

## A Brief History of the Maya

The Mayan civilization was in existence for over 3,000 years from about 1800 BC until 1540 AD. Their works of art, architecture, and inventions fall into 3 distinct time periods: The Pre-Classic, Classic, and Post Classic periods. Archaeologists have been able to pinpoint when many of the Mayan cities were built based on the evolution of the writing, drawings, and architecture at each Mayan city.

## Mysteries of the Maya

For centuries, archaeologists and explorers have been mystified and intrigued by Mayan ruins, which encompass five countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras). Archaeologists and tourists come from all over the world to study and visit ruins, which lie in the Mayan World. New artifacts are still being discovered and we are learning more about the Maya every year.

A recent discovery deep in the jungle of northern Guatemala has changed some of the previous conceptions that archaeologists had regarding the Mayan civilization. It was believed that the foundation of Mayan civilization was based on warfare and religion. However, a site called Cancuen, has raised serious questions regarding whether or not all Mayans relied on warfare and religion to survive. This site has no temples nor does it show any evidence of war or warfare. The palace at Cancuen is one of the largest in the Maya world and stands over three stories tall. It is believed that Cancuen's purpose was as a trading city.

The site was first discovered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was believed to be a small site. Archaeologists currently working on the site, have discovered that the site is comparable in size to Tikal making it much larger than they previously thought.

Dense jungle has made it very difficult to uncover much of the site and evidence of looting has made it difficult to put all of the pieces together to obtain the full story of this city-state.

Cancuen is one of many sites throughout the Mayan World, but two of the best-known sites are Copán in Honduras and Tikal in Guatemala. Copán, located in western Honduras, is best known for its intricate carvings and inscriptions on building remains and statues. Its culture was full of written documents, a trait unique to precolumbian sites. These detailed ruins have been studied and visited since the 1500's. Excavations at Copán are ongoing.

Tikal, located in the jungle of Guatemala, was once one of the greatest cities in the world in its time. During its highpoint, Tikal had over 100,000 inhabitants and was the capital city. Its towering temples and jungle location make Tikal one of the most visited Mayan sites.

Visitors to Copán and Tikal will be amazed at the remains from a civilization that existed for over 1,000 years. Anyone interested in visiting Tikal or Copán can book trips through our office in Antigua, Guatemala.

Email: [amerispan@guate.net](mailto:amerispan@guate.net)  
Tel: 011-(502) 832-0164.



*The ancient Mayan city of Tikal in Guatemala.*

## Evolution of Mayan Art and Writing

Pottery was one of the first Mayan art forms during the Pre-Classic Period. There is Mayan pottery in existence dating back to 1000 BC.

During the Classic Period, the Maya expanded their art working to include not only pottery but other art mediums and materials including: Stelae (intricately carved historical records), Jade (usually in the forms of masks), Ceramics (made without a pottery wheel), and Mural Paintings. Much of the Mayan art work during the Classic Period tells a story of ceremonies, people, or historical events.

In the late Classic and early Post-Classic period, the Mayans began to use written narratives to record astronomy and astrology related events. Of the thousands of written narratives made by the Maya, only three still exist today.

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## Letter From The Editors:

Hello Friends,



As we start off 2001, we thought that we would reflect on the mysterious Mayan Civilization that thrived over 10 centuries ago in Mexico and Central America. The programs in the Yucatán (Cancún & Mérida) and Guatemala (Antigua & Quetzaltenango) offer our participants the best opportunities to see the impressive ruins left by the Maya. As always, we are offering the Yucatán Summer Spanish Institute during July in Mérida, México. This special content program is geared at advanced or higher Spanish speakers and focuses on Latin American literature and Mayan History including visits to several sites of Mayan ruins.

The biggest program launch ever has been Flamingo Beach, Costa Rica. However, the school's administration struggled with the fact that 3-4 times as many students attended the program in 2001 than what had been projected. In this issue, we give a candid review of the program and we have an article on the "growing pains" that affect language schools.

Don't forget that we are now offering Portuguese programs in Brazil and this issue's "Country Close-up" is on Brazil. The most updated information about our Brazil programs, as well as all our Spanish programs, is available on our award-winning website.

We hope you enjoy this issue and we wish you a happy 2001!

John Slocum & Dorioara Pinku  
Co-Directors

### Medical Programs & Seminars

In 2001, we are offering several special courses geared towards Medical professionals in Costa Rica.

