

I recently completed an eleven week internship with Jatun Sacha on the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. I arrived at the site in the highlands of San Cristobal on a Sunday afternoon. When I arrived all the other volunteers were still in town for the weekend. It was mentioned to me that volunteers usually arrive on Monday or Wednesday, however I had assumed that's when volunteers usually go to the office in Quito. Since my internship began on a Monday, I had assumed I would need to arrive before then, which was not true. However, arriving on a Sunday proved to be no problem. I assume they recommend Monday or Wednesday simply because its more likely that you will be able to share the cab fee up to the station with another new volunteer and they can combine orientation and give it to more people at one time. This leads me to my first real day. Sunday I was able to acquaint myself a bit with the station and the other volunteers. I was given a brief rundown of things and then Monday morning I was given a proper orientation including a tour, how things worked at the station, and the goals of the station. The orientation was done in Spanish, however they are very accommodating and will have one of the other volunteers give the orientation in English if the new volunteer doesn't speak Spanish. I have had three years of university Spanish and I must say I am really glad I did. All of the staff pretty much only spoke Spanish. There is one director named Cesar who speaks English, but he is in and out on business a lot of the time. Although I wouldn't say my Spanish improved all that much, I became a lot better at listening and a lot more confident in the Spanish I did know. There were a couple of other volunteers who could speak it, but I did find myself translating quite a bit. Also, I was able to communicate a lot better with the staff which was nice as well as people we met in town.

After my orientation on the first day I joined work with the other which was a task I would be doing a lot in the future: cutting down raspberry and guava, two of the most harmful invasive species to the island. The work was somewhat difficult at first as I had never used a machete, but I soon got the hang of it, and anytime I needed a quick break I could just look up and get a million dollar view of the Pacific Ocean. Although I was worried I would get tired of the routine, I actually ended up really enjoying how simple life was there. We would wake up, have breakfast, have some time to get ready, and meet in the kitchen to discuss anything that needed to be discussed and also to find out what the day's work would be. The schedule is set up really nicely with breaks to make sure that the work doesn't get too monotonous and that we got breaks for water, etc. After lunch we would have some time to ourselves to read or nap or do whatever, and then it was back to work in the afternoon, most often doing a different job than what we did in the morning. After work we would often hike down to the coast, or play volleyball just to prepare ourselves for the cold showers (by far the worst thing about the station). After that it was dinner and then reading, hanging out, or heading to the bar to watch a movie or play pool.

Some of the most challenging things about the internship was the fact that things weren't always done as efficiently as possible, which coming from the United States is quite a shock. Some things just tended to take a long time getting done. For example, on one of my first days we had to fill sacks with sand because they wanted to make cement to improve the kitchen, but the sand was located a little ways down the road. We ended up loading the sand and hiking with it on our backs which was really hard work. It would have been a lot more efficient to simply load the sacks and have the taxi

that would come pick us up for the weekend stop and grab the sacks on the way to picking us up since the sand wasn't going to be used until the weekend anyway. Instead we spent a whole morning of work carrying the sand. I still don't even really understand why the sand was dumped so far from where we would be using it at the station. It was just little things like this that would sometimes get frustrating. Also lack of tools was an aspect of it as well. Jatun Sacha is a non profit organization and has to rely a lot on donations. It was kind of frustrating to have a huge wall of raspberry bushes 10 feet tall and stretching out for as far as you can see and all you have is one little machete in your hand and only a couple of rakes and hoes to share between everyone for clearing the debris and making sure to get all the roots.

Even though these things were frustrating, it really just made me understand all the better the challenges that NGOs and conservation groups are facing. Seeing as I am an International Studies major with a focus on the environment as well as a Geography major, I would really like for my future career to somehow involve helping protect and save the environment. This internship really opened up my eyes to some of the challenges of working with the environment in a developing nation such as lack of resources and dependence on volunteers. Even in the Galapagos, which have a higher standard of living than the rest of Ecuador, its hard to get people to care about their environment when they have the more pressing issue of just trying to survive. Still, progress is being made which was very encouraging to see and be a part of.

I don't think it's a good idea to go knowing too much because then you have expectations that are probably not going to be met. I wish I had known that Jatun Sacha is happy to dedicate work time to personal projects. When I got there the work was so

structured that I just kind of went with the flow of things. I wish I would have known that personal projects were encouraged a little earlier because I would have tried to think of a specific project before leaving, or even when I first got there. As soon as I did find out however that this was encouraged, I set about with another volunteer making ,an albeit rough, catalog of the flora around the station. The main idea was that new volunteers could look at it and see some of the common plants around the station and know if they were good (native or endemic) or bad (introduced or invasive). I think this is helpful since we do spend so much time chopping plants down its nice to not have to ask one of the workers every couple minutes if something is good or bad. The only other thing I really wish I had known more about was the weather. It really did end up being a lot colder, especially at the beginning, than I had expected. I had enough to stay warm luckily, but I probably would have brought an extra sweatshirt and a different rain coat since it is so moist up at the station. My nice raincoat ended up getting moldy! It really only rained at night, but the air was just constantly wet so that if you left clothes out you would come back to damp clothes. That is one big point I would stress to upcoming volunteers is to bring cheap/old clothes because no matter what they are going to get dirty. I wore the same clothes while working all week and then would change into nicer/warmer clothes at night and this really worked out well. You don't need to bring a ton. The one item I was really glad I brought myself was a face net because the bugs (gnats) are bad and while you can find spares laying around the station, they smell awful because of all the bug spray and sweat! Other advice is to definitely try and set aside some spending money as most volunteers do go into town on the weekend which can get expensive. Lastly, everyone thinks of the land animals/birds of the Galapagos,

but I was absolutely blown away by the aquatic life. Even though the water is cold, definitely go snorkeling or diving at least once. I went as often as I could and it never got old.

I had an absolutely fantastic time in the Galapagos and I am so glad that I chose the internship I did. I met amazing people and saw plenty of amazing things all while helping to protect and preserve this incredible place. Although it was frustrating that the station is so new, its great to know that I was part of it in its beginning stages. I can't wait to go back in 10 or 15 years and see all the progress that I know Jatun Sacha will make.