

Isabella DeSpirito
Bolivia Trip
Crane Undergraduate Hispanic Studies Award

During this May semester, I traveled to Bolivia with 40 other students in our International Affairs scholars program. We began in the city of Santa Cruz, in the lowlands, touring the colonial city and visiting an eco waterpark with toucans, monkeys, and a butterfly conservatory. We then flew to another city, Cochabamba, where we visited an Incan ruins site, toured a lavish palace, and spent a day at a natural hot spring. We bartered in the local markets and learned about local rituals done with herbs and animals. In this city, we helped with construction on a rural orphanage, meeting and spending time with the local children. It was extremely eye opening to learn about the children's stories and it was rewarding to give them the attention and love they need, while helping them construct their orphanage. Finally, we flew to our last city at 13,000 feet, La Paz. One of the nation's capitals, La Paz has the biggest concentration of indigenous people, whom we saw selling their goods throughout the city. We toured the city and later took a boat to Isla del Sol (pictured below) where we participated in an Aymara (Inca) blessing, camped out in tents, and got up early to watch the sun rise over the Andes. Hiking up to our lodge was tough, but the 360-degree views of both Bolivia and Peru made it all worth it! After traveling to the island, we descended to the Amazon range, staying one night in the dense jungle. As the climate changed, so did the culture: we ate more beans and rice and more people came out to socialize in the plaza each night. We even toured a local coffee plantation and got to taste-test it at the end! We finished the trip with a group dinner and folk show, featuring beautiful indigenous music along with traditional dancers. After spending the last day shopping and bartering at the markets back in La Paz, we said farewell to a naturally beautiful and inspiring country. The experiences I had abroad made me cognizant of the life I live in the United States and more aware and interested in how the world around me functions. Learning about living history first-hand was something I will never forget. I hope to conduct research in the future concerning education, the workforce, and indigenous populations and how they fit into this rapidly Westernizing nation.



Isla del Sol, Lake Titicaca, Bolivia