the fruit rack in the grocery store.

Coffee is processed in the same way. Someone has to separate the beans so that they can remove the bad beans from production. Of course, that is what a particular finca would call their café puro (pure coffee). The beans that are not as good are either thrown away, or used in blends. The process begins with the coffee either selected by hand or by machine, and begins its long road to the retailer, ultimately becoming your morning cup of joe.

Below is the process of coffee production in terms of where it starts, how much each process costs, and the earnings associated with each individual step:

**COFFEE GROWER**

This is the first actor in the process. The Coffee Grower spends approximately $70 USD in overhead to produce the equivalent of a sack of exportable coffee. The overhead costs go towards buying fertilizer and other materials to produce the coffee properly and to pay the people to pick the coffee cherry from the plant.

An exportable amount of coffee is 150 pounds, or 70 kilograms, which is equivalent to one sack. To export a sack of coffee, the Coffee Grower needs to harvest 20
At this point, the “coffee” is a red fruit or yellow fruit called a “cherry.” Thus, the Cajuelas are filled full of cherries and are ready to be sold to the Coffee Miller.

20 Cajuelas make one Fanega in cherries, which is the equivalent of an exportable amount of coffee. To produce a Fanega properly costs $70, which is the cost associated with taking care of the coffee to get it to a point worthy of passing it on to the Coffee Miller. This process does not take into account the natural risk that the workers run by being out in the fields harvesting the cherries. For example, in certain places in Central America, the people who are picking this coffee run the risk of being bitten by green pit vipers that also happen to love coffee and coil up, camouflaged, on the plant. This can be a deadly bite if not treated immediately. Other risks include different sicknesses that the plant itself can contract, therefore killing the coffee plant or bush.

At this point, the producer can sell it to the Coffee Miller for $200 per Fanega. That means the producer earns approximately $130 for each Fanega sold (that is subtracting the $70 overhead costs per Fanega from its total sales price).

**THE COFFEE MILLER**

The Coffee Miller has a cost of five to ten U.S. dollars to process the entire Fanega. Processing means removing

---

11 One cajuela is equivalent to a 25×25×25 cm aluminum can/box. It is the box used by the people picking the coffee cherries.

12 One fanega is the equivalent of 20 cajuelas.
the cherry, or pulp, washing, drying, and removing the skin of the beans, which leaves the Miller with two green coffee beans per cherry.

At this point, the Coffee Miller can sell an exportable bag of 150 pounds for $270, the Market Stock Price as of today. The Coffee Miller leaves it as green coffee beans. This is what is produced from one Fanega, which costs the Miller a total of $210 dollars—the costs after purchasing and processing the Fanega—therefore, the Coffee Miller makes a profit of $60.

**COFFEE ROASTER**

Next, the Coffee Roaster buys the 150-pound sack of green coffee beans for approximately $270 and roasts the green coffee beans. The roasting process is like making popcorn. In fact, it behaves just like popcorn in the sense that it “pops” open and allows the bean to give off its aromatic scent. Additionally, this gives the coffee the look that you and I are used to seeing. The Coffee Roaster buys from different Coffee Millers and mixes his own blends of coffee in order to create his own brand. Each pound of roasted coffee, after going through a rating process for quality purposes, can make approximately 20 cups of blended coffee.

The Coffee Roaster prefers to make blends because this will dilute the coffee and therefore lower costs to the consumer, and allows for the pure coffee to last longer, therefore increasing the Roaster’s earnings. Additionally, it is his or her way of creating a brand and
maintaining a consistency in his or her coffee brand for the market’s consumers.

At this point, the coffee is officially ready to be sold to larger coffee buyers and coffee chains or shops. Then this coffee will be put in pretty little one-pound bags and sold to you, the consumer. The Roaster can sell his or her coffee for $1,500 per 150-pound bag, and thereby earn $1,230 for his or her efforts in the production process.

**COFFEE RETAILER**

A pound of top-quality, nearly pure coffee can be sold for approximately $2 per cup of coffee, which is a total earning of $40 per pound for quality coffee. Therefore, the Roaster sells a sack of coffee to the Retailer and they, the Retailers, make $6,000 per sack of coffee. A retailer, for example, is Starbucks, McDonald’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, or your local coffee store.

Three hundred million people live in the USA, and approximately one in three drinks a cup of coffee every day. That means one hundred million people drink an average of one cup of coffee each day. That translates into 100,000,000 cups of coffee consumed on a daily basis. Divide that number by 3,000, which is the amount of cups of coffee that can be made in one sack of coffee. That gives you a grand total of approximately 3,400 sacks of coffee consumed/sold per day (100,000,000 ÷ 3,000 = 3,400). Finally, the profit made from a sack of coffee is $6,000 and given our statistics, retailers such as Starbucks sell an average of 3,400 sacks of coffee a day.
In short, given those numbers, which is a relatively conservative estimate, a company such as Starbucks grosses approximately $20,400,000 (3,400 sacks of coffee × $6,000 = $20,400,000) in coffee on a daily basis.

Of course, we cannot assume that every one of the one third of Americans who drink coffee is drinking Starbucks coffee; however, what we can assume is that multinational corporations are making much more than the person who spends all day every day harvesting the coffee.

Let’s take Starbucks again, for example: According to the information that is provided on the Internet regarding Starbucks’ average daily sales over the last couple of years, Starbucks sells an average of 4,000,000 cups of coffee per day. Using the calculations we have for a coffee retailer, Starbucks sells approximately 1,350 sacks of coffee per day. Remember that as the Retailer, you earn $6000 per sack of coffee sold. That means that Starbucks grosses approximately $8,100,000 (1,350 sacks of coffee × $6,000 = $8,100,000) per day.

Now, keeping in mind that as a business they have overhead costs such as employees, lights, merchandise, and marketing, they still make a very healthy chunk of money on a daily basis.

The purpose of this article is not to point any fingers at anyone that is involved in the capitalism of coffee processing; rather, its intention is to expose the reality of how coffee makes it to your cup in the morning to bring a
smile to your face before you run out the door to work—or to drink coffee while on the way to work. This is an attempt to provide fellow coffee drinkers with some idea of the process and the money associated with this industry.

The coffee process would appear, at first glance, to benefit the retailer. Although that may be true, we must keep in mind that the retailer also has the highest level of overhead. Naturally, everyone involved in the process has a level of risk relative to his or her role in the process, whether that risk involves natural disasters, marketing price swings, or the balance of supply and demand). And finally, all of these players are at the mercy of the consumer, because without the consumer, no one in this process would earn any money. Nevertheless, this cost breakdown will give the reader a better understanding of the costs associated with getting that fresh cup of joe into your hands for your pleasure!
Part Four
Panama

[21] Costa Rica to Panama

For me to decide to spend an extra week in Costa Rica was an interesting change of events because I had originally planned to stay in San Jose for a weekend en route to Panama. Sometimes life has different plans for you, and in this case, it worked out perfectly for me to stick around San Jose. That is the beauty of anthrotourism: the freedom to improvise and deviate from your plans. When one becomes that comfortable in a place, as I was at Victor’s house with his whole family, there is a spirit of complacency that tries to keep you from moving on. You begin to get comfortable and you consider postponing your departure date, which in my case, was pretty easy given that Victor and his family were extremely hospitable. I was still a bit sad as the last day began to come to a close and I was packing my bags to catch my bus to Panama.
I can empathize with Ernesto Che Guevara when he said (during his travels through South America), “there is a certain nostalgia that one feels when one crosses a border from one country to the next. You feel a certain sadness for what you are leaving behind, yet a certain excitement for what is to come.” There is a looming fear with regard to the unknown that lies just on the other side of that imaginary line they call a border. It is only natural to let nostalgia console you as you are walking into the unknown of a new adventure. That is human nature, I suppose. Nevertheless, that “unknown” is what drives anthrotourists to travel to new places.

It’s always hard for me to leave a place when I have been treated so well. There have been very few times in my travels when I have felt so at home in a house full of people I have known for fewer than ten days. However, it is such an amazing phenomenon that the best way I could understand it, or define it, is by using the term “divine appointment.” It’s something that just falls into place so well that you can rest easy in the fact that it was an appointment that was predestined for you. That’s a comforting place to be in, knowing that you are precisely where you are supposed to be.

I have come to realize, throughout my travels, that as gringos we have, in a sense, an outsider-type access to many different social classes in this part of the world. I cannot speak for places outside of Latin America, such as Africa and Asia, but what I have come to realize here is that being a foreigner grants me access into the nice places just as much as the underprivileged places. In other words, the fact that I speak and understand Spanish, as well as
thoroughly embrace and enjoy the cultures of these places, allows me to mingle with all of the socioeconomic classes throughout this region. In a sense, being an anthrotourist allows me to transcend the racism, classism, and elitism that many of these countries (like most others) suffer from. It’s a liberating feeling that gives you a sense of belonging wherever you go. As we have discussed before, in the subchapter titled “The Gringo Card,” sometimes this outsider-ness can be negative. Nevertheless, I have personally benefited and have enjoyed being a foreigner and operating as a cultural ambassador, with regard to international and cultural relations.

