



Installment One

Brooke Hunger is one of ten local interns chosen for Pinhead Institute's 2006 Internship Program, which sends high school juniors and seniors to work with mentors in science institutions throughout the world. Brooke is currently a senior at Ridgway High School. Brooke and Telluride High School senior Paloma Wodehouse, another Pinhead intern, spent their summer working in Costa Rica at INBIO, an international biodiversity research center and two of Costa Rica's National Parks This is the first of three installments of her story from Costa Rica, written in September 2006.

My trip began on June 12, 2006 when I left the Montrose airport at around eight in the morning and headed for Costa Rica. Paloma, from Telluride, who I had only met once before, was also doing an Internship the same time I was. Nine hours later we arrived in San Jose, Costa Rica where our mentor Vanessa met us along with another volunteer from Spain named Maria. Both of them spoke very decent English, and were very kind. We were taken to the INBio Research Center near San Jose where we spent the next four days. The first night there we were told about some of the bugs, mainly the cockroaches, and within a minute Maria bent over and a huge cockroach was crawling on her back! I swiped it off and killed it. After Maria saw it she told me "that's one of the smaller ones." I was stunned and frightened the rest of the night, especially to move anything, or even make a midnight bathroom run. My fear of bugs was only about to grow as the trip continued.

The next couple of days I was helping grow different beetles by digging for larva when I was showed a larva a size of my hand. I held it and I could feel it pulsing and squirming between my fingers. It was very creepy. The day I left Inbio I finally saw what the larva became: it was a large rhinoceros beetle, which is a very large black beetle with a horn coming out of its forehead kind of like... a rhinoceros.

After the fourth day Paloma and I left San Jose on a bus with the other volunteer Maria, who was accompanying us to Manuel Antonio for only 3 days. The bus ride took nearly 6 hours. When we arrived it was a very small tourist town directly on the beach, consisting of mainly one long street with tons of shops and restaurants. We finally got hold of a park ranger who led us on a ten minute walk with all our luggage to the back entrance of the park where we got a ride in a pick-up truck to the volunteer and ranger houses in the park. We got time when we arrived to move into our house, which was practically a giant screen. There was a three foot high wall and then from there wire and screening until a tin roof which had large holes in the side. The house consisted of three rooms with tons of bunk beds and a large pile of mattresses. We dusted off our mattress and wrapped them in sheets and placed them under our bug nets. The entire time tourists stared into our house from the parks trails wondering what we were doing, which became a usual occurrence when we visited the house.

Afterwards we walked to the ranger house, which was more of a house than ours. There we ate our meals, watched Soap Operas and soccer after work, or played pool on a crooked pool table that had no padding or carpet so the balls rolled forever. The House

had an amazing view of the ocean from the dining table and it was only a five-minute walk away from the most amazing beach. The first night we were there the park rangers took us swimming in the afternoon at the beach near the house. It was so fun and the water was so warm, it was actually way warmer than any shower I had yet taken in Costa Rica. I also learned that there are four beaches located within the national park.

The next day we did not work and we were able to explore the park. The three of us hiked to a look-out point over the ocean and visited the town. I saw tons of white face monkeys and a camin, a small alligator. We then went shopping a little and eventually headed back where we were introduced to Huberth (pronounced like Oober), who spoke very good English. Only three rangers spoke English, and the rest new maybe a word. The next night we all went to dinner with Huberth's family at a nice restaurant in Quepos, which is a town about 15 minutes away from Manuel Antonio. Quepos was where you were able to visit a bank or go to a large supermarket if needed.

Installment Two

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After Maria (a volunteer from Spain) left INBio, Paloma and I continued to stay for five more weeks and towards the end of the first week two new volunteers showed up. One was thirty-four years old from Australia, Jineen, and the other was twenty-years old from New Jersey, Kurt. Both were very fun and had a great sense of humor. Kurt and Jineen worked together and watched Howler Monkeys all day so the national park could learn more about them. Paloma and I did tons of different jobs through out the five weeks. We began by working at the entrance giving tourist directions and keeping a survey of what nationality people were who entered the park. We also had to help clean the park by picking up big branches on trails and shoveling sand off the cement at picnic areas and at the entrance. The first week we were there strong currents hit the beach and the waves went all the way to the trails and carried logs and other debris, so Paloma and I worked very hard on cleaning trails and shoveling sand the entire time we were in Manuel Antonio.

