



Emberá and Ecotourism

AS MY CLASSMATES AND I WERE GUIDED THROUGH THE UPPER CHAGRES RIVER IN PANAMA by a leader of the indigenous Emberá tribe, the hand-carved yet motorized canoe we sat in was a perfect example of the dichotomy that is ecotourism. I wondered: do our travels help or harm the planet and the various cultures that exist within it?

The Emberá shared their lives with us that day: from hiking and swimming to a nearby waterfall, to catching fresh fish and eating it with locally grown plantains for lunch, to teaching us native dances and giving us traditional markings with the dye of the jagua fruit. For just a few hours, we (U.S. college students) were taken out of our comfort zones and shown a simpler way of life that has been virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. After purchasing plenty of handmade goods (proceeds support the tribe members and

their land ownership), each of us departed the Emberá territory with a restored connection to the earth we inhabit.

Although there are downsides of the industry to explore further, this excursion left me believing that when carried out ethically and consensually, ecotourism and ecological study abroad can be a valuable experience for everyone involved.

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YOU'RE INVITED! We invite you to submit your photos along with a brief (approximately 200 words) description of why these images are important in your understanding of a person, place, idea, or incident from your experiences in international education. The photos could be of a simple moment on your home campus involving international students, a major event in an exotic location, or anything in between. The editors of *International Educator* will run selections on this page throughout the year. Please contact us for submission details at elainal@nafsa.org.