Before I left Costa Rica, I had the opportunity to go with my new Dominican friend, Carmen, to a place called La Paz Gardens near Volcán Poás, which was home to a series of magnificent waterfalls, a butterfly and hummingbird garden, wild cats (e.g., pumas, ocelots, and other tropical cats), tropical frogs, snakes, birds, monkeys, and so on. All of the insects, animals, and reptiles were part of the ecosystem of Costa Rica, which made it that much more interesting, being able to see all of these species of plants and animals that inhabit this country’s ecosystem. Regarding the park itself, before the last big earthquake shook the greater San Jose area, approximately four to five years ago, this area was home to four waterfalls that ranged from about 500 to 1200 feet; however, the earthquake shifted the rivers so much that now there are only two. Nevertheless, they are spectacular.
It was great to get to go with Carmen because she does not know Costa Rica that well. She has not lived here for very long, and she has not had the time to go out and explore as much as she would like. So it was fun to get to go somewhere new with her, near where I was staying in Heredia. Being able to talk to her about different economic institutions and ideologies such as the IMF, World Bank, and neo-liberalism made the trip that much more interesting. I valued these conversations with Carmen because she has a Master’s degree in Applied Economics from Spain and a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the USA, so obviously she was well versed in the subject. I took advantage of her intelligence to learn a bit more about economics, which is definitely not my *forté*. So as luck would have it, I got a free lesson from Carmen before I had to head out to Panama.

After tying up loose ends in Costa Rica, and saying my goodbyes, I was off to the bus station to take my 11:00 p.m. (and sixteen hour) bus ride from San Jose, Costa Rica to Panama City, Panama. I was a little nervous about the trip because just a week prior, there was an article in the Honduran newspaper about a competitor bus company that had a crash near Copan, Honduras, and ten people lost their lives. So I was definitely a bit nervous about my long overnight ride in the rain to Panama. But that tragic accident could have happened anywhere. In fact, with regard to the international busing companies throughout Central America, the buses are pretty nice. The only problem I have with them is that they keep it so cold in the
bus that it’s hard to sleep. If I do manage to get to sleep, I wake up and my nose is frozen. Perhaps they want all of us to get our money’s worth in air conditioning. It’s either that, or they are secretly trafficking penguins through Central America.

I met another friend, Beatrice,\(^1\) at the bus station, because she was leaving the same day for Panama. She had been traveling alone, so for her it was a relief to have someone she knew to sit with on the long bus ride, and someone to stand in line with during the four hours we spent at the Costa Rican-Panamanian border. Beatrice is a Salvadorian\(^2\) woman who is in her first year of graduate school in Lyons, France. She was on her way to Ecuador to live with an indigenous group in order to write about the Western influences that have been adopted by these particular indigenous people. In fact, on her way to Ecuador, she is going to be doing the same sailing trip that I am doing, but on a different boat. Nevertheless, we thought it would be a good idea to ride to Panama together and rent rooms at the same hostel. I think it gave her some peace of mind, albeit temporarily, since she would be on her own after Colombia.

On that particular day, we arrived at the Costa Rican border around 5:00 a.m., but they were not going to open until 6:00 a.m. That meant that we had to stand in line for an hour outside at 5:00 a.m. As if that wasn’t bad enough, we found out that the Panamanian customs office was not going to open until an hour after the Costa Rican

---

\(^1\) Beatrice was my friend that I met at the border of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

\(^2\) A Salvadorian is someone who is from El Salvador.
custom office, which meant we would all have to line up again and wait once we walked across the border. And unfortunately, in my experience traveling through Latin America by bus, the border towns tend to be dirty and relatively unorganized places.

Another thing I found to be quite interesting about this particular border crossing was that as soon as you cross the border, the time moves ahead one hour. Actually, that was not that big a deal; however, the most entertaining part about it was that the Costa Rican border opened at 5:00 a.m. (6:00 a.m. Panamanian time) and the Panamanian border did not open until 8:00 a.m. (7:00 a.m. Costa Rican time). I have a question: why can’t these two borders stations that are literally 100 meters apart coordinate (or agree upon) a time to open the border? This lack of logic and inefficiency is what I have come to call TICA (This is Central America) throughout my travels in Central America. That means, in this case, that it makes no sense, but this is how they do it, and you just have to leave it at that. Four hours later, we were on the bus and on the move to Panama City. Taking all things into consideration, our trip from San Jose to Panama City was approximately 16 hours door to door.

Finally, after passing over the Panama Canal, we made it to the city and to the hostel. Once in the hostel, I made sure that everything was set for the next morning. The adventure started at 5:00 a.m. when my alarm clock woke me up in my hostel bedroom. Actually it was good that I set my alarm because the guy who was in charge of waking me up in the morning happened to forget; however, my back-up alarm saved me from missing my
three-hour ride to San Blas to meet our captain, Fabian. At 5:30 a.m., I was picked up in a jeep and was driven, with two British girls (whom I met the night before at our hostel in Panama City) to Carti. Carti is a coastal town on the Caribbean side of Panama. From there, we took a small fishing boat downriver, which led us out into the Caribbean Sea, and there we met Fabian, the captain of our sailboat, Sailing Koala.

The trip started out by touring the San Blas Islands of Panama and then we eventually set our course towards Cartagena, Colombia, where, after six days of sailing, we docked, and I spent the last leg of my trip before heading back to the United States.

[22] Sailing Koala

I wrote this subchapter from the deck of a sailboat, at night, as I was gently swaying from side to side with the ebb and flow of the ocean waves while our boat captain, Fabian, was making dinner. This day was the first day of my six-day sailing adventure from San Blas, Panama to Cartagena, Colombia.

Fabian, our sailboat captain, was born in Cali, Colombia, but now resides in Cartagena and is the owner of the sailboat Sailing Koala that we are taking to Colombia. Before he became obsessed with sailing, he lived in New Jersey, USA. He had his sailing epiphany while reading a
sailing magazine during a layover in Washington, DC. This epiphany eventually led him to realize his dream of becoming a sailor; so after learning how to sail, and an intense, six-month sailboat search, he managed to buy a boat in Curaçao, and he has been sailing the world ever since. He originally pioneered this trip between San Blas and Colombia before anyone else had done it. He did the trek by himself twice before offering it to guests.

Fabian’s first guests were a group of Israelis who had just finished their mandatory three years of service in the Israeli Army and were looking for an inexpensive way to get from Colombia to Panama. The trip ended up with all of them becoming seasick, except Fabian. They begged Fabian to call for help, and it just so happened that the U.S. Coast Guard was patrolling the waters nearby, heard the call, and came to their rescue. They were all suffering from seasickness and dehydration, so the doctor that was aboard the U.S. Coast Guard boat gave them medication to help them out. Unfortunately for them, it was administered as an enema, but it would rehydrate them and help them with their seasickness so they could finish out the rest of the trip—about ten more hours of sailing in the open ocean before arriving in the San Blas Islands of Panama.

I was accompanied by Katie and Nikki, two amazingly adventurous British girls, who started their voyage in May from California and were traveling through Colombia before flying back to London. One of the things that I found most intriguing about them was that they quit their jobs
after they realized that they were sick of the rat race of London, and decided to pack their bags, take their savings, and travel the Americas. Of course once they returned to London after their travels, they had to find new jobs; however, they didn’t let that minor detail put a damper on their four-month trip.

After a three-hour drive in a 4×4 across the country of Panama, we made it to the Comarca Kuna Yala region of Panama and paid our fee to enter into this part of Panama. The Kuna Indians are an autonomous indigenous group in Panama, so it’s as though they are in their own country within Panama. They are required to adhere to the laws of the country of Panama; however, since they are autonomous, they have the luxury of governing themselves. The Comarca Kuna Yala region is located in the southeastern part of Panama on the Caribbean Sea, just north of the Darien region at the bottom of the Isthmus of Panama, which connects Colombia to Panama. San Blas is an archipelago that is home to approximately 365 small Caribbean islands that boast white sand beaches, coconut palm trees, and Kuna huts that are made of thatched roofs and bamboo walls. Only about 50 of these islands are inhabited.

---

3 The Comarca Kuna Yala is a region of Panama known as San Blas. San Blas is located in the southeastern part of Panama and is bordered by the Darien Jungle to its south.

4 The Kuna Indians were granted semi-political autonomy by the Panamanian government in 1925. At that point, the Kuna Indians created their own government body to oversee the politics of the Comaraca Kuna Yala. For more information regarding this process and/or the Kuna autonomy within Panama, read the article “Autogobierno indígena en la Comarca Kuna Yala en Panamá” by Claudia Rivera Rosales, 2007.
Once we arrived in Carti, we had a Kuna guide pick us up at a drop-off point at a freshwater river that pours out into the Caribbean Sea, leading us to where Fabian was waiting in the *Sailing Koala*. Once aboard, we organized our bags, got to know Fabian and the boat, and then took a wooden canoe to the nearest island to do some shopping. The island was approximately one square mile at best and housed hundreds of Kuna families, a school, and grocery stores, all allowing this community to be a self-sustaining and a fully functioning micro-society. Although most of the houses were constructed with bamboo and thatched roofs, many of the people still managed to earn enough money to buy a satellite dish to stay connected with the world via cable.

My initial observation of the Kuna was that they were a little apprehensive toward foreigners. They are contrary to what I have seen in other parts of Latin America in that way. It seemed like the Kuna were not very welcoming to us, even though we walked around with Fabian, whom they have known for approximately 14 years. It seemed that as a result of their recent past and clashes with the people of Panama over indigenous rights, they have been provoked into showing a rather cold front to outsiders, and for good reason.

They have suffered discrimination, violence, and exploitation, so they have essentially detached themselves from mainland Panama and have lived autonomously in the San Blas region. These violent and discriminatory acts against the Kuna as a culture were what led to their
autonomy, and as a result, the Kuna launched what came to be known as the Tule Revolution in 1925. Shortly after this revolution, they were granted their autonomy. Now, most of the Kuna who live in the San Blas islands do not even speak Spanish; rather, they only speak their native tongue, Kuna.

