

Living in the Lap of Nature

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Las Delicias, our home for the next two weeks is a rural community in West Panama. We are hoping that this ThinkImpact program will result in helping the community better utilize its natural resources to empower itself and create sustainable change. A tiny village home to about 100 people, Las Delicias is only accessible via a dirt road that winds up and down a hill through lush green foliage dotted with houses on either side. We are living in the lap of nature! Most residents are farmers, with orange and coffee cultivation being the major sources of income. Handicrafts are a symbol of pride and are greatly valued in and around the community. However, they play a minor role in the finances of the community. Sombreros, or straw hats are made in almost every household and are occasionally sold to vendors, unfortunately at extremely low prices for the amount of effort that goes into making one. The community is surprisingly equipped with most modern facilities. A large majority of the houses have televisions, music systems, cellular phones and refrigerators.

The families in the community are overwhelmingly friendly. The culture is vastly different from that in big urbanized cities. Houses are never locked and dropping by unannounced for a visit is quite common. Extended families usually live next to each other. Occupations are gender specific; men go farming and women fulfill the roles of housewives, occasionally

helping in the fields. Many families own livestock and waking up to the sounds of nature is quite common. Meals are very simple and full of flavor, mostly consisting of rice, beef, chicken, maize and potatoes. Our host family is very welcoming and is extremely interested in our lives back in our home countries. Conversations are mostly in broken Spanish, vivid hand gestures and lots of smiles and laughter. We spend most of our free time talking to the adults or playing games with the younger daughter.

Living in the community is very different from the hectic, fast paced life in the city. It is a refreshing change to be among people who focus on using their local resources to live self-sustaining lives. They even have a committee for sustainable development and are receptive to new, improved ideas on farming techniques, harvesting, etc. Life moves at a slow pace in the community and people are extremely dedicated to their work and families. We have spoken to some of the families as part of our current mission to discover skills, resources and relationships in the community. Most of them opine that they love the tranquility of their lives in the community, away from the traffic and chaos of the city. They also speak of an abundance of fruits leading to some being wasted and middle men paying them low prices for oranges and coffee. We are looking forward to discovering more about the culture of this community and eventually creating a new product that will align with their vision of self-sustenance and also bring them financial gain.