

U.S. University Student Says She “Discovered a Lot” in Cuba



Oakland, August 3 (RHC) – Upon her return to the United States after a recent study trip to Cuba, university student Annabelle Chidiac from Oakland, California said: “I went there to discover and I discovered a lot.”

Despite the recent thawing of diplomatic relations between the two countries, educational trips are one of the few exemptions for which Americans can obtain travel visas to visit the island nation.

Chidiac had no predisposition about the country, its people or customs. The sociology course taught her Cuban history, culture and the native language.

Younger Cubans, Chidiac said, have a more favorable and optimistic view of relations with their neighbors to the North.

“It was interesting to go there with an American perspective of what Cubans think of us. The reality is, a lot of people like America.”

Cubans are very educated, Chidiac said, adding she noticed their buildings and architecture are very different from what is seen in the United States. She also commented about what seemed to be a “liberal” Cuban government in terms of social issues like health care, gender and sexuality.

Chidiac stayed in Havana with a host family, from whom she picked up a great deal of the language. “I used my Spanish dictionary a lot,” she said. “Living with them and being forced to speak it taught me a lot. We spoke no English.” And Chidiac said she is still in contact with her hosts, who offered her a “very warm welcome.”

Born in France of Lebanese descent, Chidiac said she contradicted many Cubans’ perception of Americans’ appearance. “To them, Americans are all blond-haired, blue-eyed Europeans,” she said.

Chidiac said she was happy to return home after the life-changing experience, but would welcome the opportunity to return to Cuba.

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