The San Blas islands are absolutely beautiful and as I got more access into the culture and lives of the people who inhabit this region, I began to see why they act the way they do. In fact, as we traveled through the islands, the people began to open up and share more of their culture and worldviews with me.

I was able to break the ice after sailing to our first destination, which was an island that was about a one-hour sail from Carti, called El Porvenir. This island is sparsely populated, but the surrounding islands are populated by indigenous families. When we arrived at this particular island, there happened to be a soccer game in progress. Naturally, I wasted no time in introducing myself and juggling the ball with my new Kuna friends who were not in the game, with the hope of getting some perspective on their unique world. The soccer field was a vacant field that was half grass and dirt, while the other half was an old paved runway that probably has not been used in over a decade. Then again, you never know.

The Panamanian Coast Guard has a barracks with a handful of people working there, perhaps keeping an eye on sailboats and potential illegal activity such as drug trafficking. In any case, they are the only people who officially live on the island. All of the soccer players live on neighboring islands and get to the soccer field by boat.
My attempt to break the ice included introducing my three new friends to a soccer game that we call Soccer Tennis (aka Roatan Tennis). The game is played by making a small court-style field in the sand approximately two yards by three yards with a line to cut the field in half. Then you play it by allowing the ball to bounce once on the opponent’s side before having one touch to return the ball, similar to ping pong (or tennis). If the ball bounces twice on your side or you kick it out of bounds, the opponent wins a point. I am not entirely sure if they grasped the concept of this simple game; however, it was a way to chat with them about soccer and show them that even gringos know how to play. Finally, I got tired of them not playing by the rules, so I left them to play amongst themselves so that they could enjoy the game with their own Kuna twists to it. I also wanted to go walk around the 300 square yard island and swim a bit. So it was a perfect time to excuse myself and let them continue to learn the fundamentals of this game. Who knows? Maybe I will come back one day and see hundreds of Kuna soccer tennis courts all over these islands.

After getting to know the island, I decided to try to take an improvised shower by sitting in a kayak in the sea and using shampoo to wash my hair and lather myself. It didn’t work that well; however, it was definitely an entertaining experience. Once dried off and in the boat with a pair of linens on, I sat with Nikki and Katie under the starry night sky, sharing stories about where we live and what we do as Fabian fixed all of us dinner. In fact,
during dinner, Fabian told us that in the morning a Dutch guy by the name of Janvi was going to meet us here in El Porvenir and jump aboard a day late to join us on our trek to Colombia.

[23] The Kuna Life

We woke up in pure Caribbean sailing fashion. No clouds, calm seas, and crystal clear water, just like a travel brochure. In fact, the boat was so calm that I slept until about 9:00 a.m. We spent the majority of the day around the island of El Porvenir where Fabian handled the passport issues, arranged a lunch with a Kuna family, and as always, made us feel at home on his boat. Eventually our new addition to the boat, Janvi, arrived and we all greeted him with an honorary cup of coffee and bowl of granola with pineapple chunks, made by Fabian, of course. Janvi is from Holland; however, he had been traveling the world for about a year and he was on his way to Colombia, which is why he jumped on the boat with us.

The five of us went to a neighboring island to have lunch and meet one of the Kuna families that Fabian had come to know over the many years he had been sailing this route. Going to this family’s house was a trip back in time, as they cooked over an open fire and lived in a hut with a dirt floor. They did, however, have a bed in there. Still, this family, along with everyone else on the island, lived in a thatched-roofed house, had no running water, and all used a community waste area that was at the end of a rickety pier, and was nothing more than a wooden
structure with a shawl as the door and a hole cut in the bottom of the floor. The best part about this bathroom was the view, looking straight out into the Caribbean Sea towards the neighboring islands.

I continued to be very intrigued by the Kuna Indians because they had, as a result of their autonomy from the Panamanian Government, created their own means of survival that relied on community effort as well as tourism. Most of the Kuna that I came in contact with barely spoke Spanish, and those that did, knew it because they were trying to sell something to the tourists. One of the things that I found funny about the Kuna is that as they passed by our sailboat, I tended to say hello to them or at least greet them. However, every time I did that, they came to the boat, but not to say hello, but rather to try to sell me things such as *Molas*\(^5\), bracelets, handbags, and other Kuna artisan crafts. They apparently saw me as someone who was flagging them down to buy things, or perhaps they were just looking for an opportunity to get close and try to persuade me to buy some of their artisan works.

From what I had observed, the Kuna seemed to be in their own world, both literally and figuratively. As a result of their autonomy, they have been able to live in their communities away from the non-indigenous\(^6\) peoples of Panama. Naturally, their strategic geographic location is very conducive to perpetuating their autonomy and sovereignty as a culture. Additionally, it seemed that they

\(^5\) Molas are hand-stitched designs by the Kuna Indians of Panama that are worn by the Kuna women as part of their traditional blouse.

\(^6\) People that were not of Kuna ancestry.
were either so tired of people taking pictures of them, or just bothering them in general, that they have an uninterested demeanor about them. Perhaps it was because they did not speak any language other than Kuna, or it was because they were genuinely uninterested in communicating with outsiders.

They had apparently become accustomed to living in these picturesque Caribbean islands and relying almost exclusively on nature to sustain them as a community. They were doing a good job of it according to their standard of living: fishing, eating coconuts, and utilizing nearby natural resources to sustain their simple lifestyle. It’s hard for me to put into words the beauty of this area and to summarize the Kuna’s way of life. Walking around these islands was like going back in time hundreds of years. It’s almost as though I was walking into a world that had remained untouched, even after the arrival of the Spanish. Many of the islands that were farther from the mainland had no electricity or any running water—only well water, which was slightly salty, as I found when I used it to take a shower.

A vast majority of Kuna who live in San Blas live in huts with thatched roofs, and cook their food over an open fire. Their livelihood is essentially predicated on fishing, and in the recent past, selling their artisan crafts and Molas to tourists who anchor up for the night around the islands. The Kunas have no reason to learn any language except Kuna, their native tongue, as a result of their cultural disconnect from the Spanish-speaking Panamanians. First I tried to communicate with the Kuna Indians in Spanish. However, I quickly came to the
conclusion that there were only a small percentage of people who could communicate with me in Spanish, let alone speak Spanish fluently. In fact, most of these people will be born here and die here, never even going to the mainland or seeing a car.

On some of the islands, I met some younger Kuna teenagers that had spent time in Panama City studying, and they were among the small number of Kuna that I met who spoke Spanish. I met Edgar, a young Kuna kid who was visiting his family on Isla Holandes, one of the islands, and he spoke perfect Spanish because he was studying on the mainland in Panama City. He was diving in the reefs, looking for lobsters and octopus and didn’t hesitate to greet me and ask me if I wanted any lobsters. Those who had been exposed to the mainland culture seemed to open up a bit more and were more inviting, sharing their culture with me, and even inviting me to help them pull lobsters out of the reefs. Given that Edgar spends a majority of his time in Panama City, I was curious to know if he felt any type of discrimination as a result of being a Kuna Indian. He told me that he personally had not had a bad experience on the mainland and really enjoys being there.

The fact that so many of these people are completely detached from the mainland of Panama and have successfully sustained themselves and their culture throughout all of these years is fascinating to me. At this point in my travels, this culture had been one of the most intriguing things I had encountered. Their way of life and reliance on nature as the lifeline and sustaining force for their livelihood was unique and commendable. Naturally, as the sailing charters have increased, they have become a
bit more capitalistic in their approach to tourists: they tend to charge you if you want to take a photo of or with them. I found this behavior at times to be entertaining, but at other times, I found it to be quite annoying.

I learned that most of these people will never even go to the mainland, not to mention Panama City. So they will never leave this archipelago in their entire lives. It’s hard to blame them. This place was absolutely beautiful on all levels. Even though the Kuna were relatively indifferent to us as tourists, their culture was extremely interesting. Additionally, the islands of San Blas were picturesque, boasting beautiful white sand beaches and coconut trees that were so abundant it seemed they were running out of room on the islands and were going to start growing in the water.

As we were sailing around the archipelago, we all started talking about how not all of the sailing trips are successful, or even enjoyable for that matter. In a previous subchapter, I shared the anecdote about Fabian’s first experience doing this sailing trip as a “guide.” In fact, getting sick is really the least of your worries when you sit and think about it. You do not know with whom you will be sailing or even who it is that is sailing you from Panama to Colombia. That forces you to put a lot of trust in people (and a sailboat) that you do not know very well, if at all.

Fabian began to tell us a story about a Spaniard that was taking guests from San Blas to Colombia and shipwrecked his sailboat on a reef en route to Colombia. Thankfully for him and his guests, another sailboat captain
was able to help by calling the U.S. Coast Guard and therefore was able to alleviate what could have been a tragic situation. As it turned out, the rescue captain was anchored in the same area, so that made his response time that much quicker.

After all of the guests were safe and sound, the rescue captain offered to take the Spaniard to Colombia with him. However, when they arrived in Colombia, the Spaniard killed the other sailboat captain and stole his boat, and then took a paintbrush and painted a new name on the sailboat. Of course in these types of situations, it is really hard to prove anything because all the Spaniard had to say was that he was taking care of the boat or that the other captain “sold him the boat and stayed in Colombia.” Ultimately, it would be hard to prove murder without any solid evidence.

Next, the Spaniard went to Porto Belo, Panama, and met a French boat captain and asked if he could take him in his catamaran to Colombia; however, en route to Colombia, he decided to kill this captain as well. Then he casually tied his feet to an anchor and threw his body overboard.

