



Olivia

from Woodstock to Peru

“Pequeños Momentos, Grandes Recuerdos”

“Are you ready to pack your bags?” was the phone call I received at this time last year when I learned I was going to become an exchange student. Since then, I’ve read so many of the BeaverTales from years before and now here I am writing my very first one! I’ve been in Peru for nearly four months and already I can say it's been the experience of a lifetime.

July 23rd, 2017 was the day I would say goodbye to Canada for a year and also the first time I would ever be away from home alone. People think I’m crazy when I tell them I decided to go four thousand miles away to Peru for a year as my first time travelling alone. I never really disagree with that. When I was at the Pearson Airport with my family, everything was so surreal. In less than eight hours I would be on a different continent surrounded by a new culture and new people. The whole idea of that made me so excited and nervous at the same time. My mom had told me she wouldn’t shed any tears before I left but that didn’t last long as she broke down crying at the last gate before security, where after that it was only me and my suitcases. It was a difficult and emotional goodbye and before I knew it, I was in Lima, Peru about to embark on an incredible journey.

I stayed in Lima for two weeks before I moved to my permanent city of Arequipa. Despite the stay being so short in Lima, my temporary host family made it really fun. I had the opportunity to see some of the city, my favourite part being the breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean. I also got the chance to experience Peruvian music, dancing, and food. I can’t deny the fact that the cuisine in Peru is beyond exceptional. There is also no denying the fact that the Rotarians were right about getting a blazer one size larger before going on our exchanges. Even after just two weeks of living with this family, I didn’t want to say goodbye. It made me realize that even though it’s so far away, saying goodbye to people I’d have got to know by the end of this year would be a lot harder. That’s why I try to make the most of everyday while I’m here in Peru.



On August 6th, I flew to the city of Arequipa. I was welcomed by my amazing host family at the airport. For the first six months I will live with my current host mom, host sister and host grandmother. My host mom is an extremely kind woman who has helped me so much since I've been in Arequipa. She can speak English fluently which is nice when I'm having problems with my Spanish. She works as a judge and teacher at San Pablo University here

in Arequipa. My host sister is in university, she's twenty-one years old and is actually a rebound exchange student who went to Belgium. It's nice to know I live with someone who has been through the same experiences.

The first few days my family took me to different places in Arequipa. I fell in love with my city. Arequipa is surrounded by three volcanoes; Misti, Chachani and Pichu Pichu (no, not Machu Picchu). Many of the buildings are made of a white volcanic stone called "sillar" giving the city its nickname, "The White City" or "La Ciudad Blanca." A lot of the food here is also different from anything I've had, especially the variety of fruit. I don't think I've ever been so amused walking through a grocery store in my life. My favourite dish so far is anticucho which may surprise you because it's actually cow heart!

Not too long after arriving to Arequipa, I started school. I go to a very small school that lies on the river that goes through my city. It has a beautiful campus with a perfect view of one of the volcanoes. I only have around eighty kids in my school, fifteen of whom are my age. I actually started school when it was already half way through their school year. I was put in the final year of secondary school, as I will be going to university in March. At first, I really didn't like school because I couldn't understand very much Spanish but now that I've improved, I really enjoy it. I really enjoy my class, I get along with everyone and we help each other out all the time. A lot of the kids love practicing their English skills with me. We also have recess, and almost every recess I play soccer with the boys. They take it so seriously (maybe too seriously), it's like being at a hockey game in Canada.

Along with starting school, I've also been on one of the major trips with the other exchange students. During the first two weeks in Lima, we had a camp to get to know one another but after we were distributed to our different cities. There are around sixty exchange students, and the trip was a chance to get to know all of them better. I met so many amazing people on the trip, and what's even better is that I got to share unforgettable experiences with them.





On the trip we visited the Island of Amantani in Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable body of water in the world. The people who live on that island speak Quechua, one of the other official languages of Peru. On the island we helped the families we stayed with and painted the local school. The money for the paint and supplies had been raised prior to the trip by baking and selling foods

from our countries. I baked the most Canadian thing possible which was beaver tails, or in Spanish, *colas de castor*. I had to remind the customers that a “beaver tail” is simply just bread with cinnamon.



My seventeenth birthday was also on this trip, and I can easily say it was more than I could've ever asked for. My birthday was the day we went to the sacred Mountain of Seven Colours. It was such an unbelievable experience, and even more special that I got to spend it with the other exchange students.

Only two days after was our trip to Machu Picchu! My friends and I hiked Machu Picchu together. Nearly two thousand stairs later, we were at the top of one of the Seven Wonders of the World. I couldn't believe I was there, I stayed nearly six hours staring at the incredible view. I had seen so many pictures of Machu Picchu, but no picture can justify its true beauty. After that trip, I had a whole new respect for Peru. The variety of things the country has to offer boggles my mind. I can't wait for what the rest of my exchange has to offer.



Overall, I'd like to express my gratitude for my exchange so far. Whether it's my family reading this, my friends, or Rotary members from Canada, I'd like to thank you all. Each and every one of you has contributed to making this possible, and I'm truly blessed to have such people in my life. Every day I think about the day I read "Peru" at the country announcement day back in February and smile knowing how lucky I am to call it home.

Muchisimas Gracias!

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