

# INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2016

## BRIEF SUMMARY

I had an incredible time in Costa Rica. We spent the first week in a city called Heredia, where we stayed with host families. They only spoke Spanish but it was amazing to stay there as it meant we were fully immersed into the culture. Whilst we were in Heredia we did our work placement in a care centre. The children in the care centre were aged from 6 months to 12 years. I was working with 1-2 year olds which was mentally draining but they were adorable and increased my confidence with young children a lot. We also got leisure time and did amazing activities like visiting a volcano, having dance lessons and going to coffee plantation. The second week we stayed in a national park called Barra Honda. Barra Honda was an incredible place to stay, it was full of nature and we came across animals like tarantulas and scorpions on a daily basis. We got to do some fantastic conservation work like catching bats which completely changed my perspective of them. It was also great to feel like we were making a difference when we were planting trees, doing the beach clean-up and animal projects.

## FULL REPORT

**Day 1** – It was a very long journey, about 18 hours in total. There were two flights and on our second flight there was a thunderstorm so we had to land in another country called Nicaragua. We eventually arrived and went straight to our host families in Heredia.

**Day 2** – We went to volcano Poas and it was covered by cloud to begin with but the cloud suddenly disappeared and we got to see the volcano. We also went to a zoo called Zoo Ave, which was a great way to get to know some of the different animals in Costa Rica. After the zoo we went to a nice restaurant and the lemonade I ordered came out with mint blended in to it. In the evening we spent some time with the host families, we played Jenga and Ella showed everyone her diablo which people had a go with. The host family also took us to a Costa Rican party.

**Day 3** – We went downtown and saw some of Heredia's main sites e.g. one of the oldest churches and a market. We had an induction to the work placement in the care centre so we had all the rules explained to us. We also went to an orchid and Japanese garden which were both so pretty. When we went back to the host families I met an American girl and an Italian woman who were also staying with the host family I was with. In the evening everyone played cards.

**Day 4** – We spent our first day in the care centre. I chose to be with the 1-2 year olds. We had to help with their everyday routine e.g. I had to help feed the children at lunch time, wash their hands, play with toys with them, dance with them etc. They were a challenging age group as you had to be alert constantly as they would kick each other, bit each other, snatch each other's toys etc. Even though they were challenging they were also so adorable. We went to dance lessons in the evening. We did swing, salsa and rock and rolls. The host families also took us to a fireworks display.

**Day 5** – We did care work again. It was just as challenging as the day before but I was more used to the routine. The children liked to reach through to the babies pen and grab their faces. In the afternoon I got a chance to work with the older children (8-12 year olds). It was great to experience working with a

different age bracket as it gave me a completely different sort of challenge as they were much chattier and we had to communicate without knowing each other's language. We did craft activities with them. In the evening we went to a butterfly farm.

**Day 6** – Another day of care work. I knew the routine well so felt like I was a much bigger help with the 1-2 year olds. In the afternoon we got to decorate one of the classrooms by making 3D jellyfish, seaweed and sharks and then hanging them from the ceilings. After the care work we went to a coffee plantation. We all made something for the care centre as a thanks when we got back to the families in the evening.

**Day 7** – We had our final day in the care centre. We spent the morning doing the care work as usual but in the afternoon we had a little farewell party. We organized a bit of entertainment where we sung them a few songs and Ella performed her diabolos. We also organized pass the parcels. They then gave us some than you cars and we gave them our donations to their centre which included many crafty bits, books etc. It was so sad to leave but I had really appreciated the experience.

**Day 8** – We left to go to National Park Barra Honda. The journey was 4 hours long. We saw an iguana as soon as we arrived. We spent the rest of the day settling in, putting up our mosquito nets, playing cards and getting to know some of the other people who were staying with us which included American's, Austrian's, Costa Rican's and a Japanese boy and other British people. It was great to spend time with people from a variety of different cultures.

**Day 9** – We went to the beach and did a beach clean-up which was exhausting as it was boiling hot but it felt good to be making a positive impact. The beach we went to was actually a national park and was a home to many turtles so it is important that the beach is kept clean so the turtles remain healthy. Once we had finished the beach clean-up we had a bit of time to learn all about the conservation of beaches in Costa Rica and about the different species of turtles that they have on the beach. The crabs in Costa Rica are bright purple with orange legs. At the beach we got to drink from a coconut.

**Day 10** – We did cave exploration which was very slippy and we got covered in mud. We also went to the view point which is a point up the mountain where there is an amazing view. I fell over on the way down and cut my knee. We then took part in a bat project and got to feed them and release them back into the wild, most of the bats we caught were fruit eaters.

**Day 11** – We took part in a monkey project. We had to search for monkeys, identify the species and whether or not the individuals were alpha males, we then did reforestation and planted around 100 trees.

**Day 12** – We took part in the caterpillar project but we kept finding ones that would turn into moths but we needed ones that would turn into butterflies. We were walking along the river but it started to rain really heavily so we had to leave in case it flooded but we managed to find lots of caterpillars before this and we took pictures of them so they could later be identified. We also had a talk about conservation.

**Day 13** – Costa Rican Scouts came to visit us. They were ages 18-21 because this was a large age range in the Costa Rican senior section. They taught us many games including a sport called algorga. We taught each other different games which was great as we got to learn more Spanish and more about

their culture. We got to see this little ceremony that they put on for one of the scouts and someone forgot their ceremonial rock so they had to climb a tree. We played capture the flag with them in the evening when it was pitch black which was fun and there were little fireflies everywhere. Capture the flag was also a nice way to end our last full day in Barra Honda as to get out of prison we had to answer a question correct about conservation or a Spanish word/something general about the Costa Rican culture so we got to test what we had actually learnt during our stay.

**Day 14** – We got up at 3.30am and hiked up the mountain to see the sunrise at 5.30am. The view was amazing. We left Barra Honda on this day and travelled back to San Jose where we had a meal and then went to a little hotel.

**Day 15** – We flew home but our flight got cancelled so we were delayed 7 hours but then we managed to get a direct flight instead which meant we didn't have to do the stopover in America and we still got back on time the next day.

## FUTURE PLANS

This was the most amazing experience abroad that I have had and it has inspired me to do more trips that are service projects. I would love to do another international trip with guiding in the future as it is a great way to become more independent, have amazing experiences and make new friends. I would particularly like to do more conservation in the future as I learnt so much about conservation and enjoyed all the work a lot. It was also amazing to go outside Europe as I had only been to countries inside Europe before so the trip has inspired me to visit completely different places with completely different cultures in the future.

