

Summer 2019 in Panama

By: Caitlin Whitney

Studying abroad was easily the best decision I have ever made. Prior to leaving the country in May of 2019, I had never been outside of US territories. It was also the first time I had done a lot



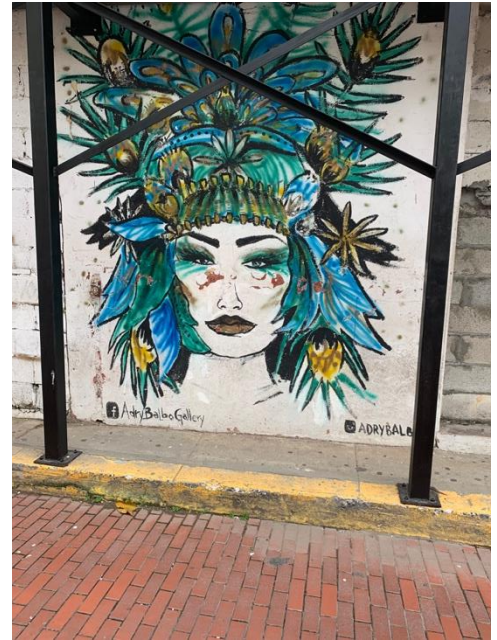
of things. For me, studying abroad was a learning experience. In my classes we covered topics like identity of individuals with mixed heritage and how it connected to Panama. We also covered topics like mindset and how we view and understand students and their families. Academically, I was challenged to

think outside of what I already had perceived to be true and that helped me grow as a teacher.

Outside of Academics, I also learned a lot about myself. I became more responsible in Panama because my parents were so far away and no one but myself was going to do the things that I needed to do. I became more independent and more adventurous. In talking about mixed heritage in our classes, I was able to become more reflective about my own identity and how it affects me and my interactions with the society I live in.

Aside from growth both academically and personally, I found that I had a ton of fun too. From the minute my plane began rolling down the runway to take off, I was having a fantastic time. I stayed with a host family that was just lovely. The mother was so sweet to us, she really genuinely wanted to get to know us and enjoyed doing things like having celebrations for us on our birthdays or running errands with us. She always checked in to make sure we were doing okay and made sure we were all comfortable. She taught us how to cook some of the things we

loved the most that she made and overall had such a lovely and welcoming home. The girls I stayed with became like sisters to me and we did everything together. We shopped in Casco Viejo, the old town that has become a very popular tourist attraction during the day and at night becomes the place to be. We went to Causeway and visited museums and rode tandem bikes and got see the water and how beautiful and scenic it looked. We tried so much new food and I don't think I had a meal that left me unsatisfied once while I was there. We got to go to beaches on both the Pacific and Caribbean and enjoyed splashing around together and getting some sun. Visiting the ruins in various parts of the country was probably the highlight of the trip for me. We were able to see what was left of a Spanish naval base and we were able to see Panama Viejo, the very first city that was built in what we know as Panama City. The museum is



beautiful and has so much interesting information. The ruins are so interesting to look at as you can almost picture what it used to look like using the remaining structures. There is so much to see and with Panama City being a city surrounded by jungle there is so much interesting wildlife and there are opportunities to connect with nature, even while staying in the city.

Having the opportunity to explore Panamanian schools was also a fantastic chance for growth. I got to see a public and a private school and I learned so much about my philosophy on teaching and I got to see the most solid version of who I want to be as a teacher. My experience

in Panama was one I will remember forever, I miss Panama and am so looking forward to going back one day.