Eventually the Spaniard was reported to the police; however, again they had no hard evidence to prove that he had killed anyone. He just fed them the same alibi, which was that the French sailboat captain had gone back to France and left him, the Spaniard, in charge of his boat. Additionally, according his story, the Frenchman had given him permission to do tours to and from San Blas and Colombia.
Unfortunately for the Spaniard, all of this came to a head when the Frenchman’s body surfaced, and the police were able to prove that he was the real owner of the catamaran. At that point, the police launched a manhunt for the Spaniard and eventually found him in Colombia, close to the border with Panama. After searching the Spaniard’s belongings, they found the credit cards of both of the dead sailboat captains, which was enough evidence to prosecute him for murder and ultimately incarcerate him. It turned out that the sailboat he was originally sailing and which he crashed into a reef could have belonged to an American couple who turned up missing in the Virgin Islands. That is still currently under investigation.

While these types of scenarios are a reality and should be taken into consideration by all anthrotourists, you can’t let your fears keep you from being adventurous. In fact, every “normal” day in your hometown has its own set of dangers as well. So don’t let the fear of what could happen keep you from living a life full of adventure and purpose.


The experience of visiting the San Blas islands was, for lack of a better term, life-changing, with the scenery, the abundance of Kuna culture, and the sailing adventure itself, which was second to none. Well, what would have literally made it second to none would have been if we had
had a larger sailboat. I’ll put it this way: if you are claustrophobic, cannot handle being in tight quarters with people you barely know, get seasick easily, and don’t like not seeing land in all directions for long periods of time, then this trip is definitely not for you.

The 48 hours that we spent in the mar abierto (open ocean) was really tough for me, as I was not used to being in such a small boat for that much time. The boat we sailed in was 31 feet long, and there were five of us on board. It was a tight squeeze, especially once we left the archipelago and began to sail the open ocean. It was as though time had frozen in its tracks, and it felt as though we were never going to make it to Colombia.

During the 48 hours of open-water sailing, it was extremely difficult to sleep during the night, and furthermore, it was tough to be inside the sailboat during the day; there was a lack of ventilation because most of the windows in the inside of the sailboat needed to be closed in order to keep the waves from splashing salt water inside. So, as a result, most of us spent the day outside on the back of the sailboat trying to get comfortable, and at the same time, trying to stay out of the sun. For me, the sun became a sort of entertainment as I watched it rise and travel across the sky and finally, because we were heading due east, fall into the ocean behind us. That is how I watched the days go by during our 48-hour adventure in the open ocean from Panama to Colombia.

I was a bit seasick during this part of the trip, but I never vomited, thanks to the Dramamine that I took every four to six hours. That kept me in a state of tranquility and prevented me from throwing up on a number of occasions.
As I have said, this was one of the hardest parts of the trip for me. It was virtually impossible to do anything during this 48-hour period because reading, writing, or even lying down inside the boat was nearly impossible. Luckily, on a couple of occasions, I managed to fall asleep inside the boat. I think that was a combination of sleep deprivation and the effects of the Dramamine. Taking all of this into account, I truly wish that I had been able to embrace this part of the trip because it was something that I had never done before in my life, and being out in the middle of the ocean with no one around and nothing on any side of us was such a unique and fascinating thing to experience. However, uncomfortable as I was, I spent most of my time counting the passing hours, wishing to see the coast of Colombia.

Actually, one of the most amazing things that I experienced during this 48-hour adventure was doing a night watch and seeing the occasional falling star. Also, it was interesting watching the constellation Orion chase Scorpio across the night sky. Once Scorpio began to fall into the ocean to the west and Orion began to rise in the east, I knew it was time for the sun to come up. Needless to say, I celebrated that particular moment, as I was one day closer to reaching dry land.

The other difficult part of this trip was the fact that we could not even get in the water to wash off or attempt to get an improvised shower. So, as one would imagine, our skin was saturated with a mix of sweat and salt, which added to the difficulty level of sleeping inside the boat. The first time that I was able to look at myself in the mirror to see how dirty I became during my stint at sea
was when we arrived at our hotel in Cartagena, Colombia. Simply changing clothes or brushing my teeth became a project in itself. Over the 48 hours of travel, I probably brushed my teeth once and managed to change from my linen pants to a pair of shorts. At that point, my threshold for cleanliness had reached an all-time low standard, as I conformed to the way of life at sea and began to embrace it.

Let me add that it was not all bad, as I was accompanied by great people. Nikki, Katie, Janvi and Fabian kept me entertained, as we all tried to adapt to this adventure as a group. Of course for Fabian, this is a way of life, so he naturally took everything in stride. Additionally, Janvi seemed to be able to embrace and even enjoy the adventure; in fact, he told me that this was much more comfortable than the boat he was on in Papua, New Guinea. So of course I was a bit jealous of the fact that he was able to enjoy the open ocean sailing while I was busy staring into the ocean to keep my equilibrium balanced in order to keep from vomiting.

Janvi told me that he was on a boat in Papua, New Guinea for 36 hours with approximately 500 other people, and there were not even beds to sleep on; rather, they all had to sleep on the floor side by side. I guess that should have made me thankful for being in the situation I was in; however, short of having a Coast Guard helicopter take me off the sailboat, there was nothing that was going to make me feel better other than making it to the Colombian coast.

I told Fabian that I loved my time in the San Blas archipelago; however, open ocean sailing is not my cup of tea. He just laughed and told me that there are typically
three types of people on these trips: the first one is someone who embraces the whole trip and loves every second of it; the second, which would be me, is someone who thoroughly embraces the San Blas islands, but had difficulty adjusting to the open ocean sailing; and the third type of person is someone who is sick the whole time and has an extremely difficult time with the San Blas to Cartagena sailing trip from one end to the other. For me, I happily embraced being the second type, as I loved my experience in the San Blas islands; however, when it came to being out at sea for that long, and on such as a small craft, it was difficult for me to get comfortable.

I think that too many people romanticize this type of adventure, especially if they have never traveled this way. I will be the first to admit that I was guilty of romanticizing this type of sailing adventure. For example, I imagined being on a much larger boat with comfortable beds, showers, and calmer seas. Of course, that is my own ignorance and no one else’s fault. Nevertheless, I stepped into this adventure with preconceived notions that, as soon as I stepped aboard, were washed away, to my dismay. However, I am sure this type of adventure could be an amazing experience for people that can handle all of the aforementioned difficulties.

Being out in the middle of the ocean with nothing in sight except the stars and the moon as you traverse the sea is a beautiful thing for anthrotourists who enjoy that form of travel and adventure. I would definitely try this
again on a larger boat. This is a beautiful way to travel, and I think the difficulty for me was primarily the size of the boat.

The people that accompanied me on my trip were awesome, and Fabian, our captain, was world-class. How someone was able to cook us an amazing pasta and lobster dinner on a rocking boat in a small kitchen is beyond me. Fabian was first-class on all levels, and extremely professional. The Europeans who accompanied me were a fun group, and being able to learn more about the Netherlands, England, and the European Union was very educational. Also, it was quite entertaining to learn about all of our cultural differences and quirks, and learn to embrace them as we were in pretty close quarters. It forces you to put aside all of your egocentrism and ethnocentrism so that you can cohabitate harmoniously with people from other cultures. That dynamic, I think, was an unexpected facet of the trip that I really enjoyed.

In short, the 48 hours in the open ocean was a growing experience in every sense of the word. I learned to cope with things such as living in extremely close quarters with strangers, coping with an unexpected level of uncleanliness, limited space, and lack of comfortable living spaces; however, all in all, I feel like I managed to embrace all of this, and I got a glimpse as to how difficult it must have been for the early explorers to traverse unchartered waters in search of land—albeit for selfish reasons most of the time. Nevertheless, I could begin to empathize with their journey if nothing else. And I was able to embrace another facet of the natural beauties of this planet.
Finally, we arrived in Cartagena, Colombia and were greeted with all of the beauties of this great colonial city. This city is home to one of the greatest magic realism writers Colombia has even known, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I can now understand, in my short time on land here in Cartagena, why he fell in love with this place.
Anthrotourist
Part Five
Colombia

[25] The Freedom to Improvise

After getting off of our sailboat, I spent the subsequent three days in Cartagena with Janvi, Nikki, and Katie just walking around and getting to know the city. As soon as I stepped into the taxi and began to ride towards our hotel, I knew that this place was going to be exciting and memorable, and it lived up to my expectations. This city was both amazingly modern and full of history, with much of the culture that one would find in South Beach, Miami. It’s just the Colombian version. I was staying in a part of town called Getsemani\(^1\) (Gethsemane in English), which

---

\(^1\) Apparently before Getsemani was restored, it was considered the “Red Light District” of the Old Town; however, it has since been restored, and it is full of restaurants, bars, hostels, hotels, coffee shops and even a salsa club.
was located close to the historical part of Cartagena, and was also where most of the backpackers and other travelers tend to stay. Tourists who prefer the more “South Beach” vibe stayed in Bocagrande, which was about a six kilometer taxi ride (or walk) from Getsemani and Old Town Cartagena. In the Old Town, the old walls, Las Murallas, which were built by the Spaniards to keep out invaders, were still standing strong, and they walled off the Old Town of Cartagena from the rest of the city. They started building these walls and fort in the late 1600s, but because of constant battles with invaders and inclement weather, they didn’t manage to finish it completely until 1796. Only 25 years later, the Spaniards were kicked out by the Colombians who were seeking independence from Spain. This part of Cartagena was full of history and beauty. Some of the places that used to be dungeons were converted into individual stores where people sold artifacts and other tourist items. Other places such as the torture chambers and lookout posts have become tourist attractions. Some were for viewing only, such as the chambers, and others were for eating food, sitting back, and having a drink while watching the sunset over the Caribbean. Many of these tiny restaurants were located along the top of the walls that surrounded the old city of Cartagena.

