



Expedition Report for World Challenge expedition to Costa Rica 2019 By Caitlin W

Character Profile

My name is Caitlin. I'm 16 years old. Most of my time is obviously spent at school but I am also an Explorer Scout and enjoy taking part in all the activities that involves, including hiking, back to basics camping and climbing. I started off as a Cub when I was about 8 and then moved on to Scouts and now Explorers.



I also help out at an after school club for children with additional needs and got into this as I am a registered young carer for my 10 year old brother who has autism, ADHD and sensory processing disorder and attends a special school. My brother often presents with very challenging behaviour due to sensory overload and a lack of social understanding and I help my Mum and Dad manage him both at home and when we are out and about. A day out with my brother can often be very difficult but he loves the natural environment and it's much easier when it's quieter without too many people around.

I think I fitted the profile for a Get Exploring Trust grant due to my role as a young carer. Although I'm an Explorer Scout and didn't think the physical side of the expedition would phase me too much I'm not the most confident person in the world and knew that stepping out of my comfort zone would probably be my biggest challenge.

Expedition Aim

I had just completed my GCSE's when I went on my expedition to Costa Rica. The expedition was organised through my school and was managed by the company 'World Challenge'.

The aim of the expedition to me was to go and experience a completely different culture to mine in England as I haven't been abroad much and have never been outside of Europe. Experiencing the different culture especially the eco-friendly side of Costa Rica was extremely important to me as I



wanted to become more aware of what I, and others around me could do to be more conscious of the environment considering the current state of our world and global warming. I had the role within my group of taking care of organising accommodation and talking to the other students responsible for the overall budget about what we could afford and whether we wanted to save throughout the trip to afford a nicer hostel near the end. I hoped I would become more confident by taking part in this expedition especially in speaking to strangers and also speaking Spanish as this was one of my GCSE options and I have never been very confident in speaking the language.

Expedition Account

Day 1- Flight

Our team flew from Heathrow to Dallas airport on a nine hour flight and then from Texas to San José, the capital of Costa Rica, on a four hour flight. We then took a taxi from the airport to our hostel which had been booked in advance by World Challenge. We separated our budget money out between us all and made sure everybody in the group knew their roles and responsibilities. I was in charge of organising accommodation for the rest of the trip along with another girl in my group.

Day 2- Orientation day

We woke up extremely early today as we were not yet used to the time difference. We had pancakes for breakfast at the hostel and talked to some of the staff there about Costa Rica which was really interesting. We then went to a local house owned by Antonio who gave us a talk about responsible tourism. This included information such as what places to trust, trying to contribute to the local economy and also what clothes/items you should wear day to day. We then went back to the same hostel to spend the night.



Day 3- Tree Planting

Myself and some others in my group decided to wake up early and walk to the local town to have a look around. This was our first proper look around San José on foot and the culture difference was very interesting - people just didn't seem to be in so much of a rush as they are in England. We then took a minibus, which we had organised the day before, to Santa Maria De Dota which was our location for tree planting. In total we planted around 60 trees as a group and



learnt about the deforestation that occurred in Costa Rica years ago that still affects the country today. We then travelled from the forests to our camp site for the project phase and set up our tents.

Day 4- Project day 1

We woke up early to start our half hour walk down to the school, which was where our community work would take place. We had breakfast there and we chose to have a local café come to the school to cater for us every day as we felt this was



the best way to contribute to the local economy. We were greeted by the headteacher, teachers and pupils who performed a song and dance especially for us. We were also able to take part in one of the PE lessons which was good fun. Then, our project co-ordinator and translator talked to us about the sort of work they needed completing at the school over the next few days. I really enjoyed the evenings at our campsite as we had a small roofed communal area where our group enjoyed sitting and playing cards and getting to know

each other better.

Day 5- Project day 2

We dug holes today at the school to put pipes in to help improve their drainage systems. We also helped plant some more flowers to improve the aesthetics of the school. We made friends with the school caretaker which was really funny as some of us spoke basic Spanish and he spoke almost no English. We enjoyed teaching each other different words in our languages and I improved my confidence in speaking to other people as i was one of the only people in my group who could speak some Spanish.



Day 6- Project day 3

For breakfast we tried a vegetable called plantain which looked much like a banana but tasted similar to sweet potato. We did lots of digging today at the school to prepare for a wall extension we were going to complete in the next few days. It was also my day of leadership today so I organised our team into groups

and set everybody to work. We finished a bit early at the school today so some of us decided to walk to town for a coffee.

Day 7- Project day 4

It was our last day of the community project today where we painted the art classroom and made it a much more pleasant space. We also organised some games for the children at the school which they enjoyed just as much as us! We spent our last night at the campsite today and the person who owned it, Lida, made us a cake which was lovely.



Day 8- Casa Parra

Today we went to the school again but the children were not there as it was a Saturday. The project co-ordinator had organised some community activities for us to enjoy which included an art class with a local artist and a cooking class with some of the teachers who taught us how to make empanadas. After this we hiked down to the town and met Rafa who would be providing transport to our hostel for the night. The hostel was quite small as it was part of the family's house, they were so welcoming and we enjoyed interacting with the children there.

Day 9- Trek day 1

We woke up at around 3:30am today as we had to get a safari bus from our hostel to the start of the trek. It was freezing but the beautiful pink sunrise definitely made up for it. We met our two guides, Jonathan and Aladio who said they had done this hike around 300 times before! We started our walk and it was more difficult than we had all anticipated. The hills were very steep and the terrain was very rocky meaning you really had to watch your step. Also, the wildlife, bugs and bees made it extremely difficult to watch where you were going as they were constantly around your face. Finally we arrived at our accommodation which seemed to be very remote, it was very interesting to see that people had started their lives there, growing their own crops and keeping their own livestock. The accommodation was very different to what any of us were used to, they were sheds with no electric or lighting but some basic showers and toilets. It was our



first night using our mosquito nets which was definitely an interesting experience considering some of us were a bit claustrophobic! I enjoyed the hike today but as we arrived at the accommodation quite late we had to set up our sleeping bags etc and didn't have time to play cards as it got dark around 6pm and there were no lights.

