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Every day in Ecuador included a blessing, a lesson, and a challenge. This was the most beautiful part of working internationally. It is rewarding to see yourself grow, your patience tested, your limits pushed, and your determination expanded, all while falling in love with a community.

I spent eight weeks in Ecuador with the WorldTeach program. The first week was orientation. The nine other volunteers and I stayed at a hostel in La Plaza Foch in Quito for a week. We took Spanish classes and instruction classes to help us when our placements began. Some of the sessions covered how to construct a lesson plan, form engaging activities to implement in the classroom, and teach in the target language. Although I barely used any of these tips once I was teaching at my site, they were helpful lessons for anyone considering becoming a teacher. That initial week also included safety lessons and sightseeing around Quito. We visited El Virgen, El Teleferico, El Centro Historico, and other popular places throughout the city. During this week we were never entirely alone because we were working and taking lessons with other volunteers. However, all of the volunteers are eventually placed in different towns or cities throughout Ecuador. Each placement site is different. I was lucky enough to teach in an actual English class, however, I worked alongside the primary English teacher at the school where I was placed. Therefore, I did not have my own classroom, and I arrived in the middle of a term. Other volunteers worked in summer camps, teaching English, sports, or music. The two volunteers in Quito lived and tutored a handful of university students from a program called Mindó Futures.

The last week of my internship abroad was a time for the ten of us volunteers to reunite and travel. This week was designed to help us reflect on our internship, as well as see more of the beautiful country we were living in. During this last week we divided our time between the Coast, the Amazon, and Quito. We first traveled to Playa Escondida, a secluded beach in the Northern Coast of Ecuador. We finished the week off with a couple of days in the Amazon, both in Puyo and in an Eco-lodge in the jungle. All of these experiences were wonderful and eye opening. One of the most beautiful parts of Ecuador is the diversity. Each region has something different to offer, and WorldTeach does a good job of providing you with the experiences to see as much as possible when you aren't teaching.

Although traveling was great, the most important and influential part of my time in Ecuador was the time I spent in Mindo. Mindo is a very small town about two hours northwest of Quito. It is a popular tourist site for backpackers, especially those interested in bird watching. The region is subtropical, and it is located in the Cloud Forest. I worked in Mindo at the local Catholic K-12 school that is also part boarding school. During the six weeks I spent in Mindo, I lived with a wonderful host family. I had four host siblings, but the house was always packed with cousins, boyfriends, and other friends or neighbors. My commute to school was a three-minute walk on a dirt road because there is only one paved road in Mindo. There are no traffic lights, or even stop signs. I could walk anywhere in the town within ten minutes.

On our first day of work we were able to decide what age group we wanted to work with. I taught middle school-aged students. School started at 7:00 am and finished around 12:00 pm. I had five classes, each with about thirty students. I also worked after school hours for an hour a day with a group of 11-year old girls who boarded at the school. These students needed extra help with the English language; therefore, I facilitated fun learning activities and games in order

to help them with the subject matter. During the day I worked alongside another English teacher who worked at the school full-time. Although it seems small, I knew I was a big help. The English language teachers at this school were not trained. Some of them didn't want to be there, and most of them had very poor English. Just being in the classroom and helping with pronunciation was helping the students. I was able to assist more with writing and grading homework assignments and exams and facilitating classroom activities and lessons.

Although the hours seem short, the days were long. Working within an education system that was foreign to me came with many frustrations and difficulties. In Mindo in particular, the students and schools are very different than what I am used to in the United States, which obviously made for a challenge when it came to teaching. During our training we were taught to only teach in the target language. However, once seeing my classrooms, resources, and class size, that soon became impossible. I had to use both Spanish and English in the classroom if I wanted the students to learn anything. There is no walking time between classes; therefore, by the time I walked to my next class and took attendance, I had about thirty minutes to teach. There were also many in-class frustrations that got a lot of getting used to. The students do not raise their hands. Instead, they yell out when they are finished, have a question, need help, or any other concern imaginable. It was difficult to implement rules when I was working alongside their primary teacher. I was not able to come in and establish my rules and expectations. I was there to help in someone else's class. This also made assigning homework, and punishing students for cheating difficult. Cheating, in Ecuador, is the norm and it is seen as a nice thing to do.

All of these factors were frustrating because I wanted to see my students learn something in English. I did not want to leave after six weeks without actually helping. Instead of spending my time complaining and pouting, I tried to reevaluate how I could help during my time in

Mindo. I acknowledged the fact that I was not going to change the mindsets of my huge classes in just six weeks. Therefore, I did not spend my time stressing the importance of raising hands. I implemented classroom activities that I knew would motivate my students to work hard. I made my classroom as interactive as possible, while still keeping it under control. I paid attention to the personalities of each of my classes and designed the best curriculum for each class. This wasn't easy, and it was still frustrating from time to time when the motivation to learn English was nowhere to be found among my students. However, I learned a lot about working in an international setting. I learned that I must be flexible and able to adapt my teaching and work strategies that best fit with the students sitting in front of me, or the culture in which I am working. Being able to communicate with my students in Spanish really strengthened the bond I had with them because I was able to show them the respect I had for their native language as well. I learned patience, which is important for anyone who is considering a career in education. Most importantly, I learned how difficult teaching is. It is a job of trial and error, and the same tactics won't work in every class. I had classes where I thought everyone understood the material, and then the majority of the class failed the exam. I also had students who failed the first exam, and after working with them and trying new strategies after school, they aced the second exam. This summer was rewarding, challenging, and frustrating, but it molded me and shaped me into a more dynamic, flexible, and understanding person. My patience was tested and there were days where I felt discouraged and wanted to give up on my students. However, I am beyond thankful for the experience because it challenged me. When teaching a class, there will always be students who seem unmotivated and unwilling to learn. If it weren't for these students, I would not have learned as much. Teaching was easy with my students who always got the right answer and aced every exam, but everything I learned about Ecuador and the teaching profession

came from the students who made each day a new challenge. There is something about an international internship, away from your comfort zone, that stretches you into being a more complex and open-minded person. I woke up every day knowing that I wanted to reach my students, in some way, throughout my time in Ecuador. Every day I went to school with a smile on my face, although I knew I would face the same challenges and cultural indifferences than the day before. These difficulties made me grow. Although I experienced many frustrations, I pushed my limits and worked harder, and with more love, than I ever have before. I felt at home in my small community, often times seeing my students and their families in town. It was in this rural town that I felt both the simplicity of life, and the complexities of education.