For me, Cartagena could not have been a better place to end my three months of travel. In fact, Colombia in general, from what I had seen, was an amazing place. And, contrary to what people may tend to say (or assume) about this country, it is extremely safe. Cartagena itself
was packed full of police who patrol at all hours of the day and night, giving you a real sense of security and allowing you to roam the streets worry-free. As I have said in other subchapters, though, when you are traveling, you always have to be street smart. No matter where you are in the world, flashing your money or bringing too much attention to yourself is always a good way to get into trouble. However, with regard to the feeling of being “in danger,” that never even crossed my mind in Cartagena.

As I was standing in front of a bank in Old Town, Cartagena, waiting on my friend Nikki to take money out of the ATM, I started talking with the bank security guard. After he realized I was not from Argentina, and once I told him that I was, in fact, from the USA, he asked me, “Isn’t the USA really dangerous?” He was so sincere in the way he asked me, too. I just simply told him that it is a bit ironic that he said that because that is the same perception Americans (people from the USA) have about Colombia. They think it is extremely dangerous. He just looked at me and laughed because to him Cartagena is an extremely safe place. While there are unsafe places in both countries, as he and I both agreed, those are places that people just don’t go to visit—at least most people do not choose to.

I say “most people” because one day when I was walking around Cartagena with Janvi, he got the urge to go somewhere that was off the beaten path and away from most of the tourists. It’s noteworthy that most of the
tourists I saw wandering the streets of Cartagena were not *gringos*. In fact, these tourists were primarily Europeans and other Latin Americans. However, there were a few *gringos* running around the streets as well. It’s just that Americans are not the majority group of tourists. It seems that Colombia is a place that American tourists are still too afraid to visit, which is a shame because they are missing out on one of the most beautiful countries I have ever visited.

Janvi and I decided that we were going to take a taxicab to a place outside of the Old Town and were going to go to a local market to eat some authentic food. So we went to a place about ten minutes outside of the Old Town of Cartagena, where there was a local market and where people sold fresh fruits and fresh fish; however, it was definitely a place where we should only be carrying things we were willing to lose (or have stolen). So we left our cameras and everything important in the room, and took only enough money to buy food and some fruit. We knew that we would be the only foreigners there, and that was exactly what we wanted. Actually, it was more Janvi’s idea than mine, but I was up for the adventure, and I knew that it would be great local food! Unfortunately it was Sunday, so when we got there, almost everything had closed and we were left with very few options—actually, only one option. Even the place where we were going to get “authentic” food was closed, but adjacent to it, in the market, was a food stand that was open. We had to decide
whether or not we were going to eat rice, beans, plantains, salad, and beef at an adjacent food stand, or if we were going to head back to our hotel.

I told Janvi to order a plate and I would try his, and if I liked it, then I would get a plate too. Well, it didn’t take long for me to decide that the food was delicious and that I should buy a plate. Though this was not the most sanitary place by American standards, as the lady serving us the food was using her bare hands to serve some of the food, nevertheless, it was, as the lady put it, “made with love.” Whether or not that was true, it was certainly very tasty; besides, it only cost $3 USD so that made it even better.

When you want to venture out and do things like this during your travels, you have to exude confidence and show that you are not uncomfortable or scared because you are out of place. In fact, as I have said in other chapters, speaking the language and being friendly earns you instant points with the local people. They may be a bit confused as to why you would come this far for their food; however, once you tell them that you want to try something authentic and new, then they are extremely glad for your business and make sure that they put their best foot forward to show you first-class service, even if you are eating while sitting on the side of the road on a makeshift table on the outskirts of a local market.
During the first few days in Cartagena, it was one amazing experience after another. I was so touched at the hospitality of the Colombian people that it made me not want to leave; so much so that I chose to stay behind in Cartagena for a few more days and let Janvi, Nikki, and Katie continue on their journey through Colombia. I had enjoyed traveling and spending time with them; however, when you are on the road as an anthrotourist, you get used to spending a few days or weeks with people before you move on in your journey. That is the status quo when traveling around the world. Nevertheless, you still build strong friendships with people and come to learn just as much about who they are and their culture as you learn about the culture of the country in which you are traveling.

That is another exciting “unknown” when traveling the world—the company you meet. Unfortunately, I had to say goodbye to them, and although wandering the streets of Cartagena was not the same without them, I wanted to continue to do my thing and take life as it comes. That is the essence of anthrotourism: realizing that you can do whatever you want at any given time. It is that freedom that draws me to buy a plane ticket (or bus ticket), pack my bag, and head out into the unknown, basking in the freedom to improvise and to go where the wind takes me.

[26] Loving Cartagena

It was a great experience to be able to walk around all of the different parts of Cartagena. The areas were quite
distinct from one another with regard to architecture and their ambience. For example, the Old Town had a touristy/backpacker/historic ambience where the people who had come to appreciate its beauty could walk around the walled city, sit in the plazas and coffee shops and eat fresh fruit salads, or have a nice dinner in one of the restaurants that were tucked into every nook and cranny of this city’s colonial buildings. On the other hand, if you were looking for something that would remind you more of a smaller, less expensive version of South Beach, Miami, Bocagrande could offer you that type of ambience. There were condos, hotels, restaurants, and shopping, all lining the streets of Bocagrande, waiting for you to come and explore its friendly atmosphere. The ambitious visitor could even walk from Bocagrande to Old Town or vice versa, which is what I did to save myself from spending money on taxi rides.

Actually the walking started after I went with my friend Kerry, who is from Virginia, USA, to a coffee shop called Juan Valdez Café in Bocagrande. Interestingly enough, this coffee shop franchise, whose name comes from the mythical Colombian coffee farmer, Juan Valdez, has come to be revered as the “Colombian Starbucks.” In fact, I was told that it was created in order to compete with Starbucks as a franchise in Colombia. And since its inception in 2002, it has managed to expand into the American market in Miami. The coffee was quite good and is grown in Colombia, unlike Starbucks’ coffee; their
business model is to import foreign coffee to the USA. But Juan Valdez Cafe only serves coffee that is exclusive to Colombia, and who can blame them? They have some of the best coffee in the world.

So after eating a Bandeja Paisa\(^2\) at a typical Colombian restaurant and then drinking a cup of coffee at Juan Valdez Café, I suggested to Kerry that we walk back down to the beach because the sun was about to set. However, as soon as we were walking down the beach in Bocagrande, we started to make our way back to Old Town, north of where we were. It was kind of like the line in Forrest Gump when he was “run’n and run’n” except we were just walking and walking, and enjoying the amazing Caribbean afternoon weather and the sunset. For part of the time we were watching a lady who was literally rolling around in the surf where the waves meet the sand. Judging from the look on her face, she seemed to be in a state of euphoria. It was as if there was nothing else in the world that could be better—like all of the stress and worries from her office job had washed away with the sweeping tide. It was quite funny, though, because she somewhat resembled a beached whale. At first we thought she was in a drunken stupor, fumbling around in the water; however, after closer inspection, we decided that everything was fine and even if she was a bit off her rocker, she would be okay because she wasn’t in deep water.

\(^2\) Bandeja Paisa is a typical Colombian dish that consists of ground meat, arepas, rice, kidney beans, chicharrón, and avocado.
So we continued walking and managed to get to a point where we decided that it wasn’t worth paying a taxi to take us to our hotels if we could just walk a bit further. The distance between Bocagrande and Old Town is probably about three miles, so it was not that far, especially after drinking a cup of top-quality Colombian coffee.

Kerry is an enjoyable, intelligent person who was on vacation after quitting her job in the States. She been accepted to graduate school to get a Master’s degree in Social Work, which is very commendable. I could tell that she had a heart for people as well as a great adventurous spirit, so it was a pleasure meeting her and getting to know her.

Additionally, Bea, my friend whom I met in Managua and bused with to San Jose and Panama City, finally arrived on her sailboat trip and we managed to reconnect and talk about our experiences. In fact, I helped her and her three Irish boat mates get a room at the hotel where I was staying. I was happy to do this, as the owner of the hotel, Marta, was a remarkably nice, older Colombian woman who was also extremely beautiful and very business-savvy. So I was happy to recommend my hotel to Bea and her friends.

All in all, it was a wonderful time in Cartagena. I was fortunate enough to have met some wonderful people with whom I could spend my days walking around, drinking coffee, and hanging at the beach, and my nights
having dinner and dancing salsa—or just chilling outside and listening to salsa.

[27] Islas del Rosario

I went with Kerry and her Colombian friend Guillermo to a group of islands called Las Islas del Rosario. I stayed with Guillermo and his colleagues on a private island called Isla Grande, where they are doing research on endangered birds. It was a positive experience because they were very hospitable as well as very passionate about nature and about tracking the various endangered birds around Colombia and beyond.

When I met Guillermo, and decided to go with him to his island, I had no idea where I was going to stay, for how long I would stay, or even on what island I would be staying. The only thing I really knew was that I was going to meet Guillermo and Kerry in the morning and we were going to the marina to catch a boat to an island that was one of Las Islas del Rosario.

