



VAMOS
DANCAR!

2024

MY EXPERIENCE

I am Geraldine Santa Acosta, I am 28 years old, and I am from Colombia. Currently, I´m working in a strategic role in the research department at the Universidad Autónoma de Manizales, where I coordinate the “Programa Delfín” of research and intercultural internships, managing international partnerships and promoting academic mobility and cultural exchange.

Through Wecollab, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in a volunteering project in France, at the Coulaures Festival, a project organized by Solidarités Jeunesses (SJ).





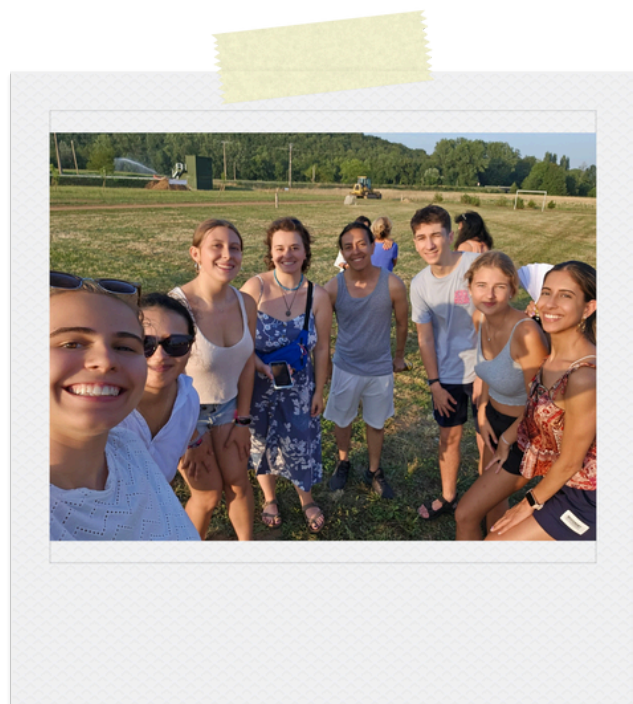
My volunteering in France took place in the small village of Coulaures, where I was part of the organization and development of their annual festival. My main task was to collaborate in the preparation and logistics of the event, which involved preparing and presenting an intercultural dance at the festival. The team was composed of people of different nationalities, which provided a very intercultural dimension. The goal of the project was not only to contribute to the realization of the festival but also to promote coexistence and exchange between the locals and the volunteers.

Previous Volunteering Experience

Before coming to France, I participated in a volunteer project with the AIESEC association. In that role, I was responsible for coordinating outgoing volunteers as well as organizing different activities for international volunteers arriving from other countries. My job includes ensuring that volunteers had a positive and enriching experience, facilitating their integration and organizing cultural events and activities so they could learn more about the local community and culture. This experience allowed me to develop valuable skills in project management and intercultural work.

Lessons Learned and Best Memories

During my volunteering experience in France, I learned a lot about teamwork, time management, the value of patience, and intercultural collaboration. Adapting to an environment with a different language and customs taught me to develop more flexible communication skills and to find new ways of organizing and working as a teamwork. I observed how different cultures approach problem solving in unique ways, which enriched my perspective on global cooperation.





I had many unforgettable memories during my experience, and some of the most memorable ones revolved around the International night and the local festival. The International Night was a truly beautiful event where we had the chance to share our cultures, from the music and dance to food. The atmosphere was full of color and diversity, and seeing how both locals and volunteers enjoyed the cultural exchange was incredibly rewarding. After all the effort we had put into organizing it, I felt like we had created a genuine space for connection between people from different backgrounds.



03 AOUT 2024

COULAURES

De jeunes étrangers sont arrivés pour préparer le Festival des danses latines



Ils sont au nombre de quatorze, venus des quatre coins du monde, huit pays sont représentés : Turquie, Allemagne, Belgique, Colombie, Mexique, Espagne, France et Italie. Photo Louise Joudinaud

Mercredi 31 juillet, Corinne Ducrocq, maire et conseillère départementale, entourée de plusieurs membres du conseil municipal, a accueilli à la salle des mariages, tous les jeunes du chantier international qui, durant une quinzaine de jours, vont résider au sein du village.

Au nombre de quatorze, venus des quatre coins du monde, huit pays sont représentés : Turquie, Allemagne, Belgique, Colombie, Mexique, Espagne, France et Italie.

