

## Toucan Rescue Ranch – Final Report

When I was planning for my internship I thought it would be best to get to Costa Rica as soon as possible, and so I booked my flight to arrive the Sunday after finals week. In retrospect I think I should have waited a day, especially since the ranch isn't open on Sunday for tours so the staff is bare minimum. I arrived at the ranch at round 8 am right after the day had started for the interns. I was given a very brief introduction to the interns and was promptly shown to the volunteer house where I would be staying so I could get settled in. It was at this point when I was left alone in a strange house, in a strange place that I started to feel as though I had made a huge mistake. Granted I was missing my family terribly and I was extremely sleep deprived due to my red-eye flight, but I was honestly questioning my ability to stay the full 10 weeks. The next day was my first day of work where I actually got to meet more of the regular staff and got to really explore the ranch. One of the most interesting things for me was the fact that it was legitimately located in the middle of a neighborhood. I had read the past intern reports where they had said the exact same thing but it was hard to picture what exactly that would look like until I saw it for myself. It helps once you know that the ranch is actually located in Leslie and Jorge's backyard, this means their house is on the property. It was also quite overwhelming to know how much food the ranch went through to feed the animals, and I honestly thought I would never be able to remember where all the trays went and who they were for. Just to give you a picture: the ranch goes through about 100 kg of papaya every week, and 160 kg of beans, this doesn't even include all of the other food that we give to the animals. My first day was also a little different than most, for most their first day is spent in the kitchen cutting papaya and

prepping all of the food, since we were so low on volunteers I was sent outside for most of my first week.

I would say that initially I had an ok grip on the Spanish language. I knew how to ask the important questions, like “where is the bathroom” and how to ask for directions. I could also have some very basic conversations. Through my time at the ranch my actual ability to speak Spanish didn’t improve that much because for the most part everyone spoke English. The only people who didn’t were Ivette the kitchen boss, and her daughter Elena, other than that even the native Spanish speakers spoke English and it made important conversations much easier for everyone if they were in English since there were a few people who didn’t speak Spanish at all. However, my ability to understand Spanish got much better, it was very helpful that a lot of times I could hear words that I knew and then be able to figure out what they meant from just having an understanding of the ranch that I could then match the words I didn’t know and it would help with translating. One thing all volunteer should know is that Ivette is one of the nicest humans in the entire world and loves to help you learn. It can definitely be nerve racking to have to speak a different language to someone is a native speaker but she is amazing at helping you understand, and she loves it when you make the effort to speak Spanish to her. I think the biggest thing that I learned here was that I could actually see myself working with wildlife and really enjoying my work. I always thought that I would go into small animal and eventually open my own clinic, however getting to work with the wildlife here has really been an extreme joy. It also showed me that I am not as interested in working with birds. I still think they are amazing creatures, but seeing the kind of work that is done on birds I don’t think it is the right fit for me. While I have been here I have actually gotten very close with the on-site vet

and am always asking her questions. Since she knows that I have a real interest in going into the veterinary medicine field she is always having me help out and is more than willing to answer all of my questions, as well as have discussions with me about what treatment options she thinks are best and why. Ana has been one of the best parts of working here at TRR and I am so lucky to have someone so patient and willing to teach me. One of the biggest things I have learned about myself is that I am more capable than I thought I was. Having been in this country alone for almost ten weeks now I have gotten much more comfortable in traveling by myself and doing things on my own. Back in the states I never really wanted to do anything by myself, I always wanted a friend to come with me, but now I know that I am capable of going out on my own and making the best of the situation whatever it may be. The greatest challenge was really getting to this point where I feel this way. The first time I rode the bus to San Jose by myself I was honestly terrified, but once I went out and had a great day exploring by myself and knowing I had made it there by my own abilities it really helped me see that I could do it. This whole experience is one I will never forget and the greatest reward is feeling confident in my own abilities and knowing I can be put in a strange place, with people I have never met and make a home for myself and make friends that will last a lifetime.

I can confidently say that this internship was one of the best things I have ever done, but that doesn't mean it came without hardships. Personally one of the biggest challenges was just being away from my family and friends for as long as I was. While it was nice to get the constant "I miss you" messages, there was a certain point where it just started to make me sad. Luckily developing friendships at the ranch and going out to do fun stuff together made that easier to deal with. The biggest challenge by far was how tiring the job is. There is something so

physically and mentally exhausting about waking up at 6 am every day and working your tail off and then doing it all over again. My time at the ranch was interesting because for most of my time I was the only long term volunteer. I had a lot of days where I was the only volunteer and when that happens you literally barely get anything done and it can get very frustrating to not be getting cleaning done because just taking care of the animals takes all day. Due to me being to only volunteer for most of my time, I was in charge of training all of the new volunteers, and it was also on me to make sure that everything was done correctly and in a timely manner. At the end of my internship I was actually put into the position of kitchen boss when Ivette had days off because I was the one who knew how everything worked. For the most part I became the boss of the Toucan team as well as helping the Sloth team when they went from three people to two. By the end on my internship I was no longer just a Toucan Team volunteer and instead was a hybrid of toucan team member, boss, and sloth team assistant. Personally I did whatever was asked of me, so they knew that if someone needed help I would be there ready to do it.