Even before we got to the marina, Guillermo had caught my attention. I showed up to his hotel room and found that he had an incubator full of giant bird eggs and an injured baby duck in the shower. I thought to myself, “Is this guy serious?” Apparently he was serious, as this is his job. He is the supervisor for an aviarío, which in English just means aviary or bird sanctuary. It originally started as a rich guy’s bird collection and has now become a clinic where they treat and house rescued and
endangered birds. This *aviario* has birds from all over the world, and one of their goals is to help replenish the bird population, particularly those that are near extinction. Their collection of birds is astounding. As if that wasn’t enough, Guillermo is also the supervisor of the *oceanario* (oceanarium), which is essentially the same thing as an *aviario*, but houses marine life.

Guillermo told me that we would have to be very precise with our timing once we left the hotel, as the eggs (and the duck) are very delicate, and if taken out of their environment for too long, it can be detrimental to them and possibly even kill them. We jumped in a taxi and took right off for the marina. I had no idea that the marina was going to be so interesting. I just pictured a dock where we would jump into a small boat and head out. However, the marina was chock full of huge yachts and sailboats. So I sat there trying to guess which yacht would bring us to the island. After all, the bird and ocean projects are owned by a rich guy, so it was logical to think that he would have a nice toy for us to take to the island. However, that was not the case, as we jumped in a 19-foot fishing boat full of groceries. I sat on two giant bags of corn and stretched my legs out on a piece of plywood. Everyone else managed to get comfortable as well, as we headed out on a 45-minute trip to an island called Isla Grande.

After pulling up to the dock on Isla Grande, Guillermo left us with some people from the island to take the food and other items to the *aviario*. Apparently these people were employees, but I had no idea. Honestly, it made no difference to me; they were great people and
seemed to know what they were doing and where they were going. So Kerry and I just followed their lead down some dirt paths until we finally made it to the *aviario*. I knew we were getting close because I could hear the birds making noise in the distance. Later I came to find out that we hadn’t docked at our own pier, which was around the point, because the waves were too tall, so we docked at a friend’s pier. As for Guillermo, he went to the *oceanario* to take care of business and later came back to the *aviario*.

The *aviario* was full of exotic birds from all over the world: peacocks, parrots, pheasants, emus, and toucans that have been rescued from bird traffickers, and have been brought here to be taken care of and to help replenish the populations which are at risk of extinction. I learned that some of these birds are here because they have psychological issues and therefore have to be taken care of. To me, the idea was hilarious. Additionally, the birds that are part of this *aviario* are, for lack of a better term, spoiled, as they are fed fresh fruits and given purified water to drink. At one point, I actually told Guillermo that I would be content living here and being treated as a bird. Apparently for him, fresh fruit is literally “for the birds.” And if that is for the birds, then you can imagine that the employees ate very well too: fresh fish, lentils, rice, beans, and plantains. As for me, I would have been content being fed fruit and water.

I failed to mention that in my two-night/three-day stay here I was not allowed to pay for either food or lodging, as Guillermo took care of all of that. Naturally, I
hosted him the following weekend in Cartagena without hesitation.

\[I \text{ personally believe that that is how we should interact as human beings. It seems so simple, yet we tend to miss the mark almost all the time. In fact, it is like my friend Victor said in Costa Rica when I asked him if it was okay for me to stay a bit longer: “Feeding one more person doesn’t make a difference one way or another.” That is so true when hosting people for a short period of time; however, in the United States, we tend to concern ourselves more with how much it will cost us instead of concerning ourselves with how much it will help someone else. I feel like the world would be a much better place if we adopted a more altruistic mentality. It is inevitable that we will all need a hand today, tomorrow, or sometime in the future, so it makes sense for us, as Americans, to learn to extend kindness and help others much like the people of Latin America have done for me and other anthrotourists. It is a great example to follow.}\]

As if feeding and lodging us for free was not enough, Guillermo and his co-worker, Maria Cristiana, walked around with us during the first day, and then, as it began to get dark, they took us to a pier where their friend, Robinson, picked all of us up in a wooden canoe and took us for a canoe ride. This ride took us through some of the mangrove paths that are located in the interior of the island, and finally brought us to a place called La Laguna
Anthrotourist

Encantada (The Enchanted Lagoon), where we jumped onto the dock and crossed the strait to a private beach. We did all of this at night, with only a small flashlight to guide us through the mangroves. This was intentional, as the moon was bright enough to light the way—in fact, it was so bright that we were able to see the plankton glowing in the water as we made our way to the dock.

It was an absolutely amazing experience and came as a total surprise. After swimming at the beach in front of an exclusive hotel, which was currently devoid of people, we walked back to the lagoon and jumped in there. It was if we were glowing underwater because of all of the fluorescent plankton glowing every time we kicked our legs to swim. Being there under the stars in the dark with the moon lighting the sky and illuminating the plankton like small lights in the water was an unforgettable experience.

Of course, Maria Cristina laughed at me because I was a little bit reluctant to jump in the lagoon in the middle of the night. I told her that, because I live in Florida, I have a thing against swimming in lagoons in general, not to mention at night. She just laughed and told me that the locals have eaten all of the crocodiles, so there is nothing to worry about. So I jumped in and didn’t worry about it. I was more intrigued by the bioluminescence than I was concerned with a crocodile attacking me.

Maria Cristina is a passionate woman who left her job as a biology teacher on the mainland of Colombia to come work at the aviario. To her, it’s a dream job. It is interesting to see the dynamic between Maria Cristina,
Guillermo, and all of the birds. They have names for every bird, and it’s as though the birds have become like people to them. They treat them so well that it’s as if the birds were their children, which has created a very family-like dynamic between both of them and the birds at the sanctuary.

After all of the adventures that day, I slept like a baby. In fact, I slept so deeply that I had no idea that my fan had turned off the next morning, and I found myself slightly sweaty when I woke up. Apparently, the generator gets turned off at 6:30 a.m. and therefore, my fan turned off with the generator. However, I woke up around 9:00 a.m. I was so tired that I slept in a hot room with no fan for another two and a half hours without waking up. Maria Cristina and Guillermo woke me up because the cooks at the aviaro had made me breakfast, and then we had to run to a boat that was going to take us to the oceanario. Guillermo, Kerry, and I jumped into the boat with some of the other workers from the oceanario, which meant we got a free ride there.

The oceanario appeared to me to be a large collection of science projects. In fact, these projects ranged from bottles of colored water that grow algae and then are passed to larger and larger bottles, to sterilized rooms for water projects, and finally, a sector of the Caribbean ocean that is fenced off for housing marine life. In these fenced-in areas, they have sea turtles, sharks, and dolphins, and the ultimate goal is to do essentially the same thing there as they are doing at the aviaro. The general idea is to study the marine life, help them reproduce, and then

169
Anthrotourist

ultimately release them into the wild once they are adequately prepared for life in the open ocean. Thanks to Guillermo, we were able to see all of this for free. When we were done, we went into the break room afterwards to have a cup of coffee and hang out with some of the biologists and other employees before heading back to Isla Grande.

On the way back, we passed islands that only had enough room for one house. Some of the houses belonged to drug traffickers who had been caught and sent to prison, or even extradited to the United States. In fact, Pablo Escobar, who is one of the most infamous drug traffickers of Latin America, owned one of the islands. He was killed in the 1990s in Colombia; however, at one point, he was so wealthy that he offered to pay off the national debt of Colombia. These houses were just about the same size as the island, and the only way to get up to the house is by pulling up to the pier that surrounds each one. Most of these islands are so small that they do not even have a beach; the residents simply jump off the pier into the water as if it were a swimming pool.

Once we were back on Isla Grande, I just wanted to lie in a hammock and relax; however, Maria Cristina and Guillermo had other plans for Kerry and me. We were fed lunch and then they told us to grab some snorkel gear because we were going to walk to Punta Brava. Punta Brava is about thirty minutes by foot across the island. One interesting thing about this island is that there are no roads or real streets; the roads are nothing more than dirt trails or paths through the jungle interior of the island. This
made the walk even more exciting. We walked through little towns that consisted of ten houses at most, and we also passed a school along the way. The school was in very good condition, very well kept and landscaped, and it looked like it had been recently painted. How someone would ever hear of a job teaching at this school is beyond me. Nevertheless, it was near the center of the town and served approximately 280 students who studied in two shifts, the younger students in the morning and the older students in the evening.

Walking through this island was very peaceful and it seemed like its own little Utopia floating out in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. Everyone was extremely nice; however, I am sure they were wondering what these gringos were doing here. According to Guillermo and Maria Cristina, Kerry and I were the first two gringos to officially stay at the aviario. There have been Europeans and other backpackers who have stayed; however, we were the first Americans to officially stay there. It made me feel a bit special.

After our journey across the island, we made it to Punta Brava, jumped in the water, and snorkeled in the reefs for about two hours. The coral was really interesting, as were some of the fish. I found myself swimming with a school of thousands of little tropical minnow fish. After swimming with them, I went down deeper than they were and looked up to observe how many were there. It was like a thick layer of shiny tropical fish between the surface and me. It was astounding to see.
After our adventure at Punta Brava, we headed back to the aviario to eat, socialize, and chat. I found it really interesting how intrigued the people were with the United States, and who I was in general. We spent hours sitting there, with Guillermo, Maria Cristina and the other employees of the aviario asking me questions about the USA, what I do, where I have lived and traveled, and so on. It was really fun to get to share with them about my country and my life.

