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A Taste of Life in Honduras

Experiencing beautiful tropical landscapes, beaches, and pine forests, and the life in the capital city Tegucigalpa, Todd Fawley had a wonderful time in Honduras. During his participation in CRP's exchange program with the Centro de Arquitectura y Construcción (CEDAC), he learned from his classes but also gained a new perspective of the world and learned the secrets of a slower rhythm of life.

My advice for students studying abroad is to be cautious of the “exotic/mystic phase” that one experiences during the first month of the trip, when everything seems more interesting, beautiful, and fun than at home. This advice is more aimed at those who study abroad in Europe than those that travel to the Third World. However, the beauty and mysticism of these countries, such as Honduras, though not readily apparent to visitors, is breathtaking once one knows where to look. As a student studying abroad my time in Honduras opened me to experiences as different from San Luis Obispo as one could get. For five months -from January to May 2005- I studied at the Centro de Arquitectura y Construcción (CEDAC), a small architecture school located in Tegucigalpa, the capital city.

Located in Central America between Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, Honduras is a developing nation still recovering from the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The country includes a diverse range of terrain: jungle (as well as amazing beaches) along the Caribbean ocean, pine forests across the center of the country, and an extremely arid almost desert region in the south. Lightly populated -only 6 million- Honduras routinely ranks among the three poorest nations in the western hemisphere.

Approximately 160 students attend CEDAC, most of them from the elite social class in the capital. Once, when wearing a Cal Poly sweatshirt, one of the students informed me that his father owned the factory where they were made (the tag confirmed the sweater was indeed made in Honduras)! In Honduras students continue to live with their parents or relatives until marriage thus the university felt more like an American high school than a university. I took courses on art history, urban history, photography, and Honduran history.

In addition to taking courses, I got the chance to travel to virtually all corners of Honduras and interact with all types of people. Though not officially a national pastime, there does exist a verb that best translates as “shooting the breeze”: *platicando*. Virtually everywhere from waiting for a bus to eating lunch in a comedor Hondurans would initiate

conversation that wound on through languid afternoons. One of my best memories is sitting at a bus stop in a rather remote rural village discussing the state of the world with a group of campesino farmers who were among the nicest and most interesting people I met there. Though much of the world has



Figure 1. Todd and Marlen in front of Camayaga Cathedral.



Figure 2. Todd's house in Tegucigalpa. (photo by T. Fawley)

little regard for the United States and Americans, I encountered no problems in Honduras although I frequently engaged in political discussions regarding the state of the world.

Although the courses I took through CEDAC were valuable, traveling to the more remote areas of the country and talking with people were the most educative part of my time there. The physical and social differences between Honduras and California are stark: extremely poor ghettos and shanties climbed the hills ringing Tegucigalpa, and most rural residents are subsistence farmers. Poverty is a constant issue (unofficially estimates set the poverty level at 80-85% of the population) and most people have seen little change in the quality of life from the days of their grandparents; in many regions of the country the Central government is just not present. The poverty levels manifest themselves in society in different ways: buses run constantly between the major cities and charge only several dollars to cross the country (although they stop every mile to pick up more passengers); taxis called *collectivos* run set routes in the major cities, waiting to go until 4 people fill it up (each passenger paying 50 cents); few people expect large changes in their lives and thus the pace of life is much more relaxed and easy going (why rush about if nothing will come of it?).

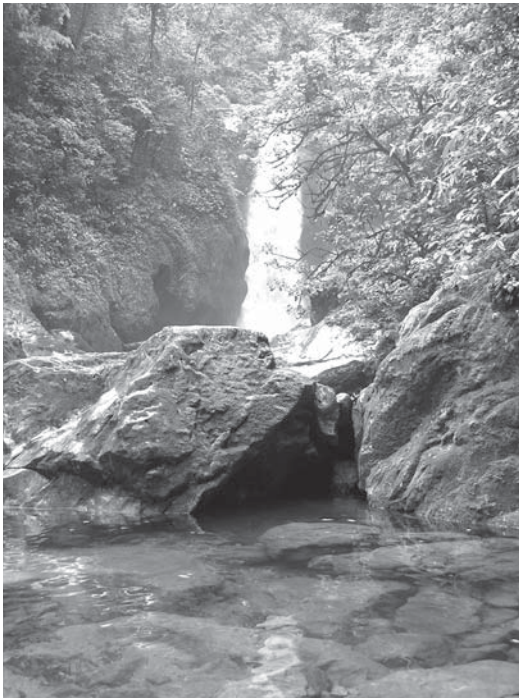


Figure 3. *La Ruidosa* (the noisy one) waterfall at Pico Bonito National Park. (photo by T. Fawley)

Although beset with many social issues ranging from poverty to gang violence, Honduras is a uniquely beautiful society. As an outsider, everyone I encountered was genuinely interested in who I was and what I was doing in Honduras. Coming from a state and a society that is increasingly individualistic and isolated, the inclusiveness of Honduras was a good change. Though I have resumed to my old pattern of life six months after my return, my experience down there has influenced my perspective and expectations in life as well as my perspective on the US. I hope to continue traveling after college.



Figures 4 & 5. The road to Erandique and the local plaza, church, and market. (photos by T. Fawley)

