

The Bolanos Family: 2005 Spirit of Adventure Award Recipients



The Swiss Alps

When they were living in their native Costa Rica, the Bolanos family always had a knack for vacationing in remote mountains, beaches, and small towns. After arriving in America, the family enjoyed a number of road trips before finally settling in California. The idea for a global tour came last year when visiting San Francisco over Memorial Weekend. They were admiring the expansive view from the Twin Peaks, when Camila, five years old at the time, ran up to her mother, and with a hug and sparkling eyes, proclaimed "Thank you mommy for bringing me here." It was at that scenic and emotionally intense moment that Eugenia promised to show her daughters the world.



The Pyramids, Egypt

A journey spanning three months is no easy feat for a single traveler, and problems are only compounded when dealing with needs of four. Still, the family never lost sight

of their goal, an amazing trip around the world to expand their minds and open their eyes. Preparations were made to depart at the beginning of summer 2005. Eugenia, who at the time was a producer at Univision and oldest daughter Karla, a 20 year old studying at Santa Monica College, would share the responsibility of working, while the whole family exercised simpler living, cutting out unnecessary expenses. After months of sacrificing they were ready to embark on their journey.

Five months later, after much hard work and planning, the dream was being realized when the travelers boarded a plane to Mexico. It was in Mexico City where a clue would change the course of their adventure. The tip was received whilst lodging at an expensive hotel. A strange hotel was noticed next door, full of young people, with good food and affordable prices. At the time we did not understand what it was about. We knew there was some sort of membership involved, and that other locations could be found worldwide, says Eugenia. I wrote down the website address on a small slip of paper and put it in my purse. It was only when budget accommodation could not be found in New York, that Eugenia remembered the little piece of paper in her purse and with some investigation, learned how inexpensive accommodations could be located almost anywhere worldwide through hostelling.



Hong Kong

During three months of travel and stays in 22 hostels, 17 of which belonged to Hostelling International, it was comforting to know that we could find low cost and safe accommodation with lots of information almost anywhere in the world. Hostels represented tranquility and we always ended up meeting many interesting people.

From Mexico, the quartet moved on through Canada, U.S.A, England, France, Monaco, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Vatican City, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, India, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong.

A hostelling experience from Hong Kong, which none of the four will forget is recalled. Arriving at the airport late at night, after plenty of calls and no availability, we were able to make a reservation at a hostel on a nearby island. What seemed strange was that there appeared to be only one main road, circling around the island, leading to the hostel. We hailed a taxi, and the driver, with his little knowledge of English, tried to ask if we knew where we were going. It was very hard to understand what he was saying, but he pulled out his cell phone and called in, asking for directions, and then saying to us: "it's okay." Little did we know that it would take two hours of driving and a one-mile walk to get there. What I had failed to see on my map was the topography of the island "the hostel was located on the highest peak of a mountain! Our idea of Hong Kong, a city of lights, rowdiness, commerce and very tall buildings turned out to be a mountain adventure that really took us by surprise.



Coliseum, Rome, Italy

The trip was coordinated as a team and decisions were made together throughout, Eugenia comments. We've always been a close family and we've confronted different situations together. As a mother, I was pleased to see that on many occasions, decisions were not solved by me exclusively, but rather by the consensus of a democratic group. In some way the responsibility wasn't all hers anymore. Each of the daughters, even the little one, had encountered situations that they might not have been exposed to under normal circumstances.

From a long list of countries, the family had no problem agreeing that their favorite country, was without a doubt Thailand. It is full of exuberant places, delicious foods, charming people and it's ridiculously cheap! There is so much to do there, and the HI Hostel in Bangkok was attended by an extremely helpful staff.

For everyone, the whole trip was an exciting first hand-lesson in cultural sensitivity and understanding. Definitely. There was growth and enrichment in many aspects. We found ourselves in a contrast of cultures, traditions, beliefs, languages, geographies,

nature, history, art and architecture. We were able to experience the way other people live life and to create a new perspective on the way we live ours.



Taj Mahal, Agra, India

A lesson of tolerance was learned in India, a country that Eugenia recommends everyone experience. She had mistakenly generalized the country to be unfriendly and somewhat hostile before meeting a family from Southern India on a bus to Agra. Their sympathy and cordiality surpassed all my unfounded prejudices and showed me once more that we should never judge anyone for the attitude of others. Introspection and direct experience allowed everyone to mature. We understood that the essence of all humanity is the same. Expectations and necessities might have other names, colors and prices, but in the end, it is all the same.

Even with the voyage completed, and everyone adjusting back to daily routine, the family is not ready to rest. Before unpacking, they made two future travel plans. The first is to traverse the 50 American states by car, and the second, is a big trip to the southern hemisphere, to cover South America, Africa and Australia. They also are eagerly awaiting a visit to Cuba and Central America. Until the new plans are put into effect one thing is certain, for at least these four travelers, the summer of 2005 is only the starting point for far greater adventures ahead!

To read more about the Bolanos family's trip, visit their website (in Spanish):
www.travelstorieseb.com.