A. Specially designed medical course with tailored Spanish classes and *optional* hands-on volunteer work. You may do some optional volunteer weeks for 2 weeks after you have finished your course. Dates: Monteverde (Feb 19 - Mar 2) and Flamingo (Mar 5 - 16). Price: \$1,165 for one course or \$2,200 for both courses taken continuously.

B. Specially designed medical seminar with tailored Spanish classes and hands-on volunteer work. The volunteer work is integrated into the course. Dates: San Joaquín de Flores (Apr 15 - May 5). Price \$1,570.

### Yucatán Summer Spanish Institute

The Yucatán Summer Spanish Institute is a special content and tour program sponsored by our partner school in Mérida, México every summer. Topics include Mayan History & Latin American literature. Activities include meeting contemporary authors and related professionals as well as excursions to Mayan ruins, beaches and colonial towns. The entire program is taught in Spanish and is appropriate for advanced, superior and native Spanish speakers. Dates: July 1 - July 28, 2001. Price: \$1,400 (register before May 1<sup>st</sup> and receive an automatic homestay upgrade with private bathroom and air-conditioning.

### Progression of the Maya Civilization

During the Pre-Classic period, the first Maya villages and cities were founded in the Yucatán Peninsula and in parts of Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala.

The Classic Period was the high point of the Mayan Civilization. Cities grew and there were great achievements in the areas of astrology, art and architecture, and writing.

In the Yucatán Peninsula, several Mayan cities rose and fell due to the Toltec invasion. Trade and barter by sea grew during this period. The Spanish Conquest in the 1500's snuffed out the Maya Civilization.

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## The Cheapest Country On Earth Takes Top Honors In International Living's 2000 Global Retirement Index.

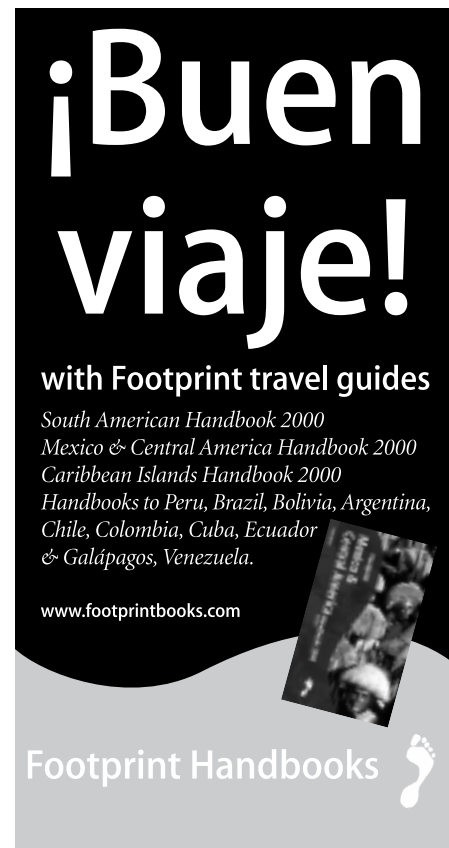
Ecuador is the cheapest country in the world. Labor is 75 cents an hour—or about \$120 per month. A part-time maid can cost less. A taxi ride across the city costs \$1. Living in Ecuador, your groceries would cost at least 50% what they cost where you're living now. And your other regular expenses would be similarly reduced.

Other countries may have other advantages (stronger, safer economies, better tax benefits, better infrastructure), but no country is cheaper. And few countries are more beautiful. And, remember, Ecuador also has one of the world's best climates and some of the world's sweetest people. When you consider all of this, it's easy to understand why Ecuador (for the second year running) takes top honors in International Living's Global Retirement Index.

Every day, people ask, where is the best place in the world to retire? We try to answer this question in our monthly issues of International Living. And, once a year, we consider all the best options, at once, in our annual Global Retirement Index, which this year considers 30 countries. This year's rankings for each country (in eight categories and overall) are detailed on our website, [www.InternationalLiving.com](http://www.InternationalLiving.com).

Four of the five countries in our Index are found in Central or South America. Countries in this part of the world have advantages for North Americans: they're nearby and easily accessible; they're relatively and sometimes absolutely cheap; the weather is warm and sunny; and the people are friendly. Generally speaking, if you're looking to retire "over-seas," this is a good place to start shopping. After Ecuador in our Index this year, there fore, come Panama and Nicaragua.

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## Cultural Adjustment: You don't look Latino!

