

Kesley Holdgrafer

ECON 496

22 January 2023

### Panama Study Abroad Post-Trip Reflection

This was a trip of a lifetime and I was beyond thankful to have had the opportunity to immerse myself in a new culture and analyze diverse operations. Through visiting these operations, I was able to see firsthand what the agriculture industry is like in Panama and how it affects their economy and much more. Within twelve days in Panama, we got to explore tropical agricultural production, international business, and trade, gaining insights into economics, culture, and rural life. Joined with 24 other Iowa State students we toured and gained insights into diverse operations—from Pineapple to Banana Farms, Cocoa Plantations, Dairy Farms, Swine Farms, and more. The hands-on tours enriched my understanding of sustainable practices and the intricate connections between agriculture and international trade. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to understand the dynamic relationship between Panama, the U.S., and the world.

Before heading to Panama we were extremely active in our pre-course learning all about diverse operations in Panama, their cultures, what they eat, their government, and education. However, once we landed in Panama City, Panama I quickly learned that you can not learn everything in a classroom and it is amazing to get to see everything firsthand. One of my favorite stops was at the Strawberry farm in Boquete called La Granjerita Farm. This farm was a great overall experience from seeing her operations, learning her backstory, and seeing just how passionate she is about agriculture. As an agricultural communications major I am extremely passionate about educating the public and trying to bridge the gap between producers and

consumers. This is something that I had in common with the strawberry producer. She was extremely passionate about educating the youth and the public about vegetable production. She made an effort to do just that by creating an educational and personable label for all of her products. She also created an educational children's book about the industry. She did all of this while expanding her operation and working tirelessly to be sustainable in all of her practices.

Another stop on the tour that was extremely eye-opening for me was the Embera Drua Community because I got the chance to witness something I had never seen before. Before the trip, we learned all about the different diverse cultures that Panama has, but it was nothing like witnessing it firsthand and immersing myself in their tribe for the day. I loved hearing all about how they live day to day, most importantly how they work around the moon. When there is a full moon that is when this tribe gets to work. That is when they build houses and other things because the full moon helps keep the bugs away. Termites are a huge problem this tribe faces and the full moon helps remove those abundance of insects. Another thing that was intriguing to me was how they worked almost as democracy. Their community votes for leaders. What is interesting about that fact too is that when you are twelve in this community you can officially vote. That seems like a very young age to be able to vote especially because in the United States you have to be 18, however, I think what plays a big factor in this rule is how there are not a lot of people in this tribe. When the voting age is lowered to 12 that means more votes and more opportunities for candidates. Another part of this tribe I found interesting was that they did not have any livestock because of the tourism. One of their main sources of income is tourism and showing off their way of life to others. My preconceived notions were that there would be a ton of animals roaming around and that is what they would primarily eat. I for sure thought I would see a lot of free-roaming chickens. I was surprised when they said they did not have any animals.

Upon reflecting on this study abroad and the breathtaking sights I encountered, I gained a profound appreciation for our world. This experience taught me to find beauty in every aspect of life. Traveling to Panama was a transformative adventure that opened my eyes to a new perspective. I discovered beauty in every moment. From diverse tropical plants to the vast ocean and various forms of agriculture, Panama revealed the beauty inherent in our surroundings. Importantly, it instilled in me an enduring appreciation for beauty in every corner of the globe. Returning home, I began to recognize the beauty in snow, American cuisine, and more. Our world, whether in our backyard or a plane ride away, is undeniably beautiful. It is the diversity of our backgrounds and differences that contribute to this beauty—a realization that dawned on me through yet again another incredible international experience. As global citizens, acknowledging and understanding the profound beauty our world possesses is crucial, and my journey to Panama was instrumental in fostering this awareness.