

Welcome to **Perspectives from Latin America**, a newsletter by university students for elementary, middle, and high school students. Through this newsletter we hope that you gain new insights about the countries of Latin America from the experiences of those who have lived or traveled there.

Perspectives features articles written by University of Notre Dame students who are from Latin America or have studied, interned or traveled to the region. Their articles cover unique experiences they have had in Latin America and inform you about the culture, people, and politics of the region. Since the authors are students at Notre Dame, **they are available to visit your classrooms**. If you are interested in any particular article and would like to meet the author, let us know and we will arrange that meeting.

Perspectives also lists upcoming local events related to Latin America. Once you begin reading and learning about Latin America, we hope you will want to participate in as many activities related to the region as possible.

Enjoy the articles and we look forward to seeing you at our events!

Turning 20 in Machala

Christy Haller, Political Science & English major

Since I began elementary school, I have always wished that my birthday was during the school year. Classroom parties, wrapped lockers, and hallway birthday wishes never happen when you're born in July – in the United States at least. This year, however, I celebrated my birthday in Machala, Ecuador and for once I was in a classroom, only this time as the teacher!

Machala is a relatively big city of about 200,000 people on Ecuador's southwest coast. It is the self-proclaimed banana capital of the world, which I can attest to, since I spent an afternoon in the banana fields seeing how Chiquita Bananas are grown, packaged, and shipped to the United States and around the world. Machala is truly an Ecuadorian city, and by that I mean that tourists bypass Machala on their way to Ecuador's arguably more beautiful sights. Some may consider my site placement in Ecuador unlucky, but I, on the other hand, think that being one of only four Americans in the entire city was something really awesome. What Machala lacks in culture, it certainly makes up for in the people of the city.

Machaleños (people who live in Machala) are PROUD of their city and in recent years, there has been significant progress to beautify and clean the city. They also love to have fun; it is common to see them dancing salsa or reggatone at family parties or on the weekends. The nicest thing about the people of Machala is that they are extremely welcoming and generous, always offering their help or wanting to have a conversation with you.

I was introduced to Machalan generosity on my 20th birthday. Two weeks before my birthday I had been teaching my classes how to say the months in English. To practice, I asked them to line up in chrono-

logical order of when they were born. My class of 35 formed a line from January to December to show me when they were born. After they had arranged themselves, they asked me when my birthday was; I told them July 10th and we didn't speak about it again.

By July 10th, I had only been teaching my students for two weeks and was feeling a little sad being so far from my family and friends on my birthday. When I walked into the classroom, prepared to teach, I was flooded with "Happy Birthdays" and good wishes. My students refused to learn that day and both classes brought me a cake. Other students brought in mixed CDs, photos of Ecuador, and other gifts. They also gave me a card not only wishing me a happy birthday

but expressing concern that I was feeling welcomed and happy in this new country. They brought in salsa CDs and made me learn to dance in the middle of the classroom. Perhaps the funniest part of the day was when I was blowing out my birthday candles and they pushed my head into the cake! I was embarrassed with all the frosting on my face but knew that that's what they do to visitors they like.



Machaleños out for a stroll

I probably had more fun on my 20th birthday, 3000 miles from my home and friends, than I have ever had. I learned on that day that I was blessed to be teaching a group of people who were so generous and concerned about how I felt. As much as they said they appreciated that I was teaching them English, they could never really understand how special they made my birthday. For that, I will always be appreciative of the Machaleños that I met and had the opportunity of teaching.

The *Maestra*

Kerry Pecho
Anthropology major

As my plane began its descent into Mexico, my only thought was: “Oh no.” Suddenly the words my father had said to me before boarding played over in my mind: “Who would’ve thought you’d be going on a trip like this, practically by yourself? We couldn’t even get you to talk to your friends on the phone when you were little, you were so shy.” Even though I can now proudly say that I have successfully completed numerous phone calls, as Mexico began to appear closer and closer, I felt a sudden childlike urge to say to a flight attendant, “I don’t want to get off the plane. You do it instead.” Aware that the flight attendant did not have two years to break me of this habit as had my parents, I collected my things and made it to where my professor waited for me. I congratulated myself for being such a big girl, until I realized I still had three weeks and a research project ahead of me.

When I first entered Centro de JUCONI, the building in Puebla where I spent most of my time, I kept thinking that I wouldn’t be able to understand anyone and that no one would take me seriously. I was introduced to a class of 4 to 5 year-olds who all greeted me with, “*Buenas tardes.*” So far, so good. The children completed different activities led by *las maestras*, their teachers, and I found I was able to understand them fairly well. When they lined up outside the bathroom to wash up, I stood near the end of their line just glancing around until I heard, “*Maestra.*” I looked down to find one of the boys pointing his untied shoe out towards me. My incredible intellect allowed me to quickly realize he wanted me to tie his shoe, which left me time to

think about what he had said. I was no *maestra*. I was as tall as one, sure, but I had just gotten there!

This boy, as well as the other children, had immediately considered me as part of the group. I felt this acceptance again the next day when an older child whom I had never met came into the building, tilted her face towards mine, and waited expectantly. I stared blankly at her long enough to prompt a “*Maestra...*”, which finally produced the kiss on the cheek she had wanted. I felt accepted again the next day when a mother who was nice enough to participate in an interview thanked me, the “*maestra*”, for listening to her.