Sometimes the direct manner in which Latin Americans (especially, the lesser educated) deal with differences can be misinterpreted causing foreigners to get uncomfortable or insulted. The main thing to remember is that you are in a different culture and thus "political correctness" with regards to the way a person looks, their religious beliefs and ethnic background is dealt with in an entirely different way. Before you get upset or unnerved, take a look at our guide to when you should get upset and when you shouldn't.

**Women:** Many Latin American men show their appreciation for attractive women with "complimentary" whistles and hisses that seem to come from all directions, especially if you are tall and blond. Although a bit annoying at times, this is a compliment so don't over-react. However, it is not acceptable if men try to touch you.

**Looks:** Often nicknames are used based on the physical appearance of an individual. In Peru, the people (including the newspapers) referred to their ex-President as "El Chino" which means the "Chinaman". Although this is unacceptable in the USA or Europe, it is not insulting in Latin America even if Mr. Fujimoro was of Japanese descent! African-Americans may be called "El Negro" while people that are a little overweight might be called "El Gordito". The point is these types of references or nicknames are not used in a derogatory way.

**Ethnic/Religious Background:** Not Catholic, not Latino looking? Expect questions that may seem inappropriate from your host family. After sending nearly 12,000 people abroad, AmeriSpan has heard it all! Jewish students asked questions about Jesus, Muslims asked about their clothing or having 4 wives, African Americans

asked about hair or do they play basketball, etc. Most of these questions are based on stereotypical traits or characteristics, and they can make you defensive or think the questioner is prejudiced. However, the reality is that the questioner doesn't know the answer and just wants to know.

### Conclusion

Rarely are these type of questions, nicknames or actions meant in an insulting or derogatory way. You are coming from a wealthier background, and usually, have a better education so don't get upset.. However, there are prejudice people in Latin America (as in the rest of the world) and you should never stand for this. If you do find yourself uncomfortable, discuss your feelings with the school's administration and if they aren't helpful then contact AmeriSpan.

## Country Close-Up: Brazil

**Public Safety:** Safe

**Health Risk:** Low.

Chagas' disease, dengue fever, malaria, meningitis, rabies, and yellow fever

**Weather & Nat. Phenomena:** The Brazilian winter is from June to August, with the coldest southern states receiving average winter temperatures of between 13 and 18 degrees Celsius. In summer (December to February), Rio is hot and humid, with temperatures in the high 30s; the rest of the year, temperatures hover around 25 degrees. The north-east coast gets as hot as Rio but is less humid and stifling. In general, the highlands are less hot and humid, and are prone to summer rainfalls. The Amazon basin is the rainiest part of Brazil, and while it is humid, temperatures average a reasonable 27 degrees.

**Travel Costs:** Daily travel budget:  
Hotels: Budget room: US\$5-20  
Moderate hotel: US\$20-70  
Top-end hotel: US\$70+.  
Restaurants: Budget meal: under US\$10  
Moderate restaurant meal: US\$10-20  
Top-end restaurant meal: US\$20+.  
Credit cards are now accepted all over Brazil. Visa is the best card to carry for cash advances. Changing cash and travelers' checks is simple - there are cambios in all but the tiniest towns. Unfortunately, it has

become harder to exchange cash since the devaluation. It's worth having enough cash to tide you over the weekend, when finding a change bureau, even in big cities, can be difficult. Gasoline \$1.71/gal.

**The Economy:**

US\$= R\$1.88 (Plural Reals).

GDP: US\$921 billion

World GDP ranking: 10<sup>th</sup>

GDP per head: US\$5,675

Annual growth: 10%

Inflation: 16%

Major industries: metal ores & products, transport equipment, soya beans, coffee, sugar  
Major trading partners: EU, Central and South America, Asia, USA

**Food:** The staples of the Brazilian diet are white rice, black beans and manioc flour, usually combined with steak, chicken or fish. Brazilian specialities include moqueca, a seafood stew flavoured with dendê oil and coconut milk; caruru, okra and other vegetables mixed with shrimp, onions and peppers; and feijoada, a bean and meat stew.

On many street corners in Bahia, women wearing flowing white dresses sell acarajé, beans, mashed in salt and onions and then fried in dendê oil. The fried balls are filled with seafood, manioc paste, dried shrimp, pepper and tomato sauce.



Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

### Recommended: *Abroad View Magazine*

Originally a magazine exclusively for Middlebury College students, *Abroad View Magazine* is now available by subscription or free at more than 50 college campuses. The magazine and related website is an excellent source for students who will be traveling, studying, volunteering or interning abroad. However, what struck us more was the magazine's cultural articles which make *Abroad View Magazine* different than other similar magazines. To check it out contact:

#### Abroad View

Email: [info@AbroadViewMagazine.com](mailto:info@AbroadViewMagazine.com)

Web: [www.amerispan.com](http://www.amerispan.com)

Tel: 802-442-4827

### More Brazil Facts

- **Population:** 158.7 million
- **Location:** Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country, occupying almost half of the South American continent and borders every country in South America, except for Chile and Ecuador. The Atlantic Ocean surrounds Brazil on the east border.
- **Area:** 8,511,965 sq. km
- **Weather:** Chile's weather is varied, it is temperate in the north and rainy, snowy and windy in the south. The rainy season in the heartland is from May to August with temperatures averaging 10C (50F). January's temperatures average 28C (82F). Chilean Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego have summer averages of 11C (52F), but have a major wind chill.
- **Languages:** Portuguese
- **Capital:** Brasilia (population 5,000,000)
- **Religion:** 90% Roman Catholic
- **Ethnic Makeup:** 55% European descent, 38% mulatto, 6% African descent (according to the 1980 census).
- **Economy:** GDP: US\$921 billion and GDP annual growth 10%
- **Government:** Federal republic
- **Electricity:** 110 or 120V, 60 Hz in Rio and São Paulo

## Who Speaks Spanish Better?

By: Ricardo González, CEO of Bilingual America

And the answer is...  
"Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder."

If you're from Puerto Rico, (which I am!) Puerto Ricans do.  
If you're from Costa Rica, (my wife is!) Costa Ricans do.  
If you're from Mexico, Mexicans do.  
If you're from Argentina, Argentineans do...  
Well you get the point!

We Hispanics are very nationalistic and most of us think *we* speak better Spanish than the next "gallo" o "gallina". (FYI – "Gallo" means "rooster" and "gallina" means "hen".) The truth is, we speak *a bit* differently, not better.

A lot of people call us at Bilingual America with this question... What type of Spanish do you teach?

The answer... the type of Spanish that will let you go to any Spanish-speaking country and communicate well with any Spanish-speaker.

Let's clear something up "ahora mismo". Or is it "ahorita" as they say in Mexico and some other countries? Could a Mexican understand "ahora mismo"? Of course. Could a Puerto Rican understand "ahorita". Of course. So what does it matter which one you use? Muy poco, amigo. The point is that we communicate together, not who's right and who's wrong. This is not a moral issue.

Spanish isn't even a language! The language is called "Castellano" and has many different regional applications. The reason we call it Spanish rather than Castellano is simple. "AmeriSpan" would have to change its name from "AmeriSpan" to "Americast". Then people would be confused... is this a place to order a cast for my broken arm or is this some sort of broadcast company, etc. So now you why we say "Spanish"!

Seriously, we are dealing with **regionalisms**, not dialects. A dialect is a separate language that has been derived from another language. It is not the same, not even close!

In other words, Puerto Ricans have certain regionalisms that are "Puerto Rican." Costa Ricans have regionalisms that are "Costa Rican".

As I mentioned, I am from Puerto Rico and my wife is from Costa Rica. We both speak "Castellano." She speaks with some Costa Rican regionalisms; I speak with some Puerto Rican regionalisms. We understand each other perfectly. I should clarify that, we understand each other's Spanish perfectly. There is this male, female thing that gets in the way sometimes!

Here's the deal. The differences in Spanish from county to country are no greater than the differences in English from region to region, or English-speaking country to English-speaking country. The fact is, if you're from Birmingham and go to Boston, you could get by just fine. Did ya'all hear that? You do not have to learn "Bostonian". Of course, you would need to get a little adjusted, but no real big deal.

If you learn "Castellano" (commonly referred to as Spanish) correctly you can go to ANY Spanish-speaking country and get by very well. I speak with people from many different Spanish-speaking countries and never have any problem communicating. As long as you learn Spanish well, neither will you.

So, there are two things to remember here.

1. Learn Spanish well because if you don't you won't speak well with any Spanish-speaking person.
2. The next time someone from Spanish speaking country x tells you...

"That's not how you say it, it's really \_\_\_\_."

You can tell them.....

"Gracias, amigo." In your mind you can think, "This person is so nationalistic that it just bugs him to death that I would use an expression in "Castellano" that isn't used in his country."

PS – if you're interested in learning Spanish well so that you can speak with any Spanish-speaker from any country, check out our website at [www.bilingualamerica.com](http://www.bilingualamerica.com)!



