

Noel: My first question is, what led you to Cuba and how did that experience become a reality for you?

Phoebe: Originally, I had planned to travel ... I'm required to study abroad for my Spanish major. I'm also a National Security major, so I wanted courses that played to both. I had finished my major by sophomore year, because that was the only thing that I wanted to do at that point. I was planning on Spain, because I had previously traveled there, and then something just kind of in me over the summer said, "Hey, look at something you've never done before." I was looking for a blend of cultures that I had never encountered before. I love Hispanic culture. I'm also very interested in the African influence that was present in Cuba. I just looked up courses that weren't Spanish grammar, and that offered two courses, one in the past, present and future of Cuba and one in Afro-Cuban ritual dynamics. That really struck a chord in me. That's how I chose it. I went to my mom and I said, "Hey, I want to study abroad." She said, "We'll see how much it costs." It all worked out, and I lived in Cuba for my whole summer.

Noel: Were you with a group, or was it an individual experience?

Phoebe: One thing that was definitely different was no AU student has been to Cuba to study abroad before. That was new. I didn't know what to expect. Had no one to refer to. The CIE program I went through had students of other ... There were other American students, but there were no Anderson students. It was definitely a very diverse group. People who were native speakers, and people who had had, maybe two or three years of Spanish. Definitely a diverse group.

Noel: Definitely. You were there the whole summer?

Phoebe: I left in early May, and I got back towards the end of July. I had to get back early, because I translated for the Tri-S trip to Peru, the metric. I was there and then got home two days before that trip so, end of July.

Noel: You went to Peru, too?

Phoebe: Yeah. I loved it. It was the best little blend of culture shocks there. It was fun.

Noel: Sure. Do you have maybe, a favorite memory about your experience in Cuba? Something that really stood out to you?

Phoebe: Yeah. Undoubtedly, my favorite part of Cuba was the dancing. I love music. While I went for bettering my language, I was pretty confident in my fluency at that point and came out just with a different Spanish accent than I entered in. That was definitely a benefit, but aside from that, it just was a culture that really allowed me to let go and very much be myself. The Cuban culture is very music and dance oriented. They're very relaxed. Everything in life is just ... it's a very work to live culture, not live to work. A lot of social interaction. People will take time out of the day if they're on their way to work, if they're on their way to a meeting and they run into someone they know, they'll spend one hour on the street talking about Lord knows what. Every night was a party. Every night was a dance. Salsa's huge there, so it was a very dance orientated society. I had lessons every week, and I would go out probably four nights a week, just in order to better myself.

Noel: I am not much of a dancer, so I can imagine. That's so cool. Is there anywhere else that you'd like to go in your future? Do you want to return there?

Phoebe: Yeah. That was my 34th trip out of the country. I am already signed up for a Tri-S trip after I graduate in May to go to New Zealand. I'm really excited about that. Specifically, I'd like to travel to South America a lot more. As I said before, I really love Hispanic cultures and getting to see the nuances of the different dialects of each one. Cuba held something specific for me

that I haven't found anywhere else. Various parts of Mexico, Spain. I love them all, but Cuba really grabbed me in a way that nowhere else has.

Noel: 34 is a lot.

Phoebe: My family travels quite a bit, and I've been definitely blessed with the opportunity to go places that, with all the privilege of my parents working so hard. AU as well, with Tri-S making that affordable and just offering those opportunities in general, has definitely helped a lot.

Noel: My last question, I guess, is what impact did this experience have on you? What is the most important thing that you took away from it, reflecting back now?

Phoebe: That's kind of a heavy answer, but spiritually the trip was hard because I most, if not all of the students that I traveled, I met there. None of them had a personal relationship with the Lord. If they were religious, it was of a different religion. Which was also a good thing because it helped that AU bubble that I think a lot of us tend to stay in for a long time. The religion there, Santeria is the most common, which is a mix of Afro religion and Catholicism. It's a lot of idolatry, and it's a very practical religion. They'll go, I think we say it a lot, "Jesus is the for getting As on my test." They will consider their gods to be for giving As on their tests and for healing specific things. It's not so much a hope centered. Religiously it was very dark. Then being able to see, I was able to point my finger a lot and say, "That's wrong, that's wrong, that's wrong. That's dark. That's not okay." Coming back to my culture and seeing, there's still definitely sin here and there's still definitely, things are really, really wrong. We just categorize them differently like, "Oh, greed's not so bad. Oh, lust isn't so bad." It's not that. That just called out my own faith and made me look inwardly and say, "Hey, what am I doing in my life that's not ... that I'm categorizing as not as bad as?"

Noel: This is Noel Marquis reporting for The Andersonian.