Evenings it would usually rain and on the second week one evening I heard my first thunderstorm in Costa Rica. The lightning was striking very near to the house so the thunder was really loud. You could feel it in your chest and it made your ears ring every time. I have never heard such loud thunder in my life and I hope I never do again because it was so uncomfortable having to listen to it. After one struck really close all the power went out in the house and Paloma and I needed something from our house so we borrowed a digital camera for light and headed back. As we were looking Paloma and I saw a snake on her foot and then the light turned off so we climbed on the bunk beds until we could get the light back on. When we did we found out what was on her foot was a small coral snake, which is really poisonous. We got one of the rangers to get it out of

the house and he warned us that since there was one there is probably more, and to be careful. I searched the house up and down and did not find any more but I still could not get over having poisonous snakes in our house.

Paloma and I began to work with an older man with a cane named Havier most of the time after that. He was very funny but when it came to work he was very serious and motivated. He was always prepared to work hard. We began to rebuild a welcome sign for the national park, and we worked with an organization called Kids Saving the Rainforest. Myself, Paloma, and another volunteer helped them dig seventy-six holes for kids to plant trees in the rainforest. I was so exhausted afterwards, and ended up taking a five-hour nap before dinner in my damp bed (because of the humidity) and I still fell asleep very early that night.

Some days the park rangers would let us just go to the beach all day where we would have sand castle contests. Kurt also had a snorkel and we would take turns going snorkeling. We all invested in a glow-in-the-dark Frisbee, which was quite fun at night. Our days off were always fun and we always hung out together.

One day off Kurt and I decided to go horseback riding on the beach, so we bought 2 hours worth of horseback riding on the beach and in the mountains for twenty-five dollars. At first I had an amazing time. We got to run our horses down the beach, until we reached the end of the beach where a herd of dogs came out barking and my horse wanted to buck and run. It was only for a little bit and I am sure he could of gotten me off if he wanted but he ended up doing it two more times before we finished riding. For the next week my butt was bruised severely and I could not walk very good; I was literally black and blue.

Installment Three

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The last week in Manuel Antonio thirty new volunteers showed up, all from Costa Rica, to help build a new trail. The rest of us helped them for the next three days, and it was only fun for about the first day. I got to help clear a path through the jungle with a Machete, and ended up going swinging on a vine for about half the day with some other volunteers. The next day we all had to haul gravel to the trail cause a truck could not get there so we did a train, where we carried a bag of gravel so far and then gave it to another person. Each bag weighed near 40 pounds and after five hours of constant carrying I was exhausted, not to mention it started raining and we were all covered in mud. I can't say I have ever worked so hard before in my life.

After making friends with all the volunteers, Paloma, myself, and two other American volunteers left Manuel Antonio and went to Heliconias National Park for three days to visit. It was a cloud rain forest and it was amazing. The hiking trail had five

bridges that hung through the canopy and the views were spectacular. We actually saw a hummingbird get caught in a spider's web. On our last day there we all visited a place called Rio Celeste, which was an hour away. It was a waterfall colored aqua blue, and it almost looked fake.

This was the last day Paloma and I saw any of the other volunteers that we worked with the entire time in Costa Rica. Both of us had a hard time leaving them all. We headed back to San Jose to spend our last 3 days with one of the scientists from InBio, Jose. He was a very nice man and had a four-year-old daughter, named Virginia who was very cute. Paloma and I ended up watching Madagascar several times in Spanish with her while staying there. We also finally got a semi warm shower for the first time in Costa Rica at that house. Jose took us shopping at the mall and took us to see Pirates of the Caribbean 2. We also ate at some very nice restaurants.

After the third day Paloma and I got up at four in the morning and headed to the airport to head back to Colorado. The plane ride was not too bad but when we got to Houston we had a six-hour lay over and only twenty dollars between the both of us. To make matters worse our flight got delayed because of the rain nearly three more hours. I was so anxious to get home and really tired because I had nothing to do the entire time in the airport. When we boarded the plane and got back to Montrose I was so happy to see my family and my mom almost instantly started crying.

Even though I had been gone for so long I felt more home sick for Costa Rica than I ever had for Colorado. I had an amazing time and I would suggest to any teenager to get out of the country or at least your town for a while, on your own, before graduating. It is an experience of a lifetime, and I feel I have grown so much as an individual being on my own away from every one I knew. I can honestly say I did not have one bad thing happen to me in Costa Rica, other than the horseback riding, and I wish I could do it all again.