

Christmas Term Update

Dear

First of all apologies for the lateness of this update as I've been very busy up until recently and haven't made much opportunity to comprise this letter.

This letter marks the end of my first term teaching in Kato with my partner Lucas, which is an extremely remote Amerindian village in Guyana. Upon arrival in Kato by plane, the only practical way of reaching this village, I was truly amazed at this landscape as I have never seen anything like it. The village itself has been built on a mountain top on the savannah. However should you look in another direction you will see several huge grass covered mountains gorged by the surrounding rivers and if you were to look in another direction you would see the start of an extensive rainforest which covers around 80% of Guyana.

Being in Kato has made me much more independent as you have only your partner to assist you who is also in the same boat as you. You learn things very quickly out here which are necessary to living, ranging from washing clothes, gutting fish, holding a full time job from 9-3 but also cooking on an open fire as we do not have a gas stove. As a result we have built an outside kitchen for when the rainy season comes. Every morning after bathing in the creek I go to the RDC kitchen where I help make bakes for the children who walk for up to 3 hours to reach school. From there it's off to the primary school where I teach grade 5. The children here are lovely and often invite you round to their house for cassiri or bring you fresh fruit and vegetables like bananas and tangerines. I teach one of the largest classes in the school of 20 and I am teaching all subjects. The teaching here is difficult, especially at first as the children sometimes struggle to think for themselves and are far below the educational standard of children their age in the UK. My children are aged 9 or 10 and at least 2 cannot read at all creating a wide range of abilities in the class. Making your teaching therefore cater to all pupils can be challenging. The school is in much need of teachers as grades 7, 8 and 9 as of yet do not have a teacher so I definitely feel that me and Lucas are very much needed here and for that I thank you for giving me this opportunity. As the term has gone on the children have warmed up to me and become more open and engaging so as a result, 15 out of 20 passed their Christmas term exams which I am very pleased with.

The people here live a very simple life surviving mostly off ground provisions in their farms. Many still live in traditional Amerindian huts with a few community members owning zinc roofed houses. I had heard before coming out to Guyana that Guyanese people are some of the nicest people you will ever meet and they were not lying. Since the village is only 400 strong, there is very much a community feel here and everyone is always there to lend a helping hand to anyone who should need it. Amerindians in Kato have been very hospitable to Lucas and me from the moment we landed. Whenever walking past

someone's house they will call you over for a chat and offer you a bowl of cassiri which is a local drink made from cassava, an Amerindian's staple diet.

This hospitality along with the help of my partner is what motivated me to stay in Kato during the first 2 weeks. Moving to somewhere with a completely different culture, surroundings and way of life along with being so far and out of contact with home is a really tough thing to deal with at first. However after this period passed, I slowly began enjoying my time in Kato more and more. Apart from spending time with locals in the village I have found many things to do here. There are several great waterfalls and pools around Kato which range from a 5 minute stroll to a 3 hour hike over the mountains. Nevertheless, the views and refreshing bathe is always worth the walk. We have also attended some village activities such as Amerindian heritage day where the whole village comes together for a huge party with lots of songs and dancing. It is the only party which I have been to where I can go to sleep, wake up the next morning, go for a bathe and have my breakfast only to then go back to the party which continued to 1'o clock the next day. Also I was able to attend several fish poisonings where the villagers collect a vine called hyari from the bush and pong it in the river. This releases a toxin into the water and disorientates the fish allowing you to catch them in your net. It's very much a team effort undertaking the poisoning as everyone must lend a hand whether its collecting hyari, making clubs for the ponging or helping one another catch fish.

After 15 weeks I was in very much need of a holiday as schools in Guyana do not have a half term. For my Christmas holiday a small group of volunteers accompanied us to Manaus in Brasil. As soon as I entered the country I love everything about it from the sights to the food and just the feel of the cities. While in Manaus we went on an excursion to a forest camp in the Amazon for a couple days. Here we were able to do some incredible things such as swim around pink dolphins, hold a baby caiman and bizarrely even tazor a fish. From Manaus it was back into Guyana to a resort called Lake Mainstay where we met up with around 20 other Project Trust volunteers in Guyana. This is where we spent Christmas day beside the beach, surrounded by palm trees playing volleyball. Although it did not have quite the same traditional Christmas feel, it was good to be alongside friends at this time of the year. Our final stop of the holiday was in Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname. New Year's Eve was a constant non-stop party from the morning to New Year's Day. The streets were lined with firecrackers which looked as if the streets were exploding when set off. There was lots of live music and dancers performing down the street, it felt as if the whole city had come to life. Overall the holiday was absolutely fantastic, full of many great nights to remember, along with some which I don't.

I'm looking forward to this Easter term as I feel that I will find other places to visit and more wonderful characters to meet. I cannot thank you enough for your donation towards this year abroad for me as you've helped me experience what I already know i going to be the best year of my life.