These experiences continued throughout my entire trip. I realize now I should not have been so worried about how I would be received. Everyone I worked with treated me so kindly and with such respect. Next time I’ll know to spend less time worrying and

more time brushing up on my soccer skills and Spanish vocab so come time to play *fútbol* and Pictionary, the kids won’t worry about embarrassing their new *maestra*.



Maestra and student



The Asado

Patrick Cochrane, Economics major

The large, precious *pampas* grasslands of Argentina are often mentioned for their beauty and sometimes ocean-like quality when the wind blows. However, they serve a very practical purpose for the country as well: raising cows.

Argentina is one of the world's largest beef producers, and each Argentine eats more than 150 pounds of it a year, almost double what the average citizen in the US eats! Beef is to Argentina what rice is to China or pasta to Italy – part of their culture.

Eating it is a cultural event in itself. Argentines are famous for their elaborate *asados*, or barbecues, all day or all night events where whole families and groups of friends get together to cook and eat. It's nothing like an American barbecue. As a general rule, be prepared to eat more than you ever have in your life when you go to your first *asado*. Tons of different salads and drinks make their way to the table, but the star of the show is the meat.

Usually the *asador*, the guy who mans the large charcoal *parrilla*, or grill, will offer you *chorizo* to eat first, a spicy pork sausage. This comes with *morcilla*, or blood sausage, actually made from cow's blood. The great stuff that we "waste" in the US comes next. This includes *riñones* (kidneys), *mojellas* (intestines), *chinchulines* (sweetbreads or thymus glands) and other organs, which are actually pretty tasty when prepared by a good *asador*.

Once you're full from all of that, make more room. A procession of mouth watering, juicy cuts of beef and pork is about to start. Out come the large racks of *costillas*, ribs. Out come huge flank

steaks, or *vacío*. Out come entire chickens (*pollos*) and *matambre*, a steak stuffed with vegetables and eggs. Don't expect any of it to be loaded with spices, either. Sauces or marinades other than some salt and lemon juice are unheard of; why mess up a good piece of meat, say the Argentines?

Chimichurri, a mix of garlic, peppers, and other spices is about the only thing you'll find Argentines putting on their steaks.

After the eating finally ends, the party eventually breaks up and everyone goes their respective ways. Don't expect them to separate for long, though. There will

surely be another *asado* tomorrow or next weekend, and with it another chance to bond with friends and family over food.



And You're Peeling Potatoes

Stephen Brennen, Spanish major

Food. That was the most important part of my experience this summer. I lived in a rural town in Costa Rica teaching English for ten weeks. I lived with a poor host family in a town full of saints. I was welcome in anyone's home at any time and whenever I went to someone's house, food was always offered. One very special moment involving food came with my host family during the final week of my internship.

We were preparing tamales. Tamales are a traditional food that every family in my town has for Christmas. I was very excited that the family was including me in a Christmas tradition even though it was the beginning of August. We were having them because, according to my

host dad, Goyo, it is not enough to eat them once a year. The whole family began working on the tamales.

There were many ingredients and lots to prepare so everyone was busy. There were carrots, rice, pork, potatoes, *plátano* leaves, and a fire to tend to. Whenever potatoes were present for a meal, it was my job to peel them because I had told my host family that my favorite food is potatoes. This was not strictly

true but, since I knew that potatoes were available in the town, I decided not to tell them that it is really warm apple pie with a side of vanilla ice cream. Because they knew that I liked potatoes, my family always had me prepare them.

On this night as I peeled the potatoes I talked to

Goyo, who was preparing the pork next to me at the sink. Goyo told me that the tamales were his favorite meal in the whole world for two very important reasons. The first reason was that, according to him, they are the most delicious food in the entire world. Secondly and more importantly he said, it gets the entire family involved and working together. As I thought about it, I realized that he was right and told him that it was great to see him working on the pork, Lala, my host mom, working on the fire, carrots and rice, and Valerie, my host sister, working with the *plátano* leaves. And then he said something that I will never forget, "And you're

peeling potatoes." When he said this I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward Goyo and the entire host family. After only nine weeks with them, they were treating me like their own son.

That night we had a long talk about Christmas traditions in both our families and, while we found some differences, we found similarities too.

We all had traditional foods that we ate and we always spent time with family and friends. That night we stayed up until way past our usual bedtimes and spent time together as a family. It was incredible. This summer I learned just how integral a role food has in families.



Latin America Events

Spring 2009

- 3/1-29 Exhibit: *In the Wake of the Beagle: Darwin in Latin America 1831-1836*.** Snite Museum of Art. A selection of photographs, lithographs and book illustrations documenting the Latin American sites visited by Darwin during the voyage of the *Beagle*.
- 3/27 Film: *Che (2008) Part 1: The Argentine*.** DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, 6:30pm, 9:30pm.
Tickets: \$6, \$5 faculty/staff, \$4 seniors and \$3 all students.
- 3/28 Film: *Che (2008) Part 2: Guerilla*.** DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, 3:00pm, 6:30pm, 9:30pm.
Tickets: \$6, \$5 faculty/staff, \$4 seniors and \$3 all students.
- 4/24 & 4/25 Dance Theater: *Luna Negra*.** Contemporary Dance celebrating Latino artistic and musical traditions while exploring new directions and identities. DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, **4/24:** 7:00 pm; **4/25:** 2:00pm, 7:30pm.
Tickets: \$40, \$32 faculty/staff, \$30 seniors, and \$15 all students.

For more information see <http://performingarts.nd.edu/>

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