Generally people in this part of the world know a lot about the United States; however, it seemed as though this group of people knew very little, so it was interesting to talk to them about my home country. The conversation originally started because the son of one of the ladies there asked me about Disney World, and I told him that I live only about one hour from there. I think that I instantly became his best friend, just because of my proximity to a place that he wants to visit. I told him that Disney World was too expensive and that the Caribbean is much cooler (my opinion of course). Nevertheless, I told him that if he was ever in Florida, then I would personally take him to Disney World.

After hours of conversation, I finally went to sleep and didn’t manage to wake up the next day until very late—11:00 a.m.! That was fine because my ride back to Cartagena was not leaving until 3:00 p.m. Of course, the people at the aviario found it hilarious that a gringo could
sleep in such a hot room without a fan from 6:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Obviously, they do not know how much I love to sleep.

Nevertheless, I went with Guillermo to find my ride and to head back to Cartagena via Playa Blanca. I was a bit sad to leave because I had such a memorable time, not to mention that Guillermo was a wonderful host and a very awesome person. I could tell he was bummed that I was leaving; however, I needed to get back to Cartagena because I was going to a U-20 World Cup game the following day.

It is always better to leave early than to wear out your welcome, so I headed back to Cartagena. However, before I left, I extended the offer to Guillermo to stay with me in Cartagena when he arrived on Sunday. It was not because I felt that I “owed” him; rather, as I have already mentioned, it was just the right thing to do. I think this type of symbiotic relationship should be the core of human interaction. In fact, I am a strong advocate of the Golden Rule, “Do for others as you would have them do for you.” I am convinced that if we were to live by that concept, then the world would be a much better—maybe even a harmonious—place.

When I arrived in Cartagena, I went to the World Cup U-20 soccer game (Panama vs. Austria) in the Real Cartagena.

---

3 Real Cartagena is the first division professional soccer team from Cartagena that plays in the Colombia National Soccer League.
soccer stadium on the outskirts of Cartagena. I had bought my ticket prior to going to the islands, and I knew that I would be going with Fabian, his son, his cousin, and my three Irish friends—Marie, Sally, and Laura—upon my return to Cartagena. We managed to get the second-best seats for under $30 dollars. I wanted to do something nice for Fabian after all he had done for us as our boat captain, so I paid for most of his son’s ticket to the game. I could tell that he was extremely grateful; also, I think it helped him out financially, and it allowed us to get even better seats.

[28] Adiós, Colombia

How does one begin to summarize a long journey through so many different places where you have experienced so much culture, hospitality, and adventure? The realization that my trip had come to end was bittersweet, because a small part of me was looking forward to going home and being in a place that is familiar, and being around friends and family who know me and have missed me. On the other hand, acknowledging that this adventure had come to an end saddened me because I felt like I was abandoning a voyage that my soul wanted to continue. It is as if a part of me was left frozen in time to wait until the next time I could come back, to pick up where I left off.

For me, traveling is something that allows me to feel alive, like a nomad who is traveling through an
unknown land. The cultures that I get to experience, the beautiful landscapes, even the sicknesses that I am forced to endure as a result of traveling to new places, all draw me closer to the human species. And although I know that I will never be able to empathize with most of the people with whom I come into contact, at least I will be able to get a glimpse into their lives and hopefully be able to get a bit of understanding with regard to who they are within their own society.

In fact, after having traveled from Honduras to Colombia, I am more convinced than ever that I really know very little about these countries and their cultures. Although I have read a lot about these cultures, and have even traveled and spent quality time in many of these countries—not to mention my Master’s degree in Latin American and Caribbean studies and the college courses I teach that are related to the cultures of Latin America—I still recognize the fact that I am, and will always be, an outsider. Furthermore, this region of the world is so diverse that it seems virtually impossible to become a true expert on this region, much less an expert on all of Latin America. In short, this trip was a humbling experience for me on many levels, and I am extremely thankful to have had the opportunity to travel through this part of the world. I learned so much from the people I met that there is no price tag I could put on this experience.

Before I embarked on this trip, I thought that I was going to find myself empathizing with the poor of these countries and finding myself feeling more and more indifferent to the elitists and classists of the region;
however, during my trip, I found that both socioeconomic groups extended such hospitality to me that one can’t ignore the fact that what separates these social classes is not etiquette, but simply opportunity. And that, for me, has been something that I have spent countless nights thinking about and wondering what could be done to provide the underprivileged people and their communities with an opportunity towards upward mobility and a better life. It’s unfortunate to observe the segregation, discrimination, classism, and elitism across this region, because at the end of the day, we are all human beings and should treat one another with dignity and respect. However, the hospitality and kindness that has been extended to me throughout my journey has no borders. And that is undoubtedly something that transcends the socioeconomic barriers of this part of the world.

On the other hand, the one place where I have been able to witness all classes harmoniously sharing the same admiration was at the soccer field, when I went to watch the U-20 World Cup game, Panama vs. Austria. I am convinced that the power of soccer allows all of us to transcend socioeconomic boundaries—even temporarily—in order to come together and support a greater cause: one’s team. There is no other place in the world that this is exemplified more than during the World Cup.

Fortunately for me, I was able to go with my friends to watch the U-20 World Cup game in Cartagena, Colombia. The game in itself was interesting, as these two
countries were playing their first World Cup game of the tournament. After tying the game, Panama earned their second point ever in the World Cup, an accomplishment that almost everyone in the country enjoys. While you go to a game such as this for the love of the game itself, you end up getting more than that. You get a group of people who come from all different socioeconomic backgrounds—including the Panamanian president, who was in attendance—who come together for 90 minutes or longer, to support a cause that is greater than themselves, and greater than any differences that one may have with another fellow countryman. And that greater good is no more or no less than striving to win the World Cup, an honor that very few will ever come to know. It is winning this Cup that motivates people to set aside any provincialism or cultural differences in order to support their national team. This phenomenon in itself is interesting on so many levels, because a sport can cause a whole nation to join together to support their team.

Just having the opportunity to witness the ambience of a World Cup game here in Colombia was impressive in itself. Mobs of people flooded into the stadium to support their team, be it Panama or Austria, although I have to admit that there were very few Austrians. I would guess that it was approximately 60% Panamanians, 35% Colombians, 4% Miscellaneous, and 1% Austrians in attendance. The Austrians were outnumbered in terms of fans which is logical, given their distant geographic locations. Nevertheless, it was a friendly environment for anyone who came to support their
fellow Austrians. In fact, there were a group of Austrians, about four people, sitting near us, which happened to be in a Panamanian section, and weren’t reluctant to celebrate and cheer their team on as the game unfolded. I found that to be an extremely beautiful thing. The mutual respect that was extended towards each other’s countries was impressive, especially taking into account the importance of this tournament.

I was cheering for the Panamanian team because I felt an obligation to support a fellow “American” team. Maybe I was overtaken by an attitude of regionalism, or maybe it was the fact that I was surrounded by Panamanians; in any case, I thought that it was appropriate to cheer for the Panamanians. Nevertheless, my cheering had no impact on the outcome as it ended 0-0. All in all, it was a fun game to watch, not simply because of the game itself, but because of the atmosphere.

Coming back to Cartagena for the game and to spend my last few days in Colombia was a great decision. I was pretty familiar with Cartagena by now; however, coming back for the game and to meet up with friends was a great way to end the three-month journey through this part of Latin America. In fact, it gave me on opportunity to try to buy a few things for my family. While I was at it, I managed to meet three new friends, Nickola, Laura, and Max. Nickola is an Austrian guy who happened to be part of the one percent of fans in the stadium who were Austrian, and who watched the Panama vs. Austria game. Laura and Max are from England and are traveling the
same route through Latin America that I did, but in reverse, with the additional difference that they are going all the way up to Mexico, which I did about five years ago. So I felt free to give them advice as to where to go and which bus lines to take so that they would be able to make their way to Mexico.

They were trying to do this in five weeks, which left very little room for error. They headed out on a yacht that took them to Panama, which was similar to what I did, except they were traveling a bit more comfortably than I was. Nevertheless, they had the same ambitions and same plans: to get to Panama and continue north, and try to soak in as much of Central America as possible before getting to Mexico and flying back to England. Regarding Nickola, I am not sure what his plans were; all I know is that he started in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and I do not think he planned to stop in Panama.

Another facet of anthrotourism that I find interesting when I travel is meeting people. Sometimes I find myself not even surrounded by people from the country I’m visiting, but rather by people from other parts of the world. That is something that is unique when traveling to international destinations. Furthermore, to be able to connect people with other travelers to facilitate a more seamless trip for them is enormously gratifying to do or witness. For example, I met a guy by the name of Nicolas who works in an Argentine restaurant in Cartagena, Colombia. He had mentioned to me that he was interested in going to Isla Grande to dive and to spend a few nights camping on the island in order to get out of
Cartagena for a few days. So I told him about my experience on Isla Grande and about my new friend Guillermo. He was excited to know more about the island and wanted to know how he could get in touch with Guillermo. I told him that I would bring Guillermo to him once he arrived from Isla Grande to meet me on my last night. And that is precisely what I did: I went back to the restaurant with Guillermo so I could make that connection to help out my Argentine friend Nicolas.
Conclusion

As I have mentioned before, that is what anthrotourism is all about; extending kindness to people you meet on the road and trying to make connections along the way. By doing this, you create a worldwide network in which you can, at any given moment, contact those people in their respective countries and seek advice about traveling there. You make more international friends and begin to create a network of anthrotourists who could be in any given country at any given moment. Who knows, perhaps you could find yourself with them in another country in some other part of the world simply because you had made the connection with them in a country half the world away.

