

Kari Ramsey
Long Way Home
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Final Internship Report

Guatemala was the first time that I had ever been outside the United States. I had always dreamed of traveling and doing study abroad programs before, but the timing was always off. Summer 2008 was my last official term on the OSU campus. I had just finished my entire 11 week anatomy and physiology series and I was ready for an adventure. I had three weeks to move all of my belongings home, pack my bag, and leave for Guatemala.

I arrived in Guatemala on Friday September 26 in the afternoon. I was extremely nervous and followed the crowd of people off the plane and over to customs. Everything went smoothly and I was feeling anxious and excited as I waited for my back pack. Then I was suddenly approached by a guy who had overheard me say my name to some friends I met on the plane. He said his name was Mateo, all of a sudden I was extremely confused because my supervisors name was Mateo. He quickly saw my confused look and reassured me that he was a close friend of Mateo, my supervisor. He was and also a member of the board of directors for Long Way Home and was meeting Mateo at the airport too. Immediately I felt 10 times better, that is until I walked out of the airport to find that I was surrounded by hundreds of people holding signs, shouting, and of course starrng. I was so overwhelmed by everyone and everything. Mateo reassured me that this was normal and that we would wait across the street where it was much quieter.

Eventually our taxi arrived, where I was greeted by my supervisor Mateo and the driver, his friend Donald. I was blown away by the large size of Guatemala City. I was expecting a big city, but not that big. Once we made it out of the city, we headed for Comalapa, the small town where I would be living for the next 10 weeks. The roads were windy and bumpy and the surroundings were absolutely beautiful, corn fields for as far as the eye could see.

A couple hours later we arrived in Comalapa and drove to Parque Chimiya. I thought that I knew what a bumpy road was, but I was wrong. The road to the park was the bumpiest road I had ever been on in my life, but I grew to love the bumpy roads and I miss them greatly. The park was vibrant, colorful and full of wonderful people. I was greeted with amazing smiles and friendly faces. I got a great tour of the park and I was immediately welcomed to my new home.

Since I arrived on a Friday, everyone was busy working on their projects. I jumped in and helped Cat in the botanical gardens. The gardens were peaceful and beautiful. They were full of all types of flowers, herbs and vegetables. As the sun set, everyone put their materials away and prepared for dinner. The other volunteers had made a wonderful dinner, and we played cards and talked for the entire evening. I felt great about my first day, and looking back, each day was an amazing adventure in its own.

Before the internship, I had completed two years of college Spanish. The language barrier was the most difficult adjustment for me. I quickly learned the importance of studying and taking more Spanish classes. I met with a local woman in town and it helped immensely. Living and working with the community also was an

amazing way to learn Spanish. By the end of my internship I was able to communicate with the local people at a basic level and I was able to travel around the country comfortably. My language abilities developed greatly during my ten week internship.

There were numerous benefits to the internship. I gained valuable work experience in terms of public health. The community assessments and health surveys were great ways to work with local families and learn about the Mayan culture. My Spanish speaking skills improved greatly and I made amazing life long friends.

The biggest challenges were the initial language barriers. I knew basic vocabulary and basic phrases, but the cultural immersion was very overwhelming. It seemed as if everyone was talking extremely fast and I was only able to understand bits and pieces of conversations. Over time, I spoke more and was able to communicate more effectively.

In order to become an asset to the organization, I worked hard each day and learned as much as I could about the current projects and the dynamics of the organization. I spent time getting to know the current staff and volunteers. Having an open mind and a willingness to learn new skills as well as more Spanish were also very important.

My supervisor on site was great. He was friendly, outgoing and very helpful. He worked hard each day and was very dedicated to helping the community of Comalapa. His open mind and willingness to help others was inspirational.

My impression of Guatemala changed throughout the course of the internship. Initially I was very shocked by different lifestyles and ways of living. Over time I made some great friends and learned about the culture. Living and working with the local

communities greatly changed my impression. I grew to love everything about the culture and I learned to appreciate all of the differences that it offered.

My daily routine consisted of waking up between 6 and 7 every morning and making breakfast with the other volunteers. Work began around 8 each morning. Each day consisted of at least 8 hours of work on various projects around the community. The other volunteers and I would cook all of our meals together and share with the daily chores.

I recommend future volunteers to study as much Spanish as they can before they arrive. Speaking to the local people as frequently as possible in order to improve your language skills is also very important. Come with an open mind and a willingness to learn new skills and a new way of life.