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  Guide books for Costa Rica often advise tourists to spend a day or two in San José but never
more. The Costa Rica tourists want to see is outside of San José in the cloud forests or white sand
beaches. After eleven weeks living in San José, Costa Rica as an intern for Centro de Amigos para la Paz
or Friends Peace Center I can say that the guide books are wrong. San José and the people who inhabit it
are worth more than a day or two. After living with a host family and interning at Friends Peace Center I
have a better understanding of this capital city and the large population within it.
  My arrival in Costa Rica and the start of my internship was buffered by a week of Spanish classes
at a language school close to my house. My first day at Friends Peace Center I arrived at 9:30 and waited
until 10:30 for my boss Isabel to arrive, when she did she printed me a list of projects that I could choose
to do and gave me a day to think over which ones were most interesting to me. My Spanish which at my
host family’s house was just fine was not as great in a work environment where a new vocabulary
existed. I worked the rest of the day with Meaghann, another intern from Maine, who had been at the
center for one month already. We put together a small portfolio for a project called Artes para la Paz. I
also spent the afternoon looking over and researching the projects on the list that Isabel gave me to see
which ones I could be the most useful. It was a pretty quiet first day and I felt good about the choice I
had made for an internship site.
  My daily routine at Friends Peace Center with a few changes began at nine but sometimes as
early as eight and ended anywhere from four to six at night. When I arrived at the center I greeted the
other co workers and set up the laptop at the main table to check email and websites that concerned
my projects especially the School of the Americas Watch website to see if any updates had happened
overnight. When the other two interns were presented we worked together on all our projects from

writing letters to going around the neighborhood to inform people of an upcoming meeting. Later
during the summer when I was by myself I usually worked on my projects, answered the phone and ran
errands. At times I would go places with Isabel or another member of the center but usually I worked on
the computer and interacted with whoever came and buzzed at the door. My projects throughout the
internship changed from writing letters and working promotion for a concert to writing a history of the
Quakers and creating flyers for a recycling center.
  Before arriving in Costa Rica I had completed third year Spanish at Oregon State University and I
found that all that I had learned was very useful and became clearer to me throughout my time in San
José. My host family provided a wonderful opportunity to practice my language skills especially through
dinner time conversation about the topics that I had learned earlier at work. At Friends Peace Center,
the other interns and I spoke English among each other and with Isabel but our work within the
community was in Spanish. Being surrounded by the language improved my Spanish in all three areas,
listening, speaking and writing. I watched the news and soap operas with my host family most nights
and the staff at Friends Peace Center conversed with me in Spanish. I found after a few weeks I could
follow conversations easier even when people spoke really fast, it was not as tiring as well.
Reading the paper everyday also improved my vocabulary and helped me become aware of the
events that are important in Costa Rica. Writing as many letters as we did introduced me to a higher
level of Spanish, professional writing was an important skill as we were sending these letters to the
mayor and members of the government. My use of irregular verbs improved, instead of picking up my
verb book every time I came across a tough one I learned how to write and speak them better than ever
and this gave me a great new confidence. My speaking improved but not as much as I wanted. I am a
quiet person and although I pushed myself to speak as much as possible I still need people to draw me

in and talk to me and this did not happen as much as I thought it would.   Overall my Spanish did
improve and I am excited to continue studying and speaking this beautiful language.
The one step that was most important to me to becoming a part or an asset to the organization
was to always be helpful to the members and staff of the Peace Center. I took the attitude that no
project was too small. I found it useful to put the needs of others before mine, so I could have worked
on my projects more or I could make copies for the president of the board or make an Excel spreadsheet
for the vice president. This type of work ethic create more opportunities to work with more people and
to have more work in general, once I completed one task efficiently I was the first one they came to if
there was something more to do. I felt that this step and attitude is essential to becoming a useful
member of any organization.
There are no shortages of challenges when it comes to internships but the biggest one for me
getting my projects done on time. Time runs slower in Costa Rica compared to the United State but part
of this challenge was that Isabel has a very full plate being the director of the Peace Center and since my
work had to be approved or edited by her it was difficult to have this done in a timely manner. In other
words, I or another intern would be unable to move forward with a project for up to seven days because
Isabel was unable to look at our work. It would have been very useful to me and will be helpful to other
interns if they schedule a weekly meeting with Isabel where the project or work one is doing can be
looked over, improved and with the next step mapped out.
The guidance of the staff especially Isabel at Friends Peace Center was always wonderful and I
learned a lot from their work. Isabel is a great director and an asset to the community, I learned a lot
about the role of the non profit in the community from her. She was great at reaching out to the
community but also standing back and letting the community teach us as well. I learned under her
supervision how to plan and carry out meetings and how important networking is when it comes to