Sous la direction d'Yves Ducrocq, ces jeunes viennent aider à la préparation de la fête du 15 août et au grand Festival de

danses latines du jour, une grande fête patronale bien connue des environs.

Une expérience unique et interculturelle

Ce projet de solidarité internationale est une expérience unique, enthousiaste et interculturelle. Elle est aussi le résultat d'une rencontre entre jeunes de différents pays et milieux différents.

Leur dynamisme et leur bonne humeur seront un atout qui contribuera à la réussite du festival qui attire, chaque année, une foule de spectateurs dans la ville.

LOUISETTE JOUDINAUD

Another highlight for me was participating in games with the local community. They taught us their traditions and how to play some of their traditional games, which allowed us to learn about their culture in a fun and close way. These moments of coexistence were very enjoyable, as we broke down language barriers and cultural differences by simply having fun together.





The festival was, without a doubt, one of the best memories of the entire experience. For days, we rehearsed to present an intercultural dance, and when the time came to show the audience all the hard work we had put in, it was incredibly exciting. The festival was centered around Brazilian culture, so we had the chance to learn and enjoy capoeira and samba, which were taught to us by local dancers. Additionally, we tasted the traditional cuisine of the region, which was very interesting.

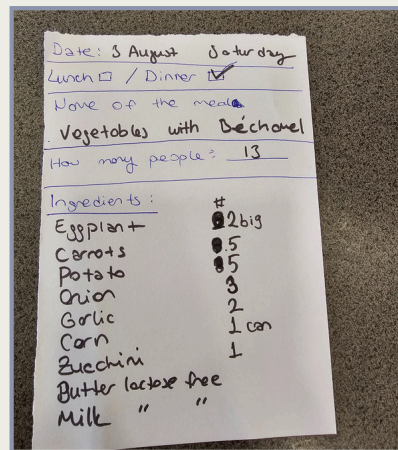
The day ended with a beautiful fireworks show. It was a perfect end to a day full of celebration, learning, and beautiful moments. The combination of culture, fun, and camaraderie made this experience something truly unique and special, which I will always remember with love.

Opinion on the Work and Tasks

I really enjoyed the opportunity to work as a team to prepare an intercultural dance that would be presented at the Festival of Coulaures. During the practices, I learned a lot about different dance styles and cultures, which was incredibly valuable. In addition, it was rewarding to see how we supported each other, especially those teammates who were not as confident in dancing; together we overcame the challenges. Regarding the tasks, I appreciated how we organized ourselves. Creating a schedule was key for everyone to participated equally, and this helped make the process smooth and fair.

Food

The food was very good. We made cards of menus that were going to be prepared each week and then we bought all the ingredients. Thanks to this we able to ear different typical dishes.



Return Home and Future

Upon returning to Colombia, I try to apply what I've learned in my future projects, especially those involving local communities. I'd like to replicate the spirit of cooperation and coexistence that I experienced in Coulaures, adapting it to the context of my country. In addition, I'm motivated by the idea of continuing to participate in international volunteer projects and continue developing this passion for community service.

First Impression of France and What I Will Miss

What surprised me the most when I arrived in France was the kindness of the people. Despite the language barriers, I felt that people were always willing to help and make me feel welcome. I was also impressed by the organization and the respect that people have for the common spaces and nature.

Have you learned or improved any skills through volunteering?

I have definitely improved several skills. For example, I have developed better teamwork skills, as we constantly had to collaborate and support each other to accomplish our goals, such as preparing the intercultural dance and house tasks. I also improved my communication skills, learning to express myself clearly and to listen to others.

In addition, I acquired better time management skills due to the need to stick to a schedule and meet the responsibilities assigned within deadlines. Another skill I improved was empathy, as I had to adapt to the needs and abilities of my friends, which strengthened my ability to work in diverse environments and with people of different levels of experience.



A Transformative Volunteering Experience: Learning, Friendships and Intercultural Connection

My experience at the Coulaures Festival was transformative. I not only learned new skills but also took away memories and friendships that will last a lifetime. These type of volunteer projects are a powerful tool for creating connections between cultures and support community growth in a sustainable way. I am deeply grateful to Solidarités Jeunesses and the International Solidarity Fund for giving me this opportunity.

Participating in the workcamp with WeCollab was an enriching experience. I worked on an intercultural project, developed new skills, and enjoyed great wonderful teamwork. I highly recommend this opportunity for personal growth and contribute to the community!

