

## **CET Colombia, Fall 2024 | Nevaeh Angarita**

**Privacy & Sharing:** "I am OK with CET using this piece along with my name and photo in a public manner (on flyers, CET website, etc.)"

**Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece?** "LGBTQIA+ & People of Color in Colombia."

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### **CET Colombia as a Black Queer Woman**

When I first stepped onto the balcony edge of my apartment in Colombia, I was greeted by nervousness, excitement, and the sound of vendors selling arepas across the cracked concrete streets. All of the brick homes bled into each other and the mountain view blazed with murals depicting the Colombian armed conflict or Afro-Colombian resistance. Standing there, looking at illustrations of salsa dancers in the streetlights, I knew studying abroad in Colombia would not only be an academically stimulating experience, but also transform how I understood the world and myself.

In the classroom, the discussion-based seminars were rich in exploring identity, especially from an Afro-Colombian perspective. I found myself visiting a multitude of Black communities across the country alongside my cohort with immersive experiential workshops. One of the most beautiful moments was through my course *A Social History of Colombian Coffee*, taught by Dr. Diego Andrés Lugo Vivas, where I learned the strength of Colombian women. The main owner of a local coffee farm was a woman named Elsa and only a week after falling ill, she taught us how to harvest coffee beans and cooked incredible meals with fresh *aguapanela*. Her son even showed me how to plant a coffee tree that was named after me. In Colombia, I was always shown the strength and courage of the local women who utilized their rituals and traditions to facilitate cultural exchange. They slowed down to teach me their language, sang with their hearts and always complimented my coarse hair with a kiss on the cheek.

Living independently in a foreign country can be challenging and nerve-wracking, especially when I questioned how I would adjust to a language barrier or meal prep. Beyond struggles with my emerging independence, I wasn't sure how my identity would be received by my cohort, staff or local roommates. On the contrary, from the moment I arrived, I was immersed into a beautifully Black and queer space where both students and faculty shared in vulnerable conversations about their existence in the United States and Colombia. The friendships I created with the people in Apartment 602 changed my life. We bonded over our common similarities, uplifted our differences, laughed around the *chisme* table and helped each other adapt to being in a completely different environment.

The opportunity to study abroad, for me, was a dream come true. As an Afro-Latina born in America, I wondered how I would view myself. Some label it as heritage seeking, but instead meeting all of the beautiful and passionate local women as well as the women in my program showed me that I want to carry their strength and activism with me everywhere I go. Change always brings challenges, but building community as well as engaging in important conversations helped me overcome obstacles. CET Colombia was the best semester and left me extremely proud to be a Black queer woman.