



Chanticleer Tales from Abroad

“It’s probably one of the best things I’ve done in college so far.”

By Hans Kaser with Jakob Gessay (BS Marine Biology)

Jakob Gessay is currently a Junior at Coastal Carolina University. He is majoring in Marine Biology and minoring in Spanish. When Jakob was a Sophomore, his interest in studying abroad initially arose once he discovered that some of the study abroad programs offered Spanish language classes. This intrigued him because he wanted to improve his Spanish-speaking ability. When Jakob learned that the long-term exchange program with Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ/GAIAS) not only offered Spanish classes, but Marine biology classes as well, he knew that was the perfect program for him.

USFQ/GAIAS begins and lasts in Ecuador at Universidad San Francisco de Quito for 4 weeks. Here, over 900 international students enroll in Spanish language learning courses. Ecuador is an attractive studying location due to the many possible adventures and activities imaginable. Ecuador is home to the Amazon basin, snow-capped volcanoes, amazing beaches, wildlife, and a plethora of different incredibly rich cultures. Furthermore, the beautiful main campus of USFQ is located just 20 minutes away from the lively Ecuadorian capital city, Quito.

Once courses at USFQ conclude, students have the option for an extended program in the Galapagos Islands. For 12 weeks, CCU students travel to the Galapagos Islands for marine science courses at The Galapagos Academic Institute for the Arts and Sciences (GAIAS). The Galapagos Islands is a special destination for marine science students thanks to the Galapagos Marine Reserve. In 2001, the reserve was declared a World Heritage Site and is now known as the most attractive diver destination in the world.



Before leaving for Ecuador, Jakob spent time researching the country and The Galapagos Islands to help prepare himself for a once in a lifetime experience. Jakob read various books pertaining to Ecuadorian culture and the wildlife found on The Galapagos Islands. He also happened to be the only CCU student on that particular trip, so he expected to meet many new people. Jakob said that most students came to the program from different universities, putting almost everyone in the same shoes as him.

One of the biggest opportunities of studying abroad is meeting new lifelong friends. Jakob enjoyed his stay with both of his host families in Quito and The Galapagos Islands, however he particularly liked his host family in Quito. Jakob continued on to say that he made close friendships with two professors and many of the 50 international students studying with

When asked what his favorite memory or experience from the trip was, Jakob confidently stated that the highlight of the trip was diving in The Galapagos Islands. He also mentioned some of the cultural differences he experienced in his time in Ecuador and The Galapagos Islands. Apparently, it is custom to eat much later in the day than in the United States, but this did not bother Jakob.



In The Galapagos Islands, Jakob explained that most of the cuisine was rice, fish, and other seafood. Jakob was also thankful to experience the traditional Ecuador Carnival. It is an annual holiday, similar to the Mardi Gras Festival, in which locals wear disguises with colorful masks and dance to the rhythm of lively music. The Carnival is a celebration that originated in Catholic Italy centuries ago that precedes the 40 days of Lent and fasting.

The USFQ and GAIA's trip was more than just a few weeks of classes and fun for Jakob. It has led to future academic opportunities for him through the connections he made. He is currently staying in contact with one of the professors he met in order to plan another trip to The Galapagos his senior year at CCU in hope of conducting a research thesis there.

If there was one thing that Jakob would have done differently, he explained that he wished to have tried harder to

build relationships with the locals of The Galapagos Islands. He believes that many locals somewhat keep to themselves because they think visitors of the islands are all tourists.

Jakob has already begun planning his next study abroad trip. He is hoping to finish his Spanish minor in Costa Rica during the 2016 Maymester. For students who are trying to decide whether or not to study abroad, Jakob recommends them to "try your hardest to make it possible if it is something you really want to do." He said, "It's probably one of the best things I've done in college so far" and continues to mention that "it is definitely worth it." Jakob explained that although the application process is long and tedious, "it is so worth it."



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