Rebeeca Deveau

Three years ago, I fell in love with the country of Brazil. It was not for carnival, or Rio, or the rumors of endless beaches, but the people and their stories. Since my freshman year, I had attended a couple of guest lectures with various professors discussing their scientific research, though their research was very interesting, what stuck with me each time was their tales of the people that they met. For you see, the unique thing about Brazilian people, is that their work ethic is so different from the United States and yet they are quickly becoming a world power. After a few of these lectures, Brazil became an obsession, every report was on Brazil and every free read book was on Brazil and the stories of the people. My obsession became my passion, but even I underestimated the impact that my time in Brazil would have on me.

Three years later, after two failed attempts of making the trip, I was finally leaving for Brazil. My flight left at 5:00am, I was sitting on the bed of seedy hotel next to JFK. I was not sure if someone would be waiting for me once I landed in Brazil, and I was really unsure if my Portuguese was going to be enough to get me through the next couple of months. But the loudest thought in my head was the regret for not taking part in one of the already set up experiences done by the university. Words can not explain the amount of panic and self doubt I was feeling that night.

In an effort to calm my nerves, I decided to make a list to remind myself of why I was there. It had been three years, surely there had to be something that had gotten me to this point. I stared at the paper for a solid twenty minutes, the fear was becoming crippling. But just when I was about to start packing my bag to return to upstate and abandon the whole trip, a commercial for Rossetta Stone came on, and just like that my list began to form.

Starting off with learning Portuguese, my list quickly took up three handwritten pages. I wanted to learn how to cook Brazilian food. To dance somewhere other then my kitchen. I wanted to reach out of my comfort zone and meet new people and keep in contact with them after I left. Professionally, I wanted to learn at least one new research technique, attend as many lectures as I could
get my hands on and work with crops that Cornell students can only dream about. Quickly my list became the calm that I needed, I fell asleep and woke up in time to board the plane to place known for operating without a plan.

When I landed in Brazil, I was greeted by a worker from Embrapa who did not speak much English and did not understand my Portuguese or Spanish. Yet we still managed to have a pretty decent conversation. He dropped me off at house surrounded by three feet of razor wire and an electric fence, all on top of a cement wall that was at least ten feet tall, I was clearly not in upstate New York anymore... I was greeted by Flavio, who had spent not only time in the United States, but also at Cornell and even at my lab. We spent the entire afternoon trading stories about our times on the hill, it was the perfect welcome for an unsure traveler. The next morning I woke up ready to start the journey into the unknown.

In this paper I keep referencing unknown and no plan, it is important to note that I am obsessed with planning. I always need to know what is going to happen next and what the backup plan is if the original fails. Brazilians think very differently, they do not believe in plans, schedules, or even setting start times. If a Brazilian tells you they will be there at one, you should be prepared for that to mean either one am or pm or even five o'clock three days later. They truly live with a go with the flow attitude. For this high strung American, who is obsessed with color coded calendars and their email, this lifestyle was serious adjustment.

For the next couple of months, I would wake up wander out of my dorm and start heading for the lab, fully expecting to be directed in another direction, and every day without fail, I was. During my time there, there was at least four people at any given moment with the sole purpose of keeping me entertained. And if there is one thing that Brazilians are good at, it's entertaining, an over scheduled American.

I traveled all over the state of Goais, even to the man made capital city of Brazilia. I even danced in public! Over my stay, I improved my Portuguese and my cooking style. I met people that I
miss dearly, but look forward to the time that we meet again. I worked with crops that most Americans will go their entire life never even hearing of. I learned research techniques, that will assist me furthering my future endeavors. I honestly could write a book on all that I learned and that I experienced, but the most important lesson I took away from Brazil was to live in the moment. Use the past as a reminder of where you have been, and a direction for the future but only for a moment.

My experience in Brazil, changed me a lot, it taught me how to relax and how to enjoy life again. It gave me the courage to change the course of my future plans in the most drastic means imaginable. Most importantly it taught me to live in the moment, and to use plans as a guide but not as gospel. Though I am not sure my experience is for everyone, I would heavily recommend this opportunity to future students this opportunity, to students who are afraid of change.

Brazil is truly a beautiful place, with a diverse landscape that offers a variety of opportunities. However, more then going to Brazil I would recommend the following strategy for setting up abroad experiences. First I would not study abroad during the fall or spring semester, taking classes during your time abroad distracts you from actually being immersed in the country and really experiencing the culture. Once you have established a time frame, find a passion, whether it is scientific research or culture evaluation. Finding this niche will help you to expand your horizons while you are in the country. Though it would be amazing to just sight see for eight weeks, you need to learn more about the country and give back to a country that will truly impact you in life changing ways. Once you find your passion and time frame set up the experience, with loose guidelines. Save the planning for when you are picking your courses for the fall semester. Once you have done all that, book your flights and just GO!