The workplace culture at the ranch is really that of a close-knit group of friends, maybe even a family. For many of the people at the ranch they spend most if not almost all their time there and you get really close with the people that you are seeing every day. In the position that I had I didn't have a direct mentor per say, however I did have a few people that I checked in with on different aspects. One of the biggest mentors for me was the on-site vet. She was always so willing to help me learn and is the one who brought me onto the Sloth team when she needed it. The thing I am most proud of is my work in the clinic and the fact that she trusts me to help with treatments when she needs it. Whenever they need help in the clinic I get

called in, for me having the trust of the vet to know that I will follow instructions and know what to do is priceless. I also received support from my IE3 advisor, there were regular check-ins and if anything was happening, even if it wasn't close to me she checked in with me just to make sure everything was ok. She was always very supportive, and was a great person to bounce questions off of.

Coming to Costa Rica I really didn't know what to expect exactly, I honestly thought that I would be in a small town and would have more interaction with the local people. This is far from the truth as San Josecito (the closest mini town) and San Isidro actually have a relatively large population – at least larger than I had pictured. I had hoped to learn more Spanish by being exposed to it, but at the ranch they really mainly speak English, mostly because most of the locals are fluent in English and so it doesn't make sense to stumble through Spanish when we can communicate much easier in English. One of the most frustrating things about Costa Rica is the constant cat-calling, staring and honking. I thought it wouldn't phase me at all, but it was something that has gotten on my nerves since it happened every time that I left the house. There was one situation where I was walking down the street and a man probably 40-50 years my senior started catcalling me. I was so shocked I didn't even know how to respond. However, the people I have met here that are locals all have extreme respect for nature and animal life, obviously that is a little skewed working at the ranch, but even those outside of the ranch really enjoy talking about how beautiful the nature is in their country. As someone who appreciates nature this was such a refreshing and wonderful outlook for people to have.

Here at the ranch the general schedule for the volunteers is you work 5 days a week and have 2 days off in a row. As far as my experience you do not really get days off with other

interns, however we have been very short staffed for the month of April so I think with more people you would have a couple of days off with other people. Every day work starts at 7 with the daily meeting, they normally start directly at seven, and sometimes before so it is important to be on time. There are two main jobs: outside and kitchen. The kitchen means helping with preparing all the food for the morning feeding. Working outside we go collect all of the food trays and clean their water. Once a week the water trays are washed in the kitchen. After collecting there is normally about 30 minutes which I use to feed and clean the enclosures to the small birds we have on the porch. I will also help with dishing out all of the food into the correct trays. It can take a while to learn the amounts, but you start to pick it up pretty quickly. Once all of the main animals are fed we feed the guinea pigs, chickens, rabbits, ducks, and pheasants. Once everyone is fed, if we have time we start the cleaning for the day. There are a few enclosures that need to be swept every day and some that only need cleaning every few days to every week or so. We normally clean until about 12/12:30 at which point we have lunch, and then we do top-up, afternoon feeding, and feed the raptors. We normally finish anywhere between 2:30-3:30 depending on the amount of cleaning that needed to get done and the number of people we have. After work I will normally go to the little store nearby to get little things like a diet coke, or some chocolate. After my walk I come back to the house and take a much needed shower and change into comfy and clean clothes. After that I will hang out and talk to friends and family, read a book, or watch some Netflix. Around 7 I eat dinner and then I am normally in bed on my phone just hanging out. Since you wake up at six each morning you tend to go to sleep pretty early so I am normally in bed by about 9. It is a little hard to be motivated to do anything after work because you work long hard hours but it can also be boring



just sitting in the house doing nothing. I normally try and do something big once a week, normally on my day off. It is really nice that you have two days off because it gives you one day to catch up on sleep and not do much and then the other one you can go do something fun with friends.

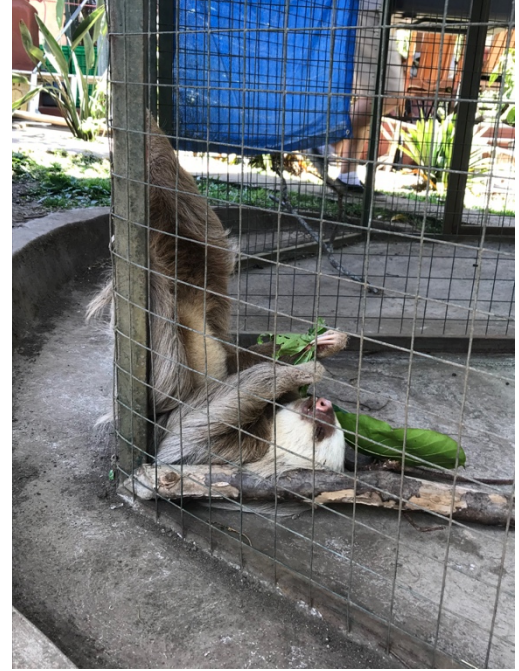
Me and Maria a Tour guide



The Volunteer House



Adult Sloth Eating (Milo)



Toucan Rescue Ranch Front Gate



High School Sloths in a bucket