

Is CIPLC and Puerto La Cruz area meant to be your new home?

I remember being at the recruiting conference a year ago, talking to directors from beautiful locations such as Curacao, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires...and eventually signing a contract with CIPLC in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela. When my friends and family found out the options I had and what I had chosen, they thought I was crazy (VZ hasn't gotten the most positive press lately, you know). But, there was a method to my madness, I assure you.

First, I was looking for a small school where I would know all the students and all the staff—like a big family. Next, I am a water sports fanatic and living on the Caribbean offered me every possibility to pursue my passions as well as the chance to chase a few dreams, such as learning to kiteboard and scuba dive. In addition, I was really committed to learning Spanish. The pictures of the luxury condos (the teacher housing provided by the school) with pools and tennis courts, as well as of dolphins from boating adventures with fellow staff members certainly did not hurt (and neither did the salary package, which ROCKS!). So, with visions of dolphins, poolside lounge chairs, white beaches, underwater adventures, fluency in Spanish, a healthy bank account, and classes full of eager learners, I signed my contract and began my journey to Venezuela.

The first glimpse I had of what things would really be like in VZ came when I tried to book my flight. No travel agent had any idea how to get me there, and Barcelona, VZ did not show up on any flight search on any site. I ended up having to call a person in Miami who spoke very little English, and give my credit card information over the phone to book my flight on a small Venezuelan airline. Life in Venezuela is like that flight—often there is only one option for doing things and trying to get it done can take you through a very long and exhausting process...this is true for banking, paying bills, getting money exchanged, booking flights for travel in and out, cooking (and finding the right ingredients)—as well as for daily activities when they are disrupted due to power, water or internet outages (or all three), or protests that block traffic on the two main roads.

So, here is a list to consider as you contemplate that contract...

You will find CIPLC to be a good home if-

- You are independent
- You are comfortable (and patient) initiating friendships
- You are willing to go out by yourself or to step up and organize teachers and friends for evenings out or gatherings at your home
- You are open-minded about everything, from people to ideas to food (you take what you get here—VZ is not really a smorgasbord in any of those areas)
- You do not need a large peer group and lots of social options to be happy (this town has a small expatriate population and the club scene is two clubs and a few random bars...you have to make your own fun and it will be with the same people)
- You are flexible when plans change due to disruptions listed above or anything else (plans change more than they do not—in social life and school life)

- You LOVE the water and water sports (but if you surf, don't expect to find good surf here)
- You are willing to make the extra effort to help highly motivated students who are struggling with various levels of language barriers
- You are a team-minded person and don't mind using your free time to support your school community (teachers attend all arts programs, help with many after school activities/clubs, sponsor booths at the Halloween carnival, plan holiday celebrations like a progressive Thanksgiving dinner together...)
- You speak or are willing to learn Spanish to develop friendships in the local community
- You are very positive—glass is half full even if there is only a drop left in it)

Granted, this is not a European type city with historical buildings, winding roads and cathedrals. It is a beach city and its main focus is the beach and the islands scattered through the Caribbean beyond those beaches. The buildings in town—new, modern, and utile—are merely a beehive of spaces to house the support systems necessary for the beach industry. Knowing Spanish is a real plus for navigating daily life. Few people speak English, and Spanish is a necessary tool for building a peer group outside the school community. If you don't know Spanish, a true willingness and commitment to learn is needed.

The school is small and active. I have never met more involved parents (and teachers) in my life. That is the strength of CIPLC. This October, I organized the haunted house for the Halloween carnival and in a mere seven hours the moms of my 6th graders created a haunted house that would make Disney jealous. Teachers here put in extra hours meeting with parents, tutoring students, helping with special events, sponsoring clubs, and attending celebrations. It is more of a thriving, teeming community than just a school campus.

Keep in mind that CIPLC is a private school, and although we have a few students on scholarship, the majority come from wealthy South American families or were brought here from all over the world by oil companies. Naturally, under these circumstances, the socio-economic diversity is low, yet cultural diversity is high. Some students need extra support to overcome the challenge of learning in English, but all the students are highly motivated and the parents are supportive 100% of the time.

If you are honest with yourself about the things needed to be happy here, signing that contract will be one of the smartest things you will ever do. A grand adventure awaits you....come join us!