

Galapagos Newsletter



Grapsus grapsus

“Zayapa” sun bathing on the rock



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May 2013

NEW HELP...!!

It is May already and we have started extra outdoor activities on San Cristobal Island, including great projects run by our dedicated volunteers, such as in the Care Project, where we are working with autistic children, or sports projects, and in May our volunteers built a pond for drinking water for one of the giant tortoises called Genesis. Genesis was the first tortoise to be born in the Tortoise Breeding Centre, in the Highlands above the town. There you can walk with giant tortoises and study them for hours, without causing them any stress. You can see all sizes, from ones as big as your hand, to the giant ones. There is never a dull moment on the island, even if it is one of the smallest places you might ever find yourself living in, 600 kms. From the nearest large city on the mainland. The number of volunteers coming here keeps increasing, Projects Abroad's activities in Ecuador are really picking up and it is becoming a favourite destination for potential volunteers.



William Puga
Country Director

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MONTH ACTIVITY

Genesis, San Cristobal Island's Giant Tortoise

La Galapageura is a tortoise breeding centre in the Highlands of San Cristobal Island in the Galapagos. There, trained staff look after and breed giant tortoises in their own special garden. Amongst the animals is one tortoise called 'Genesis', who belongs to the species *Geochelone Elephantopus San Chatamensis*, which is found in the north east of the island, both within the centre and in the protected land outside it, which can only be visited with special permission from the Galapagos National Park. At the moment, there are only about 500 to 700 tortoises left in the whole world from this species, so they are nearly as endangered as Lonesome George was. Eggs are kept in incubators until they hatch, when the young tortoises are fed in special cages, until they are old enough to be moved into the centre's grounds. If you go there, you can walk beside them and watch them for a long time, without causing any stress to them. They are very curious creatures, that sometimes stare back at you if you stay still. You have to be careful about where you step, because sometimes they look like large rocks, and are easy to trip over if you don't look where you are going!! At one time, the eggs were being eaten by donkeys, cats, dogs and rats, amongst other animals, so eggs were taken from wild nests and hatched in the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island, before the breeding centre on San Cristobal Island was established. In 1979, 139 young giant tortoises were returned to the island and 13 were kept at the centre. Recently volunteers from Projects Abroad helped build a pond for drinking water for Genesis, a symbol for all the other endangered inhabitants of the Galapagos.



LIVE IN THE GALAPAGOS

By Hayley Sherlock, United Kingdom, 2 months



Having had no experience in teaching at all and very basic Spanish, 'going in blind' seemed a fitting way to describe the first few days of volunteering to teach English. However, when I was first led in to a class full of Spanish-speaking children, they greeted me enthusiastically and I immediately felt at ease. The other volunteers also helping teach that lesson appeared calm and relaxed and readily offered me advice and tips on the best ways to communicate with the children and to use topics they thought would be good to teach.



Four weeks later and now an expert on applying sun cream, that first daunting day walking into the lesson seems a distant memory. Preparing lesson plans, materials and games to play with the children seems like second nature and my Spanish is improving - YAY!

The best part is getting to know the children's personalities and having a laugh with them. The amazement on their faces when I told them some people in Britain own two or three cars was priceless. Most of them are really eager to learn and progress quickly, which as a teacher becomes really satisfying; it's great to see firsthand the difference you are making.



LIVING IN PARADISE

By Katharina Füellsack, Germany, 6 months



After living on the Island of San Cristobal for 4 months, I feel that I have settled in. If you think life could get boring on a tiny island like this really quickly, I can assure you of the contrary.

In the mornings I work from 8 to 12 noon. In the beginning, I worked as an assistant sports teacher in a school. During the summer vacation, Projects Abroad organised a summer camp for the kids, where I was teaching sports and arts. Now that school has started again, I am taking care of 4 year old kids in a kindergarten. There I also have the possibility of working with an autistic kid who has to go to a “normal” school because there is no school for disabled kids. By giving him all my

attention, I feel that I can actually help him cope with the challenges of daily life.

I eat lunch with my family at home (which is mostly soup and afterwards a portion of rice with either fish or chicken). After lunch everybody in San Cristobal has a siesta. Most of the time I sleep for a while too. I spend the afternoons with my friends. Sometimes we go to the beach; there are three beautiful ones here, where we can go snorkeling, surfing (we can't do that), sunbathing or just swimming. The presence of sea lions, iguanas, a thousand different kinds of birds and, if you are lucky, some turtles, is guaranteed. If we don't go to the beach, we stroll on the Malecon, meet to bake different kinds of cakes, do our nails, make bracelets or try to improve our Spanish by studying a little bit. Every night from 7 to 8 there is Samba for everybody. My host mother takes me there with her friend and a lot of other volunteers come too. If there is some time before Samba, I usually go for a run to Loberia, my favourite beach here. It's a nice way to run along the landing strip for the airplanes, and as a reward you get to see the sea. If I'm not too tired after dinner, I usually watch a DVD with my family.

Life with my family gives me the opportunity to get to know the culture and learn the language, but also they make me feel comfortable and at home. I feel like a part of their family.



CONSERVATION PROJECT

By Sisse Kristensen, Denmark, 2 months



I am taking part in conservation work in the Galapagos Islands for two months. This region is the perfect place for it because a lot of the animals and plants are endemic, and can't be found anywhere else. The animals are very tame and this makes the experience unique. Because of our work on the conservation project, we get to see and learn a lot about the animals and plants. We work with the National Park employees in their greenhouse, in La Galapaguera, the place where giant tortoises live and breed, and in El Junco, where the lake is. We also work in Projects Abroad's nursery, where we are developing a botanical garden with endemic plants for the kids. The work is physical and after a day's work we are tired.

My experience with the culture has been great too. The Ecuadorian people are very friendly, open and helpful. Living with a host family is a great way to learn about the culture. I will never forget my two months here in the Galapagos. It has been great being surrounded by amazing people, beautiful nature and interesting animals. I



will go home with memories of an eye-opening experience, and I can strongly



recommend people to come here.



Updated pictures from different Projects and activities



- HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY AT THE SCHOOL



Congratulations for your outstanding performances

If you have anything you'd like to suggest, about our work please contact ecuador@projects-abroad.org

Best wishes from Ecuador!