

### **Learning American culture and teaching mine**

I moved from Colombia to the US last October 16th. It is my first time out of my country and all I knew about the US was what I watched on films. I have never spoken English before besides some classes, so I had to prepare my movements in the airport, because I had a connection in Huston, and I was scared. I searched on YouTube how to switch among terminals in and learned the route, which was not useful, since, when we landed, the gate was changed, and I had to ask for help. Everything was new for me: taking an international flight, using other currency, saying goodbye to my suitcases, and praying for logistics Houston Airport to be so good than I would be arriving and could find my luggage at my destination. Finally, I did it, now I am here at UD learning English and about American culture. My first month has been full of contrasts between the things I know and the new things in the US like transportation, food, people, and customs; sometimes I feel my brain wants to explode, it is a lot of information.

In Colombia I used to ride my bicycle anywhere in Villavicencio, my city, that was enough for me. However, I realized that having a car is normal here (I would like to have one). It is needed because everything is far, there are seasons, shopping centers and supermarkets are huge and when you visit them you usually buy plenty stuff to stock at home, so you need a car to bring your stuff to home. In Colombia there are no extreme weather changes and you have almost everything you need at maximum 10 minutes a walk in “neighborhood stores” located in the corners of blocks and served by the owner, these are very common, so people do not need to go to a big supermarket, just walk outside, buy what they need in retail presentation and pay in cash. In addition, if you forget to carry enough money and the shopkeeper trust you, you can carry the product and pay it next time you come, shopkeeper will take note on his notebook about your new debt on a page

marked with your name. My new lifestyle is going to buy groceries at the ACME, the closest supermarket to my apartment, pay with my credit or debit card and receive my bill.

On the other hand, it is surprising when I meet new American friends, because most of them watch the tv show on Netflix “Narcos” and tell me about Pablo Escobar. I realized that they know more about this character than me, but they do not know he is already dead, that is funny. nevertheless, they neither know that much about the attributes of Colombia. We are not that violent and scary country showed on Netflix anymore, therefore, I explain them, and I would like that everyone knew these 3 wonders of Colombia: food, landscapes, and people.

We have as much food as you can wish because our land is “blessed” with all the thermal floors and no seasons, so we can farm almost everything during the whole year. Hence, we can cook infinite tasty dishes, some of the typical are *bandeja paisa*, *ajiaco*, *arepas*, and from my region *carne a la Llanera*.

Traveling from 3 to 4 hours from any city you will discover wonderful landscapes and different weathers. For example, driving from the cold Bogota (it is almost in the middle of the country) 3 hours to the south-east you will get Villavicencio, the gate of the great plain lands of Colombia. You will find several cow farms where you can rest and learn about culture of the region, warm mountains for a great hiking, hotels and condos with big pools, nature, and rivers everywhere to refresh, and several outdoor restaurants rounded by nature with an awesome sight of the city. If you like cold adventures, you also can drive to the north and climb a snowy mountain in Boyacá. Or you can go to the north-west and visit *Medellín* and *Guatapé*, where you will get a large dam which you can navigate in and a big rock which you can reach the top in 15 minutes by going stepping upstairs and appreciate the landscape of the dam. For sea lovers we have Pacific Ocean with whales and Caribbean Sea with corals; *San Andrés* Island has the third biggest coral

reef and the sea of 7 colors, best sea ever. It is located 2 hours from Bogota by flight. The options in Colombia are limitless.

Finally, Colombia is a diverse and multicultural country which everyone is proud to have been born, Colombians are warm people always ready to share with the visitors. We celebrate any occasion considered enough to make a big meal and drink some beers with family, friends and even unknown people that can join to the celebration, it does not matter, everyone is welcome. Colombians are happy with our wealth, doing our best, smiling, enjoying, and creating; I think that the most creative people are Colombians. I invite my readers to consider visiting my country, I would be excited to guide and advise you.

I am so glad being here living new experiences that shape who I will be in a couple years. I admire the US and the way that things work here. I will be glad to share the knowledge that I will have acquired by the end of my experience with my friends, family, partners, and coworkers in Colombia. I am also sure that my American friends would be able to begin a conversation about Colombia from a different perspective next time after visiting my country as I do after getting to know the US, a country full of opportunities.