As we would all agree, what comes around goes around; therefore, the best thing you can seek to do as a
human being is to get along well with each other no matter what your political, religious, or cultural preference may be. We have to remember: we are all human beings and should respect and be respected as such. Of course, this does not mean that we should be reluctant to share who we are with people; however, what it means is that one should not be superior with one’s belief system or worldview. We all come with different worldviews and perspectives on life; therefore, the best thing that one can do is understand another’s worldview or perspective before judging them or condemning them for being who they are.

With respect to that idea, I have learned so much about people on this three-month journey. I thought that I knew a lot about Latin America; however, after this trip, I realize that there is so much more to learn about this region that I doubt I could learn all there is about this part of the world in two lifetimes. Anthropologists claim to have an understanding of people—after all, anthropology is the study of man. However, I have come to realize that the study of man is a goal that is unachievable. Nevertheless, that does not mean that we should abandon this field of study; rather, I think it should inspire us to want to learn more, and to yearn to understand as many people and cultures as possible. I would even say that the United States could use more anthropologists who yearn to understand other people and cultures.

As the United States, we could benefit from more cultural ambassadors. We need more people who are slow
to judge and quick to listen with regard to other people and their cultures. I think that this humbling experience has served me well, in the sense that it has shown me that, although this region of the world seems to some people to be very homogenous, the reality is that it’s complex and very heterogeneous, and as such, has created a region of the world that is known for its people, its food, its music, and its culture, and has captivated the hearts of so many, myself included.

As I left the beautiful terrain of Colombia, I realized that I will not be abandoning Colombia or Latin America for very long. In fact, I am already planning to be back in Central America in a few months; however, as the famous line goes from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, “Parting is such sweet sorrow,” I will be leaving this country with a heavy heart. I will miss the places I have visited, but more importantly, I will miss the people I have met. And I will miss the people I have left behind in my improvised voyage through this part of the world, a voyage that will be unforgettable.

Knowing that I have grown as a human being during this time gives me a certain level of contentment in leaving this region. In fact, being able to impart this experience to my students at the university where I teach is what excites me about going back to the USA. In short, it is my hope that by sharing these experiences with my students, that I will spark an interest in them to leave the comfortable bubbles that they live in, in order to experience this beautiful world that God has created for us
Anthrotourist
to discover. That is not just my hope for my students, but also for my friends, family, colleagues, and anyone who is willing to let me share this story with them. I truly wish that everyone who is reading this could have lived this experience.
Glossary

“Abajo Trujillo!”
“Down with Trujillo!” Specifically, abajo means “down with.”

Agua potable
Potable water.

Albiceleste
Sky blue. Significant in this case because it is the color of the Argentine team jersey.

Arepa
A corn pancake. It can be sweetened or unsweetened.

Aviario
Aviary or bird sanctuary.
Bandeja Paisa

_Bandeja Paisa_ is a typical Colombian dish that consists of ground meat, arepas, rice, kidney beans, _chicharrón_, and avocado. (See Recipes.)

Cada quien, lo suyo
To each, his own.

Café puro
Pure, or single-source coffee (like a single-malt scotch!).

Cajuelas
One _cajuela_ is equivalent to a 25 x 25 x 25 cm aluminum can/box. It is the box used by the people picking the coffee cherries.

Campesino
Farmer.

el Campo
The fields.

Caudillo
The Spanish term for a political or military leader. The term can be translated into English to mean “strong-man,” or a leader who governs by exercising his military force or clout. _Caudillo_ has been the term used to refer to many historical leaders within Latin America.

Centro
Center, as in “downtown.”

Chicharrón
Pork rind.
**Chimichurri**
A pesto-like condiment from Argentina that's made with parsley, garlic, and olive oil and is used as a topping for steak. *(See Recipes.)*

**Chorotega**
Also known as Mangue, Chorotega is an indigenous language spoken by the people of Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua.

**El Comandante**
Che Guevara.

**Comarca Kuna Yala**
The *Comarca Kuna Yala* is a region of Panama known as San Blas. San Blas is located in the southeastern part of Panama and is bordered by the Darien Jungle to its south.

**Fanega**
One *fanega* is the equivalent of 20 *cajuelas*.

**Fincas**
When referring to coffee plantations, the word *finca* simply means plantation or farm. The word can also mean “property” or “estate.”

**El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN)**
The FSLN was the revolutionary group that overthrew Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979, ending the Somoza dynasty and establishing a legitimate government in Nicaragua. It is now a democratic socialist political party in Nicaragua.
**Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional** (FMLN)
Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. The FMLN operated in El Salvador. (Farabundo Martí, was a Marxist-Leninist activist and a revolutionary leader in El Salvador during the 1932 Salvadoran peasant massacre.)

**Futsal**
Futsal is a style of soccer that is played on a smaller playing surface with a soccer ball that is significantly smaller and heavier than the average outdoor soccer ball. The word *futsal* is a combination of the two words in Spanish, *fútbol* and *salón*, which loosely translates, “hall football.”

**Gallo pinto**
A typical dish served in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and consists of rice, black beans, and occasionally chopped up tomatoes and onions. This dish is generally served at breakfast; however, it can be eaten at any time of the day. *(See Recipes.)*

**la Gente Popular**
Ordinary, non-rich people.

**Gringo**
A term that is given to tourists from the United States. Depending on the context, it can be a term of endearment, a nickname, or it could be used as a derogatory term towards people from the United States (or Caucasian people in general). *Gringa* is the feminine version.
**Guardia Nacional**  
National Guard (in this case, of Nicaragua).

**Guevaristas**  
Followers of Che Guevara’s ideology.

**La Avenida Central**  
Central Avenue (in San José, capital of Costa Rica).

**La Boca del Diablo**  
The Devil’s Mouth, the name given to the crater of Popogatepe by the Spaniards during the colonial period in Nicaragua.

**Loco**  
Crazy.

**Maquila**  
A pretty Spanish word for sweatshop.

**Mar Abierto**  
The open ocean.

**el Microcentro**  
Downtown.

**Militares**  
Military men.

**Mochilero**  
Backpacker. *La mochila* means “backpack.”

**Molas**  
*Molas* are hand-stitched designs by the Kuna Indians of Panama that are worn by the Kuna women as part of their traditional blouse.
Anthrotourist

**Museo de los Niños**
Children’s Museum.

**Museo de Oro**
Literally, Gold Museum. In San José, this is the Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, located in a subterranean structure.

**Novias**
Girlfriends.

**Oceanario**
Oceanarium (a large-scale aquarium focusing on the flora and fauna of the ocean).

**Onda**
Vibe (colloquial; from the Spanish *onda* meaning “wave”).

**Partido de fútbol**
A game of football, or football match.

**Peñas Blancas**
The Peñas Blancas River forms the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border.

**Popogatepe**
Chorotega for “burning mountain.” It is the name of an active volcano near Managua, Nicaragua.

**Pulpería**
Convenience store.

**Revolucionaria**
A female revolutionary. *Revolucionario* is the masculine version.
Suegra
   Mother-in-law.

Ticos
   Nickname for Costa Ricans.

Tómbola
   The revolving drum that is used in a lottery.

Un plato típico de Nicaragua
   A typical dish from Nicaragua.
Recipes
Anthrotourist

**Bandeja Paisa**

6 servings

**Ingredients**

- 3 cups cooked red beans
- 3 cups cooked white rice
- 6 cooked chorizos (fried)
- 6 pieces of chicharrones (pork rind)
- 6 fried eggs sunny side up
- 2 lbs shredded grilled beef flavored with hogao (see below)
- 6 baked plantains
- 1-1/2 avocados
- 6 arepas

Lime for Serving

**Hogao:**

- 2 white onions, diced
- 6 large green onions, diced
- 4 tomatoes, diced
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup diced green pepper
- Fresh cilantro to taste, chopped
- Salt
- Vinegar
- Cumin to taste
- Vegetable oil
Instructions

Make hogao by combining all ingredients except cilantro in a skillet. Cook for ten minutes; add cilantro and turn off heat. Let sit 5 mins. Mix half with shredded beef, and set half aside for garnish.

On each plate, place the following:

1/2 cup beans
1/2 cup rice
1 chorizo
1 piece of pork rind
1 egg
A mound of beef with a spoonful of hogao on top
A quarter of an avocado
1 arepa
A slice of lime
Gallo Pinto

6 servings

Ingredients

1 lb. black beans, soaked overnight
3 cups chicken broth
2 cups white long-grain rice
1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
1 small green pepper, chopped
1/2 tablespoon salt
Vegetable oil

Instructions

1. Drain the beans and add fresh water to cover them by about an inch. Bring to a boil. Add salt to taste. Cover the pan and simmer until the beans are soft, approx. 3 hrs.
2. Heat a deep pan and add 1 tbsp. of oil. Sauté the rice for two minutes, then add cilantro, onion, and pepper. Sauté 2 minutes more.
3. Add chicken broth, bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat to simmer until rice is tender, about 30 mins.
4. Pour most of the water off of the cooked beans, reserving about 1/2 cup of the liquid.
5. Sauté the rice mixture and beans in vegetable oil for a 5-10 minutes. Add the bean water back in and heat, stirring constantly.
6. Serve with a little fresh chopped cilantro and onions.
Chimichurri

2 cups

**Ingredients**

- 1 cup flat leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 cup cilantro, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 fresh jalapeno or red pepper, chopped
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon diced red onion
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Lemon wedge

**Instructions**

1. Combine vinegar, salt, garlic, onion, and hot pepper and let stand for 10 minutes.
2. Put mixture in food processor and pulse for two minutes.
3. Spoon sauce over grilled beef.