Day 10- Trek day 2

We woke and packed up our stuff again to start the next phase of our trek through the rainforest to Quepos. We had to do four river crossings today and the second one was around waist deep. We were a bit scared but we had lots of safety equipment and it all went well. We took a break by the river for lunch and then walked for another two hours in extremely heavy rain. We then arrived at our accommodation for the next two nights which was on a family farm. It was nice to have a communal area again where we played cards and games before bed.



Day 11- Trek day 3

We woke up after a rather cold night of sleep as when we packed for the trek we all realised that we wouldn't be able to fit our sleeping bags in our day bags and therefore only took our sleeping bag liners. We had a rest day today on the farm where we milked cows, fed pigs, collected eggs and ground sugar cane to make juice. In the afternoon we went down to the waterfall which was very close to our site. It was a really lovely afternoon and probably one of my favourite memories from the trip as it was a great reward after all our hard work trekking.



Day 12- Trek day 4

Today we all woke up with new found energy as it was our last day of trek! Our guides took us to the road which we would be hiking up and down which was a nice change of terrain compared to the difficult uneven surface. We had finally finished our 50km trek and we were so happy to turn the corner and see the minibus waiting for us - we literally ran towards it! We took a short bus journey to Quepos where I had booked us a nicer hostel - we had decided to budget our money over the rest of the trip so we could afford it. This was a really nice treat and I'm glad we decided to save our money and reward ourselves with it. We walked down to

the town and bought some souvenirs then had a well deserved feast for dinner at the hostel.

Day 13- Beach day

Today was our first proper day of rest from all the work on our community project and trek! We all decided we wanted to travel to the nearest beach for the day - we sunbathed, paddled and looked around the shops. We also found a nice café on the seafront and took lots of photos. We had a group dinner in the local town today which was really nice to celebrate all our hard work.



Day 14- White water rafting

We got picked up today by a big yellow American style school bus which would take us to our white water rafting spot. Our guides for white water rafting; Jayden, Jesus and Louis gave us a talk about Costa Rican history on the journey which was really interesting. White water rafting was one of the best experiences I've ever had. The people and also the rafting itself were so much fun. We were allowed to get out of the raft every so often and let the current carry us down the river. When it was over we got changed and travelled to a café for lunch and then got a taxi all the way back to San José which took around five hours. We spent the night in the same hostel as our first night in Costa Rica which seemed like it was years ago! It was great to reunite with the other team from our school as we had not seen them for our whole trip. We spent the evening talking about all our experiences and sharing photos and memories.



Day 15- Flight

We first took a three hour flight from San José to Miami and then a nine hour flight from Miami to Heathrow. An excerpt from my diary sums up this day the best I think; "Currently there is six hours to go on our flight. I have had the best time ever but have never been so excited to see my family and not live out of a rucksack anymore!"

Financials

I had to raise £2700 to be able to go on my expedition. Much of this was raised from running pebble painting stalls at local fairs and fetes and by selling pebbles I painted myself. I also earned money from babysitting, doing extra chores at home and delivering flyers. I applied for various grants and as well as a grant from the Get Exploring Trust I obtained grants from local organisations such as the Lions and Masons.

My tip for raising money would be to find a theme and think of every way it could help you raise money. My theme was pebble painting and I ran pebble painting stalls at fetes, ran pebble painting sessions with local cub groups and painted and sold my own pebble creations including pebble tic-tac-toe, pebble house signs and pebble Christmas decorations. My life went pebble mad for about a year!! If you're creative, find out about events taking place near you - many local fetes and fairs will probably be more than happy to give you a free stall if you get in touch and explain what you're doing.



Highlights

The highlight of my expedition was definitely white water rafting, something I've never done before but would love to do again! The people who were running it were some of the nicest people I've ever met and didn't hesitate to make us feel welcome and sing along to Bohemian Rhapsody with us as we paddled along the river!

The most challenging part of the expedition was definitely the accommodation on the trek portion of my trip. It was completely different to anything I had experienced before and although I am used to camping it was even more difficult as we were in a remote area and didn't really have all the kit we needed, eg sleeping bags as these didn't fit in our trekking rucksacks.



The most important thing I learnt while



on the expedition was that wherever you go there will always be people to support you and make friends with. Everywhere we went and on each phase we found that we always found at least one person who would help us if we needed it but most importantly make us feel welcome. Whether this was the receptionist at our hostel on the first night, the caretaker at the school, the little girl at our hostel, our translator on our trek or our photographer whilst we were white water rafting. These people truly made my experience so much better than i could ever have hoped.

Get Exploring Trust

I am so grateful to the Get Exploring Trust for the grant I was given and would never have been able to attend otherwise. As well as meeting new people, helping others, seeing amazing landscapes and wildlife and taking part in adventurous activities, I became much more confident while I was away on my trip and that confidence will never leave me, I can't thank you enough for that.

What next?

After arriving back in the UK in late July my next challenge was waiting for my GCSE results! I was very pleased when 22nd August came and luckily my results allow me to move on to the next stage - starting a new school for A levels and making new friends. The expedition to Costa Rica has given me the confidence to take this in my stride and in another couple of years I will be moving on again, to university (hopefully!) to study Occupational Therapy.





I would love to do more travelling in the future and hope this will include more community work and helping people less fortunate than me.