

A Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar's Experience

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I returned in December from my year as a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar for the year 2003-2004. The purpose of the Ambassadorial Scholarship is to promote international understanding and goodwill through study in another country. I was sponsored by the High Point Triad Rotary Club and was a Rotary ambassador of goodwill in Valparaiso, Chile. There I had the opportunity to share my own culture (be it about High Point, NC, UNC, the USA as a whole, etc.) and learn Chilean culture. The cultural exchange has profoundly affected me and I, without sounding conceited, have hopefully made a change in those that I met. I would like to share some of this information and joy of discovery with you!

The following is brief information about Chile and my experiences there. I feel it is very important to share this with you because most people in the US do not know much about Chile. Before my Rotary year, I only knew where it was from playing the game RISK. It's the long slender country with a meat-sauce name. *No*, Chileans do not eat burritos and tacos. *No*, Chile is not tropical. *No*, the typical Chilean food is not chili and beans! Read up and see how much you know and dazzle everyone with your new knowledge!

- Chile has a population of app. 15 million. 89% of the population is Catholic (divorce was legalized last year) and 11% are Protestant. Chile is not ethnically diverse: 95% are white or white-native American mix while only 3% are Native American.

- Chile is a democratic republic. Its current president is Ricardo Lagos. Fun Fact: Lagos graduated from Duke with an Economy degree and guest taught at UNC. Presidential terms are for 6 years. The congress building is not located in the capital but in Valparaiso, an hour and a half west. Chileans are still trying to reestablish trust in their Military after the Pinochet's regime from 1973-1990 where thousands were killed, tortured, and disappeared.
 - Like the USA, Chile has many immigrants from its Latin American neighbors who come for its political stability, strong educational system, and growing economy. Chile has the most stable bond in Latin America, low inflation, and a GDP that has consistently grown at more than 4%. Chile is very centralized. Most of the businesses have moved to Santiago. Over 5 million people live there, which is one-third the nations population!
 - Chilean exports: Fruits and vegetables, copper and other minerals, wine, lumber.
 - Chileans are wonderful people. They are very welcoming to North Americans although many are against American politics. However, they generally think that we are a cold people and culture. Changing this view, I was received in many families to celebrate national holidays, birthdays, and just to make friends.
 - Chileans are easy going and fun loving. They usually arrive late to appointments. If a Chilean says meet at 2, you should arrive at 2:30 and await their arrival! However, public transportation runs like clockwork, especially the buses.
 - The favorite Chilean pastime is the "asado" or cookout. Any event can be an excuse to have a cookout. Chileans eat lots of chicken, beef, pork, sausages, etc. Their typical meal is any meat (fried, grilled, or baked) with vegetables. They eat salads with a dressing of lemon juice, salt and oil... Very tasty and healthy!
- Their Independence Day is the 18th of September. Unlike the fourth of July, they celebrate the 18th for at least 3 days!
- Ramadas are constructed (temporary structures made with "ramas" or palm branches) where everyone gets together to eat typical food, dance the national dance (the CUECA) and have a good time.

- Chileans are not known for their athleticism. Even so, they took home their first gold medals in the history of the Olympics in the 2004 Summer Games in Athens in Tennis Men's Singles and Doubles. You do see pick up games of basketball, baby soccer (played on a basketball court), and volleyball.

MY EXPERIENCE

I arrive in February 2005 to Santiago for language training. There I met several other Rotary Scholars from all over the US. I went to a 99th Rotary celebration for the Rotary District of Santiago in February (I will be attending the 100th celebration with the same group on Feb. 23rd). I moved to Valparaiso (population ~300,000) where I studied at the Catholic University of Valparaiso (www.ucv.cl). I was enrolled in a post-graduate business administration program (the DDE) with nine Chilean professionals. I will be returning Feb. 2005 to complete the second year of that program to earn an MBA.

In Valparaiso I lived in a boarding house. It is an old house with large rooms and high ceilings. The landlady (whom I called "tia" or aunt) and her son lived there as well as 5 other boarders. Because I was the houses first international boarder, there were many fears that I would not fit in, but soon after arriving we were all sharing meals, stories and friendships. The boarding house was an excellent opportunity to learn and share culture.

My host Rotary Club was the Rotary Club of Playa Ancha. It is composed of about 30 members, 50/50 male and female all of whom meet on Wednesdays for lunch at the Naval Club, right down the street from my boarding house. They were a very warm group.

Most of my community involvement was done though a women's city basketball team I was lucky enough to befriend. These ladies lived in a near by town of San Antonio and played for Llo-Lleo. After their disappointment that this North American did not play basketball, I was designated for cheering and helping with activities such as bingos, raffles, tournaments

and 3x3 championships in order to raise funds for Christmas parties for the neighborhood children, new uniforms, scholarships, and improving of the sporting facilities. We also made time for a traditional Thanksgiving meal (Southern cooking of course!), trips to the countryside and beach, and learning about each other.

I feel that I have met and been able to be a cultural ambassador to a large number of people:

the University choir which I was a member; my boarding house; the basketball team; school classes to which I spoke; the people I passed on my daily routine; my host Rotary Club and those Rotary Clubs and groups I have talked to upon returning.

I hope that my experience has given you an idea to what a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship can do in contributing to world understanding. Although next year I will not be a Rotary Scholar, I will be returning to Chile and hope to continue being an ambassador of goodwill. Thank you for your support through Rotary International.

Kathryn White

If you have any comments or questions, please email me at katrindss@yahoo.com.

If you would like to see some photos of my time in Chile, they can be found at www.covewood.net/chile/kat.html (These pictures are not labeled!! They start with maps, then landscapes, Santiago, Valparaiso, then people I have met along the way! I hope you enjoy!)