

Thursday

Seeing that no one has mentioned the food yet, I will be the first to say that we began Thursday with a delicious breakfast prepared by the staff. Surely you've heard of pancakes! Soon after our filling meal, we set off for Xochicalco, which are Mayan ruins about an hour from where we are staying. After receiving a tour of the museum, which contained artifacts and was located on a peak opposite of the actual temples, we walked through the ruins themselves. It was fascinating since some of us have never been to an ancient site before. The ingenuity of the architecture was startling; a clap would echo throughout the area, and carvings depicted many different people, astronomical facts, and events in their history. Due to the fact that the ruins were located on the top of a mountain, you could see for miles.

Following the tour we ate a picnic lunch in the parking lot of the ruins where we were serenaded by an aspiring opera singer. Following lunch, we got in the vans and drove to Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH), an orphanage that operates different compared to most. There are approximately 800 children at the orphanage ranging in age from infants through teens. Its philosophy focuses on providing stability in a child's life; therefore, once a child enters the orphanage they can not be adopted and it's nearly impossible for parent(s) to regain custody of their children. The reasoning behind this is that the children, staff, and volunteers are all part of a big family.

Our tour guide was someone who had previously worked at CCIDD, and now she is volunteering for one year at the orphanage. She showed us around the magnificent orphanage where they have a cafeteria that makes 8,000 tortillas each day, a pig farm that houses 600 pigs, a school, greenhouse, and a clinic. All of the land that the orphanage occupies was once a sugar cane hacienda, or plantation. This gives the kids opportunities to learn about agriculture by maintaining corn fields, fruit orchards, and a Tilapia fish pond. In short, the facility was very impressive in size, educational opportunities, and attention to sustainability.

The schooling that is provided for the children is better than what we observed in many communities that we've visited. After the children complete secondary school they can get a free college education if they volunteer at NPH for two years. Those that participate in this program are often living as middle class citizens. Unlike many of us were expecting, it was, for lack of a better term, a happy place. The children were well taken care of, and had a future in front of them.

To conclude our day, we had salsa lessons from a local woman. Not only did we learn the Salsa and Cumbia, but we learned several other Central American dances. It was a great time, and a great way to end our second to the last day here in Mexico!