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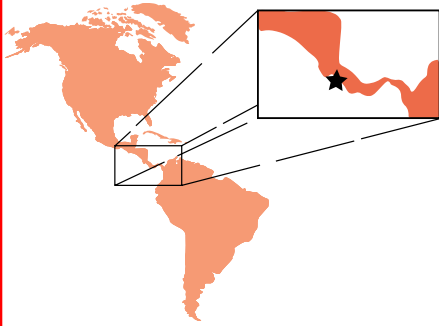
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## Program Profile



### Flamingo Beach, Costa Rica

#### School:

CPI-Flamingo, a Casa de Lenguas school

#### Location:

The province of Guanacaste is renowned for its breathtakingly beautiful beaches, ranging in color from ivory white to shiny volcanic black. Some are long sweeping reaches of sand, stretching as far as the eye can see while others are sequestered in windswept cover, disturbed only by pelicans or an occasional fisherman. Flamingo with its white sand beach and crystal blue water is considered the best along the Guanacaste coast.

About 10 years ago, Flamingo Beach was thought to be the next big tourist destination in Costa Rica and attracted considerable investment to build infrastructure. Several upscale hotels and many large, beautiful homes were built at this time. However, the tourism market never exploded as originally anticipated and Flamingo remains relatively calm most of the year. The city is most crowded from mid-December through Mid February when the owners of the large beautiful homes come to enjoy Costa Rica's summer and escape the winter of North America and Europe.

#### Atmosphere:

The school campus is located in the town of Flamingo Beach across the street from the Ocean and the Marina. The entire facility was built within the last year and includes excellent classrooms, a kitchen/cafe, swimming pool, hot showers (see homestays), internet access and ample outdoor space for students to relax during class breaks. Directly behind the school is a protected natural area and it is not uncommon for students to see some of Costa Rica's wildlife (iguanas, monkey's, etc.) wandering near the school.

Most participants are younger (18-35) and from North America and Holland. Flamingo Beach is hot year round and thus the pace is more laid back than at other Costa Rican schools.

#### Language Program:

The language program methodology is exactly the same as the method that has been used for years at the school's other campuses in San Joaquin de Flores and Monteverde. However, the teachers based in Flamingo are less experienced and less trained at this new location. More experienced teachers have been "borrowed" from the two older campuses, to help augment the local teachers. Our own observations and feedback from our students indicate that "very serious" students should consider other Costa Rican school campuses until Flamingo's teachers become more seasoned.

#### Homestay:

Students receive a private room, two meals daily and laundry service. The homestays are located in the nearby beach towns of Potrero and Brausillito. Walking to school takes 20 minutes via the beach and 45 minutes via the road.

Since taxis are virtually nonexistent and buses are irregular, the school provides van transportation to and from the homestays. Both of these towns are typical Costa Rican and offer students one of the most genuine homestay experiences of any AmeriSpan program. With the great interaction come some "creature comfort" challenges such as no hot water, sharing bathrooms and more cramped living arrangements than what is typical for North America and Europe. Feedback from our students indicates that students either love the homestay interaction and authenticity, or the basic conditions prompt them to switch to a hotel. There are several inexpensive hotels in Potrero that provide kitchen facilities (cost is about the same as a homestay). By the summer of 2001, there are plans to offer a special student Residence in Flamingo Beach. There are 2-3 organized activities offered each week, ranging from dance or cooking classes to visits to nearby towns and beaches. Next to the school campus is a water sport company that rents jet skis and offers scuba lessons.

(Continued on page 7)



(continued from page 6)

On the weekends, excursions are offered (extra cost) to typical Costa Rica destinations such as volcanoes, rainforest, cloud forest, craft village, other beaches, boat safari, etc.

#### **Other Comments:**

With two weeks notice and a \$50 fee, students are able to switch to one of the sister campuses in Monteverde or San Joaquin de Flores (subject to availability).

#### **Conclusion:**

The administration and the facilities are first rate, but the school just opened in January 2000. During the first year that a school is open, there are always some minor set backs as teachers gain experience, homestays learn how to comfortably deal with foreign students, etc. It was a bit overwhelming at times during year 2000 because nearly 300 students more than initially expected registered for this program. AmeriSpan is confident that the school will continue to improve and that Flamingo is an excellent location for students looking for a relaxed and authentic environment to learn Spanish.

