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Community Service in Costa Rica
Last report



Dear all,

Reflections on 5 Months Volunteering in Costa Rica.

As I sit here at my computer back in Australia I find myself smiling as I daydream about the wonderful experiences I had in the Central American country of Costa Rica. Costa Rica translates as “rich coast” and I have to agree that the beaches are great but I also think the inland regions and especially the



highlands around Zarcero are equally “rich”. Living above 2000 metres in a very rural area was pretty much the exact opposite of what I expected when I first researched the country. My visions of glistening waves crashing onto palm lined beaches were replaced by rolling hills framed by clouds and accentuated by active volcanoes.

Costa Rica is a very beautiful country and it is easy to see why it is such a popular destination for tourists from around the globe. The booming tourist industry keeps ticos employed and injects a substantial amount of money into the economy although I found it disgusting that in many areas prices were in US dollars instead of the local currency, colones. To combat this I would make an effort to always pay in colones and to speak in Spanish even if I was spoken to in English. Also, I made a point of not responding to ‘gringo’ (a sometimes derogatory term for people from the USA). Instead I would say “No soy gringo, soy australiano!” which translates as “I’m not American, I’m Australian!”.

Ticos in general didn’t know much about Australia apart from the fact that we have kangaroos. Because of this I would frequently give “Australian” lessons to the students in my English classes. In particular interest to my students was the fact that Australia is 150 times larger than Costa Rica but with much of the land uninhabited due to expansive regions of desert. We also looked at Australian coins and banknotes (many were amazed at the vibrant colours) and even baked ANZAC biscuits! I was the first Australian in my town and made sure I left my mark, with many kangaroo key chains and Australian flag stubby holders!

During my Christmas holidays I was fortunate to travel to 4 excellent locations within the small country. I spent a week surfing at Playa Hermosa with my



girlfriend, brother and another mate from Australia. Playa Hermosa is 10 minutes south of the famous (read infamous!) Jacó. We were fortunate to score some very decent waves and also spent time clambering over waterfalls, chilling on the beach and searching for wildlife. After spending Christmas with both my Australian family and my tico family (a wild affair full of dancing and partying!) we made

an assault on the highest peak in the country. We walked 42 kilometres in 3 days, reaching the summit (3820m) on the second day. Even with dense cloud cover and rain we were privy to many beautiful landscapes, a truly memorable experience. We passed New Year's Eve in beautiful Cabo Matapalo on the Osa Peninsula in Southern Costa Rica eating fantastic food, surfing good waves, sleeping in hammocks and watching monkeys in the treetops. I spent the last few days of my holidays in the Caribbean town of Puerto Viejo riding bikes around the potholed streets and watching the surf roll in. We also managed to see 3 sloths, many monkeys, a bright yellow python and a myriad of tiny, brightly coloured poisonous frogs.

As my time came to leave Costa Rica I had moments of sadness when I realised that I would not return to this part of the world for a very long time. I spoke to my host Mum about this and was comforted when she said that I would always have friends and family in Costa Rica and that will never change. I will stay in contact with my tico friends via email and the occasional phone call (to practice Spanish) and one day I will return to the 'Rich Coast'.

Saludos y Pura Vida.

Ricardo...

