

Michaela's s experience on the 2022 Faculty-led Program Abroad to Ecuador

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My time in Guayaquil, Ecuador was one the most eye-opening and life changing experiences of my life thus far. I chose to take part in this experience to further my skills and abilities but also to help me grow as an individual. Through traveling in the past quite a bit, I learned early that seeing new parts of the world, meeting new people and learning their culture are all important to creating a well-rounded individual.



A photo of Michaela helping bats at an animal sanctuary.

One of my most memorable days was when we had the opportunity to visit the little town of Dos Mangas. Here we got to go on a beautiful hike through the wet forest. Our guides told us about wildlife we saw and even how useful the flora was in that forest!

Our guide showed us how you can make a hat out of the Paja Toquilla in the forest. I was lucky enough to be the model for this! We continued our hike where we got to take a quick dip in a waterfall to cool off after our hard workout in the sun.



Michaela wearing a hand-made Paja Toquilla hat.

After our hike we went back into town where we had lunch prepared for us by one of the local families. The food was delicious, fresh and enjoyed with a delicious glass of home made lemonade.

After lunch we got to take part in two different workshops. One was with the same toquilla plant that the hat was made with (side note: the Panama Hats that you may have heard about; they are actually made in Ecuador with toquilla!). This workshop showed us how to make a necklace.





A photo of Michaela handling a toquilla plant.

First we dyed the toquilla different colors, then used the colors to create a beautiful pattern! I'll be honest, this was tough to do, I was very impressed with the talent levels of the ladies teaching us! Our second workshop was with Tagua seeds. Tagua, also known as vegetable ivory, can be used to carve just about anything and make beautiful art. We got to see first hand how this goes from a seed, to a smooth and shiny engraved piece of art.

After our workshops we were able to buy some souvenirs from this wonderful community. This was one of my happiest days. Not only was it beautiful to see, but I also loved the community. To support these families and help them was an amazing feeling that I will never forget.

This was just one day of my trip, and it didn't even really involve any technical work at all, yet it was one of the most impactful for me. Days like this is why I always highly recommend anyone take an opportunity such as this if and when it is presented.

The world is big and we are just minor pieces within it. Go out and explore... see everything you can and meet new people!

Don't pass up a chance like this!