conferences and other events. Isabel was great at pointing out things in my work that I could improve
and why. I always appreciated her opinion because of her many years of experience working in non
profits. Isabel, the staff and members of the Peace Center have such a great passion for what they do
that the experience confirmed for me the desire to continue working with non profits after graduation.
When I was fifteen I travelled to Costa Rica and spent two weeks hiking through the Osa
peninsula and after a few days in San José I knew that I was in an urban jungle. My impression of Costa
Rica was always positive and it only grew more during my time there. I understand the appeal Costa
Rica has to foreigners especially Quakers; this is a country with no army and high standards of education
and health care. Ticos feel fortunate to live in a peaceful country compared to their neighbors, my host
mom explained to me that the indirect communication of Ticos is a result of them wanted to keep the
peace by keeping things to themselves about others to avoid confrontations.   In the beginning I also did
a lot of comparing between Costa Rica and Brazil, a country I had spent a year in as an exchange
student. I realized quickly comparing the two countries that there were more differences than
similarities.   Working in San José near the places where the government worked gave me an
appreciation for the politics and complexities of another country and its people. At the end of my
internship my impression of Costa Rica was still positive and I would like to go back one day in the
future.
  Before arriving to my internship site there are not many things that I wish I knew. I always try to
kept an open mind and leave my expectations at the door, it helps when one has to adjust and be
flexible. In general I wish I knew more about what exactly I was going to do but I had an idea from the
other inters reports. I also did not know it was the rainy season but a little more research about Costa
Rica on my part would have given me the information. Tips for future interns would be to travel on the
weekend of course, there is a whole country out there and different sub cultures exist outside of San

José but also to stick around some weekends to take in the activities around San José. If you are living
with a host family be sure to ask question if you are not sure you are doing something right. They are
hesitated to tell you themselves so it is helpful to ask. Another piece of advice is one way that I got to
know people was to create a routine with my lunch hour, there were a few restaurants or “sodas” that I
went to frequently and I got to know the owners since I am a vegetarian, quite a rarity in Costa Rica.
  After returning from Costa Rica I am starting to process the benefits that my experience at
Friends Peace Center has given me. Professionally, the experience of working in another country, culture
and language will show my versatility when I go to apply for a job after graduation. This is a huge benefit
along with improving my Spanish in a time where bilingual workers are in high demand. As I said earlier,
nonprofit work is something I always thought I would like to do and having the opportunity to be an
intern at a nonprofit and enjoy the work I was doing helped me in making decision when it comes to life
after college. Personally my internship gave me a chance to learn about another part of the world. I
connected with people who have very different experiences from me and building relationships gave me
a new confidence and passion for life. I am aware now of what activists have done and what they
continue to do and now that I know more about the injustices in the world I have only once choice but
to continue working against them in anyway even if it is very small.
  My re entry culture shock was a harder than I expected, it shows how not just studying but how
working and becoming part of a group creates more cultural adaptation. I found a lot of things that
Costa Ricans do better than Americas and I am trying to keep with those habits especially eating well,
meaning no processed foods and being more peaceful of course! My world views have changed as a
result of Costa Rica and Friends Peace Center; I have become more critical of United States policies
around the world and interacting with many Quakers has attracted me to many of their ways of life

which I have adopted into mine. In the future there is no doubt that I will look back at this internship
with a great sense of accomplishment as it will continue to positivity effect me for years to come.