## Music Review

Caught up in the fever of AmeriSpan's newly added Portuguese programs in Brazil, I decided to rummage through a few of my recently purchased faves featuring artists from that country. Turns out that I am more of a Latin music junkie than I realized. Choosing just one album from a Brazilian artist was "mui dificil."

I went for the least obscure of the bunch. A CD that can be enjoyed by all: cesaria evora: café atlantico. Relaxing but fresh melodies. It's a treasure. You'll fall in love with Cesaria even if you cannot understand a single word she's saying...you'll just feel her mood and somehow it all clicks. If you enjoy Buena Vista Music Club, this is a must have!!

-Highly Recommended  
by Carol LaMastra from AmeriSpan

#### **The Runner-ups!! (Portuguese, Spanish and more!)**

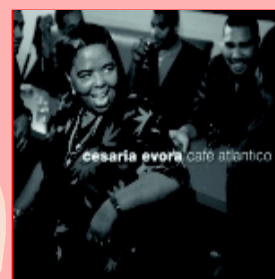
- \* Sergio Mendes – Brasileiro
- \* Millo Torres y El Tercer Planeta – Caminando
- \* Yo Yo Ma – Soul of the Tango

#### **Too Good to Remove from the List!**

- \* Aterciopelados - Pipa de la Paz
- \* Afro-Peruvian Classics - The Soul of Black Peru

The above CDs are either already available or will be very soon on our online store:

[http://www.amerispan.com/au\\_store\\_fr.html](http://www.amerispan.com/au_store_fr.html)



Café Atlantico album cover.

### **New Schools: Growing Pains**

Several of our key partner schools launched second or third campuses in year 2000. Normally, AmeriSpan would wait several years before a school has proven itself before representing it but we made exceptions this year since these new schools were part of an existing partner school. Many typical start-up problems (language program methodology, administrative issues, managing homestays, etc.) are eliminated when an existing school opens a second campus. However, there are still some first year growing pains that even a second campus must resolve. Let's look at the main issues:

- Teachers' Effectiveness** – When opening in a new destination it is often hard to find teachers that have taught foreigners Spanish so all new teachers receive an intensive training program. However, a teacher's effectiveness improves with classroom experience, but new teachers have very little classroom experience. This issue is somewhat mitigated because experienced teachers are sent to the new campus during the first year to help augment the teaching staff.
- Homestay Hosting** – During the first year, host families are still learning how to host students. This is just as new for them as it is for you and they genuinely want to provide an excellent experience but they haven't refined the "art" of hosting students. They may serve too much or too little food, not fully explain things like how to work the hot water in the shower, or worry about you if you miss a meal or come home late. The best cure for mix-ups or awkward moments is a smile!
- Other Issues** – Picking a building is a very inexact science because with a new school projections are just guesses. Here are a few examples to illustrate other issues. Overwhelmed by a higher than expected enrollment, our partner in Flamingo was busy building classrooms during June. Our new program in Puerto La Cruz was delayed almost a year when flooding destroyed some key roads connecting Caracas & Puerto La Cruz and weren't fixed until the beginning of the main campus's high season. Our partner in Sucre was forced to move to a bigger location in September because the current owner of the building wouldn't agree to provide a longer lease if the school constructed new classrooms.



## AmeriSpan: Off The Wire

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### **Partner School Changes**

AmeriSpan is constantly striving to offer the best programs in every location where we offer programs. In keeping with that, we have dropped our program in San Miguel de Allende (México) and switched partner schools in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Cusco (Perú). Our new partners in Buenos Aires and Cusco offer improved language programs, more organized administrations and better atmospheres.

### **Morelia Offers Group Classes**

Over the past several years, our partner in Morelia has been forced to increase their prices on their highly recommended one-on-one program. Now, Morelia offers an excellent group program at a very reasonable price.

### **Customized Internships**

We are happy to announce that we are able to fill requests for specific occupational areas for volunteer placements & internships in Cordoba Argentina. Placement areas include but are not limited to: banking, government, marketing, economics, medicine, tourism, psychology, engineering, and architecture.

### **Getting There**

Many times it is difficult for our participants to purchase airline tickets for flights within Latin America from the US. Now, AmeriSpan can offer packages which include airport transfers, hotel night, and one-way airfare for the following programs: Cuenca, Cusco, Merida-Venezuela, Puerto la Cruz and Sucre.

### **JH Extends Again**

Johns Hopkins has received the green light from the FDA to expand their research study and has extended their cut-off date to August 2001. Remember, this is where language program participants in Antigua or Cuernavaca receive \$450-\$600 stipends.



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