

Hola,

Last night we returned from Guatemala after an action packed week of nonstop adventure and excitement. We all learned so much about the history of the country and culture. The best part for all of us was trying to communicate with the people of Guatemala and especially the children. One day we even played Simon says with the Mayan children of the Uaxactun area. These were things we will never forget along with all the other adventures. But lets get through the itinerary.

After a long day of traveling from the East Coast to Guatemala we flew straight to Flores where we stayed two nights at ARCAS-the wildlife reserve. It was a once in a lifetime place that was so unique and important to the Guatemalan ecosystems. This place is set in the middle of the rainforest and accessible by boat. After a hike to get to the top of the hill we saw our volunteer cabin. This was a 4 bedroom 2 bathroom house that is basically a cabin. Because we were volunteering its important to know that it was a rustic setting and definitely authentic to the area. The first night we had a small meal of mostly vegetables and talked to Alejandro the director of ARCAS. He explained to us what sorts of things we would see and how important the property is for the rehabilitation of animals (most of the animals are harmed by animals trafficking and taken to ARCAS). The next morning we took a tour of the facilities and started on our service projects. We cleaned two of the cages and put new branches in for the birds to live in a cleaner environment. This was a good time to learn more about the animals of ARCAS and talk to the other volunteers that stayed at ARCAS. Later in the day we swam in the lake which was great! Afterwards we went for a challenging hike part of which was rock climbing and grabbing on to whatever vines we could. ARCAS may not have been our dream vacation spot but the things that we learned and saw made all the difference in the start of a great trip.

The next two days were spent at the Mayan ruins. This was definitely an awesome experience. We climbed higher than the rainforest canopy to the top of a thousand year old pyramid. The tours were definitely better due to our tour guide, David. He gave us a whole new outlook about the ruins and the life of the Mayan people. After the first four non-stop days we got to take a break on our flight back to Guatemala City.

Then we drove about 45 minutes to Antigua which was definitely a cool town full of Guatemalans and tourists. There were so many people out during the day and the cobblestone streets were filled with people shopping, and eating. After a good dinner we went right back to our hostel to get a good night sleep before our two day peddle-paddle tour began. We met Matt the next morning at Oldtown Outfitters. After a two hour ride towards Lake Atitlan we got out and started to practice our mountain biking skills before our 25 mile mainly downhill ride. After 15 miles we stopped for a picnic lunch overlooking the lake. Then we biked another 10 miles to the village of Panajachel. From there we took at boat to an awesome hotel that is built on a cliff overlooking the lake. After a day of biking it felt great to jump into the water. La Casa del Mundo is definitely a cool hotel with some really good food too. Everyone loved the hotel and were happy to have some time to relax. The next day we woke up and hiked 4 miles to the village of San

Marcos. There we met the group that kayaked and we switched places. Kayaking was great and spending time on this gorgeous lake was amazing. Matt gave us some good information about Guatemala and the volcanoes surrounding the lake.

The peddle-paddle tour was exhausting and rewarding. After so much excitement we all felt like we were invincible. The last day was for the Volcano Pacaya hike. This volcano is active and we could hear and see the shifting lava rocks. The hike was pretty steep and definitely dusty. We had to make sure we kept our mouth shut and sunglasses were a must to keep the dust out of our eyes. Throughout the hike we stopped to see some amazing vistas of the volcanos and surrounding flora and fauna.

The trip was filled with amazing experiences. Throughout the trip we talked to so many people and the 13 of us in our group all became so much closer. Most of us enjoyed our experiences and took back so much insight about global living and to be more conscientious about how people live and things to do in our area to help the environment. The trip right now is fresh in all of our minds but things I will never forget are talking to the Mayan and playing Simon says with them, we experienced bartering in a few markets and learned so much about the culture. We all talked to people from around the world and enjoyed the people we met including our host families and tour guides. Everywhere we went there were new things to experience. Global traveling isn't just about seeing a new country its about experience everything that you can. On this trip to Guatemala we definitely took in so many aspects of the country-from culture, adventure, history and the people; everywhere we looked was something everyone could enjoy. The trip opened our eyes to different issues and types of people things that I will remember forever.

For those of you on the trip to Guatemala in March, if you read this, it is definitely important to know a few things and remember to bring some things. The currency is quetzal and it is easy to transfer money in the airport or any banks in the markets. The conversion rate is 7:1 so it is easy to buy a lot of local gifts. Things that are definitely important to have are a towel (1 is enough) for swimming in the lakes and for showering at ARCAS, and at the host families. Also remember to bring a flashlight or headlamp. This is important for ARCAS and in some places in Tikal. Also bug spray is a must in the rainforest. There's is no reason to worry about malaria or any other disease besides drinking the water. Everywhere we went fresh water was available to us and we filled our water bottles. A watch might be helpful because there is some independent time and we had to stay on a tight schedule. Most important I enjoyed the trip as much as I did because I kept an open mind and really seized every moment. This trip isn't just an ordinary vacation its a learning experience that really helped to give everyone a different mind set about respect, and different cultures.

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