

## Study Abroad Story – Brittany Barrett

So, last semester I studied abroad in Puebla, Mexico. I was at the Universidad de las Américas, or the UDLAP as they call it. I had a couple of friends from Spain there who were going to go away for the weekend to celebrate Mexican Independence Day. Interestingly enough, one of them had two of his friends who were from Barcelona who were coincidentally in Mexico at the same time. And one of them had been just sort of traveling around and just meeting people, just making friends and doing random things, and so he had formed a lot of strong relationships with people in a town called Acatzingo.

So, we decided to go with my friend, me and Silvia and Marc, we decided to go meet Marc's friends in Acatzingo, and we got there and we were walking around the town at night and just looking at the beautiful streets, they were decorated with colored wood shavings. They were all designed beautifully, just to celebrate Independence Day. And we were walking around and we go hungry, and so one of Marc's friends that knew the town well was like "Okay, we'll go find somewhere to eat."

And we just walked into this place, I didn't really know where we were going, and I sat down and people brought me *atole* which is a Mexican drink made with corn and *tamales*, which is a type of Mexican food. And I was sitting around this table with people who had come to Acatzingo for the religious communities which are very alive and strong there. And they'd come from all different countries.

I was sitting at a table with people from Spain and Argentina and Nicaragua and Costa Rica in Mexico. And I finally asked, "Where are we? What are we doing?" and it was just someone in the neighborhood had just opened up their house for people to come to and just made food for everybody free of charge and just basically opened their doors to anybody who wanted to come in. And so, it was a really cool experience for me because here I was sitting at a table in a foreign country that I'd come to not knowing anybody, sitting with people from all over the world and just eating in a stranger's home basically.

This experience was really meaningful to me because it was a whole different level of hospitality and community than I had ever experienced before. And, obviously I'm in a different country, speaking a different language, so there's a level of discomfort there, but I felt very comfortable and very welcomed a very much a part of a community.

So, this hospitality doesn't always manifest itself in the same way, but one thing that I've noticed about a lot of the relationships that I formed while I was in Mexico and the people that I met there was that there is this sort of warmth and hospitality and genuineness in the relationships that I built and, you know, people invite me to their house in different parts of Mexico, I know that they're really serious about it, they'll put me in contact with their family, even if they're not there. And there's this genuineness and warmth and sort of feeling like the relationship really matters that I would like to emulate with all of my relationships with people.