



## The opportunity of a lifetime - Drinking one tinto at a time

### Before arrival

Since our first year we heard about the chance to write out bachelor's thesis abroad. Since we both speak Spanish, we knew we could try to use it to our advantage. We then decided that we wanted to go to a country with a lot of nature and that we had some connection to since before and then read about deforestation and how is not that followed up on with remote sensing in comparison to other countries. Since Maria had a connection with a researcher it was possible to ask about which topics were of interest and where there was a research gap.

### Upon arrival

We arrived on a Sunday and part of the project started on Wednesday. Jasmines father greeted us at the airport. We conducted our field studies under nine weeks, including field visits and own work.

### Financials

We found that the cost of living was generally lower than in Sweden. Food, housing, and transportation were more affordable, which made it easier to manage our budget during the field studies.

Both of us had worked during our studies and summers, so we had some savings before going. However, we managed very well on just the CSN student loan and grant during the months we were there, without needing to use much of our savings. Tips for saving money is to use public transport whenever possible and shop locally and cook your own meals instead of eating out frequently.

### Accommodation

We stayed with our contact person's family during most of our time in the country. Colombia is known for its warm and welcoming people, and it's not unusual for locals to invite you into their homes. We felt very well taken care of and appreciated the hospitality a lot.

When we traveled for fieldwork to more remote areas, we stayed in hostels or budget hotels. These were very affordable and generally comfortable, which helped us keep our costs low while still having a safe place to stay.

## **Project**

Our project aimed to combine GIS (Geographic Information Systems) with local perspectives. By using satellite imagery and data analysis, we were able to identify where and how much deforestation had taken place. However, we wanted to go beyond the numbers and understand *why* it was happening and how local communities were responding to it.

A typical day during our fieldwork involved traveling to someone's farm, where we examined their land and listened to their stories about how it had changed over the past 20 years. They shared with us what had been lost due to deforestation, how they adapted to these changes, and what they were planting or doing to restore the environment.

Our contact person made all our visits possible and also introduced us to major organizations working against deforestation. These organizations educate and support local communities in reforestation efforts.

We also shared our GIS maps with the people we interviewed, so they could help us interpret the data and explain why the land looked the way it did.

## **Country**

Both of us have roots in Colombia, so we didn't experience any major culture shock. However, we learned a lot about where we come from and gained a deeper understanding of our heritage.

We also had the chance to explore parts of the country that were completely new to us. Colombia is an amazing country with warm, generous people and incredibly beautiful nature. It was a valuable and enriching experience to reconnect with the culture in such a meaningful way.

People in Colombia are very curious and truly love when tourists visit. They are proud of their country and genuinely want visitors to leave with a good impression. Many are eager to change the often negative image of Colombia and show the world the beauty, kindness, and richness of their culture.

## **Leisure and social activities**

We spent a lot of our spare time going on trips and excursions, as we were surrounded by beautiful nature and landscapes. It was very easy to get to know the local people. We spent time at local markets, and we also danced a lot of salsa!

## **Sustainability**

During our field studies, we primarily traveled by car or bus when visiting other cities for interviews and site visits. The infrastructure in many parts of the country is limited, and unfortunately, there are no trains available, which made it difficult to choose more sustainable travel options. In terms of everyday sustainability, it was also challenging to maintain the same level of environmental consciousness as we are used to in Sweden. For example, recycling systems were not widely available, so waste sorting wasn't possible in most places we stayed.

Despite these limitations, the core of our project was deeply connected to sustainability, particularly in relation to two of the Global Sustainable Development Goals:

**Goal 13: Climate Action** – By analyzing satellite images and conducting interviews, we aimed to understand the extent and causes of deforestation in the region. Our goal was to raise awareness of local climate challenges and support long-term environmental thinking.

**Goal 15: Life on Land** – Through our work, we highlighted how local communities are actively working to restore and protect their land. We learned how they adapt to deforestation, what they are replanting, and how local organizations are helping with education and reforestation efforts.

#### **Other recommendations and observations**

If you have roots in another country, take the chance to do your field studies there! You get a completely different perspective and learn so much about where you come from. It's really special to experience it in that way.

And if you don't, then just go explore something new! Getting to know a different culture up close is such a cool experience, and you'll grow a lot from it both as a person and in your studies.