

## Life after Study Abroad 2018

Taking the role as a guest in a foreign culture could be a challenging and perhaps an anxiety-producing experience. The idea of visiting a country in Central America was appealing to me, but I was also concerned about being so far from home and family for so long. After weighing all of the factors, I concluded how spending two weeks in Heredia, Costa Rica, would be overwhelmingly beneficial for me, as a future educator—so I took the leap! After making the final decision several months before I left, my excitement level increased. Being fluent in Spanish, I was excited about speaking my first language in a large community again. Upon my arrival in Costa Rica, there was a sense of comfort I felt in communicating in Spanish. Any doubts or concerns I had went away as soon as I was in my homestay.

The primary factor that convinced me to study abroad was the opportunity to visit many types of schools in a foreign country. During the trip, my professors, my fellow Illinois State University students, and I were given permission to visit to five different schools in the surrounding area. The schools ranged from urban to rural and public to private. The main differences I observed between Costa Rican schools and American schools are religion-based courses, recess breaks, and available resources. In addition, the commonality I found across every Costa Rican school—regardless of location and socio-economic status—was how happy students were. They were truly *happy*. The collective mindset of the students I was fortunate to observe was nothing short of inspiring. In schools, children were granted time to run around to play games, and then they were ready and excited to learn. As a future teacher, I hope to apply what I learned during my time with students so happy to be in school.

The two weeks I was there weren't all school visits, overall, I feel like this trip pushed me out of my comfort zone. I spent hours exploring Costa Rican towns and learning about their philosophy on life. The local saying *pura vida* ("pure life") is seemingly simple yet, as I reflect on my experiences, so profound. Appreciating life and all that is available to us is what truly matters. I am deeply appreciative of the new friendships I formed through studying abroad. Being there truly change my perspective on life and education. Experiencing another culture and its education system is something that I will always cherish and intend to apply in my practice as an educator.

- Karina Soto



The students at one of the schools knew I was going to be in their classroom and they made me a piggy bank. The back says, "Costa Rica es pura vida ...Karina".



*Volcan Irazu*. This volcano was incredible with its great views, and we were able to walk very close to it because it was inactive. One of the many adventures I experienced!