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Temporary Lack of Amenities Taught Me to Appreciate What I Have

By Vu Tran
UCF Forum columnist
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In my daily routine I often forget about how fortunate I am to have certain luxuries such as running water, electricity and a fast Internet connection. To us, these amenities may seem expected because we live in a developed country. However, during my recent 45-day adventure to Peru, I had an enlightening experience.

I had grown so accustomed to living comfortably (as much as I can on a college-student budget) that I used to take many amenities for granted.

Looking back, I was ignorant and wasteful of resources. For example, I would leave the water running sometimes while I was brushing my teeth instead of being mindful and turning off the faucet when I did not need it.

My perspectives changed the moment I arrived in the small and pristine town of Chachapoyas, Peru. The isolated town is deep within the Andes Mountains at an elevation of 7,657 feet. It can only be accessed via ground transportation as there is no airport in the city and flying is too dangerous anyway due to the high altitude and wind currents.

One can either brace a 22-hour bus ride from Lima, the capital, or fly to a closer town and take up to a 12-hour bus ride. I decided to try the former option because it seemed like a more interesting experience to tell my friends.

I was in Chachapoyas for my anthropology master's thesis research, but it was quite an enlightening journey that I will always remember and hold dear to my heart.

I received the complete traveler's experience, including unfriendly rat visitors at night, to being squished in the backseat of a rundown Toyota sedan with four other locals and bags of cabbages during a bumpy one-hour drive down a mountain. But I would do them all over again if I had the opportunity to return to Peru.

Chachapoyas has nearly all the basic amenities that you would see in any urban dwelling but to a lesser standard. However, surrounding rural places I visited such as Kuelap, an impressive archaeological site, and San Jerónimo, a tiny village to the north, did not. The people there live in modest homes with simple furnishings. They are self-sufficient and make almost everything from scratch, whereas I was struggling with the thought of not being able to even shower with hot water for days.

As much as I wanted to enjoy these experiences, I had a difficult time adjusting to this lifestyle at first because I had become so spoiled at home. Compared to these wonderful people, I felt prissy and useless for not knowing basic skills required for living in those rural areas. Fortunately, everyone was understanding and patient enough to deal with my lack of survival skills.

I met several genuine and incredible people during my random mini-adventures in Peru. Since I made an effort to speak Spanish and adapt to my circumstances, the locals were welcoming and I felt more competent as time passed. Everywhere I went, people were kind and helpful even though I was an outsider—a gringo—who spoke only broken Spanish. I even befriended French backpackers at a hostel in Lima who had visited my hometown in Vietnam.

My Peru trip taught me to always appreciate what I have regardless of my circumstances and to cherish the friendships I make in my life.

These situations also reinforced that I need to enjoy the present as it is happening instead of trying to record everything on my phone. We often become unaware of our surroundings when we are so engulfed into our daily routine of waking up, going directly to work or school, and returning home exhausted.

It is crucial to take a step back, breathe, and appreciate everyone and everything around us. Be grateful for the present because the past has already happened and the future is uncertain. As cheesy as that sounds, I personally needed to take those steps to really value what I have: simple amenities, supportive friends, and an experience of a lifetime.

My journey to Peru—and the unexpected lessons—turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

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