

EI Abroad: Bosque Eterno de los Niños

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Abstract

Representing the Lehigh in Costa Rica program, we interned at the Children's Eternal Rainforest, or Bosque Eterno de los Niños (BEN), in Monteverde. The BEN consists of 23,000 hectares of protected forest, making it the largest private forest reserve in all of Costa Rica. The land is maintained by the greater Monteverde Conservation League, or la Asociación Conservacionista de Monteverde. Since the league's founding in 1986, donors from more than 40 countries have helped save the forest. Through short-term purchases and long-term investments, international efforts keep the BEN as a sanctuary for the rich biodiversity that exists within the forest. While most of the forest is completely closed off from human contact, four separate operations stations lie scattered across the forest: Bajo del Tigre, Pocosol, San Gerardo, and Finca Steller. We spent five of our six weeks working in the Bajo del Tigre Station in Monteverde, just about a kilometer from the BEN's main office in Monteverde. There, we completed most of our internships duties: maintaining the BEN's facilities, promoting the BEN through social media and local outreach, completing our detailed written blog posts, and working on long-term projects for the BEN.



Our Work

In Monteverde, the rainforest was our cubicle, and our project was its protection. These circumstances provided various jobs and tasks for our internship. Frequently, our job involved promoting the nature around us to an international, digital audience. We took guided hikes through Monteverde's fraction of the BEN, sharing our resulting experiences in a multitude of media. Our forest photos were published on facebook and instagram, and our treks were journaled through a series of sixteen total blog posts on the Monteverde Conservation League's website. We strengthened our outreach further through a series of "Instagram takeovers" on the BEN's official account, wherein live, first-hand accounts of our daily responsibilities were broadcasted to BEN's 2,000-plus followers. Audiences joined us in exploring Costa Rica's wildlife, its people, and the connection between them both.

When we weren't marketing the rainforest itself, we maintained and improved the BEN's facilities to make a more enjoyable visitor experience. We partnered with volunteer groups, fostering personal connections while working on the forest's trails. Additionally, we completed several necessary renovations for the BEN's trails. With BEN's environmental educator, Maria Fernanda, we taught the importance of the rainforest to elementary and college students alike. We hope that these efforts will help to create a more informed and fulfilling experience for all who visit.



Impact

Though six short weeks comprised our time with the Children's Eternal Rainforest, we feel that our internship was equally valuable to ourselves and our employers. Our jobs provided experiential learning even in the off-hours, when we would return to our Spanish-speaking homestays for crash courses in a new language. The delicate, daily care of scientists, park guards, and nature-enthusiasts alike has inspired us to think with the environment's well-being in mind.

We hope that our long-term projects for the Children's Eternal Rainforest will continue to benefit the organization. Individual skill sets led us to two separate projects. One involved the creation of an interactive, visitor photo upload and feedback system. Visitors to the BEN can now scan a QR code and provide photos from their excursion in the rainforests. After their photos are submitted, they are encouraged to provide constructive feedback about their own experience. All photos are stored in a repository, where the best among them can be posted on the BEN's social media. All feedback is stored in conveniently structured ".csv" data files, so that future interns with experience in data-oriented thinking can create statistical models for future evaluation. This system was created in Spanish and English.

Our other project helped environmental education through creation of new, educational activities for Bajo del Tigre's "Casita," or "children's house." Information from previous activities was also updated to reflect new environmental findings. Overall, we hope that each project leaves a positive impact, and that both can advance the BEN's crucial preservation efforts.