



Saturday, July 28th

Our day began very early in the morning as we left for the airport. After a few hours of flying, we finally arrived in San Jose, Costa Rica. We were greeted by Joel and Chente from Agua Viva, and we prepared to make the long journey from San Jose to Los Chiles, where we would be staying for the week. We drove through a lot of beautiful scenery as we left the city behind and headed into the mountains. We stopped for lunch across the road from a cloud-filled valley and enjoyed a very authentic Costa Rican meal of chicken, rice, beans, fried yucca, sweet plantains, and salad.

Afterwards, we hit the road until we reached Carolina's Hotel in Los Chiles.

Sunday, July 29th

On Sunday, we woke up and ate breakfast before making the 15 minute walk through town to the local Methodist Church. Walking through Los Chiles was fascinating because it is not one of the tourist towns that most people experience when they go to Costa Rica. Los Chiles is a very authentic representation of how most Costa Ricans live. The houses are painted vibrant colors, there's lots of wild plant life in all of the yards, and the dogs roam free on their own. We arrived at the church and took our seats and we listened as the service began with songs played on acoustic guitar and sung in Spanish. Next, the pastor welcomed us and gave his sermon in Spanish while Byron, an Agua Viva member, translated for us. We were very appreciative of how much time and effort it took for the pastor's sermon to be translated to us live into English, but he was very insistent that he wanted us to hear his message. Though we couldn't understand his Spanish, we could feel the passion and the energy that he spoke with. When the service was over, we went outside and everyone was talking and socializing while the children were running around and playing. We noticed that even during the sermon, the little kids were free to roam around. Visiting the church and experiencing the service was important because we got to see the sense of community and passion that the people felt.



A few hours later we went on a boat tour down a river in Los Chiles. We saw a wide variety of birds, iguanas, Jesus Christ lizards (lizards that can walk on water), howler and white-faced monkeys, and even a sloth. The white-faced monkeys got close to the boat and rocked the branches to scare us away. The howler monkeys made very loud and imposing sounds, especially considering their tiny size. After the tour we walked back to the hotel through Los Chiles, but first we stopped at the supermarket. We noticed the huge variety of items that the supermarket sold, which made sense considering it probably supplied a very large amount of people.



Monday, July 30th

On Monday we got to work. We woke up bright and early and rode out to La Guaria, a 2-3 hour drive. Once we got off of the highway, we had to abandon a couple of the cars because they simply wouldn't be able to handle the roads that we had to take. A bunch of us piled in the back of the truck as we rode through miles upon miles of pineapple plantations that stretched as far as the eye could see. We drove past tractors transporting workers to and from various sections of the plantations

and semi-trucks hauling tons of freshly harvested pineapples all on the same little dirt road. We took a break from precariously driving through the mud as some of the Agua Viva staff gathered some pineapples. We all agreed that the pineapples from the grocery stores back home don't taste half as good as freshly-picked Costa Rican pineapples eaten off a pocket knife.

When we finally made it to La Guaria we drove past the school, and we noticed that all the kids were using laptops. Seeing that really made us think about what true poverty looks like. Despite the fact that most of the kids didn't have a clean source of drinking water, they were learning using laptops at school. We split up into different groups and worked on connecting houses to the existing pipe system. This job involved not only a lot of digging, but also a lot of bailing water as the rain had filled in many of the ditches.

For lunch we went to a little farm house, where a family cooked for us. They were cooking using a charcoal stove. The food was fantastic and the family was very friendly and welcoming. We all enjoyed the hilarious company of Douglas, the little kid who lived there. After lunch we went back to work for a few hours before making the journey back to Los Chiles. During our devotion that night, we found out that we had all learned a lot. We discovered a lot about the nature of poverty and what it looks like in the real world. We were very impressed with the kindness and the sense of community that the locals displayed while we were working in their town. We were also given an appreciation for manual labor and the kind of work that the people of La Guaria have to do every single day working in the pineapple fields.



Tuesday, July 31st

On Tuesday we split into two groups. One group went back to La Guaria to continue working. The other group went to an English class at a school called INA at a catholic church in Los Chiles. The students at INA were studying English because it allowed them to get jobs in tourism or call centers. Knowing English is a trade that is very valuable in Costa Rica. We each paired up with a group of students and talked to them for a couple of hours. We got to

know them very well. They had an assignment that required them to interview a native English speaker, so some of them interviewed us on a particular subject about American culture. Some examples of subjects that they were researching are Easter, individualism, and the lives of teenagers.

After this, we formed different groups and we helped the students study for a test they had coming up on "phrasal verbs". Phrasal verbs are verbs made of more than one word such as "come over", "throw away", or "make up". We helped them understand the meanings and contexts of these phrases. This activity was particularly interesting because these phrases are all second nature to us, but to new English speakers they don't make much sense and can be difficult to learn. Later that night we discussed the relationships that we had formed with the students and the similarities we saw between us and them. We also talked about how great their English was, which showed how dedicated they were to learning. The fact that learning English was almost a necessity to them was very interesting. It was an extremely valuable experience to get to connect with the students at INA.



Wednesday, August 1st

On Wednesday the groups switched, so some of us went to the English school and the other half went out to La Guaria. This time we were laying new pipe in trenches dug by a backhoe that had been lent to the town by the government. After the pipes were glued and connected, they were covered up with a small layer of dirt and the backhoe would fill in the rest. The heat was particularly brutal, which made the work a little bit more taxing. Connecting the 20-

foot pipes was no easy task but we got pretty good at it throughout the day. When we were finished working and ready to go home, we could see just how much pipe we had laid over the last several hours and it was rewarding to see how much progress we were making each day.





Thursday, August 2nd

On Thursday our whole group was back together again. We headed out to La Guaria for one final day of work. We worked all morning connecting more pipes, covering them up, and making new connections to the houses. After lunch, we were able to go to the school in La Guaria to play with the kids there. The younger kids were painting while the other kids played soccer out in the mud. This was a really fun experience, but perhaps the best part was watching them all play in the rushing water from the water tower to clean off the mud.

That evening, we met up with the Agua Viva staff, their families, and their friends for a game of soccer in Los Chiles. We predictably didn't play quite as well as the Costa Ricans, but we loved playing with them and once again being able to connect with the people who live there.

- Friday, August 3rd**

On Friday we left Los Chiles and drove to La Fortuna, which is far larger and more touristy. We had fun on the chocolate and coffee tours and riding ATVs. It was interesting to contrast the tourism hub of La Fortuna with the small, more normal towns that we had been living in for the past week. It was also interesting to talk with the tour guides and hotel employees knowing that they had probably gone through a rigorous English course at a technical school similar to the one we had visited so they could work in these jobs.





Saturday, August 4th

Saturday was a long day of travel which entailed a lot of driving, flying, and waiting. But while we were waiting in the airport, we were able to have a big debriefing and go over everything we had enjoyed and learned on this mission. To say that we learned a lot would be an understatement. One thing we noticed and admired was the resilience and the grit that the locals displayed. It was clear that they were no stranger to hard labor and strenuous physical activity. Seeing them work tirelessly in the mud, seemingly immune to the heat and

humidity, was humbling. We also gained a lot of perspective by talking with the English students and forming those relationships. We noticed how similar we are to them but also how different our lives can be. Some of the things that are scarce and valuable to them are things that we tend to take for granted. For instance, access to books is something that is quite challenging for them, but isn't even on our minds. We experienced first-hand that material poverty doesn't necessarily mean that they have nothing. Despite their lack of clean water, the people of La Guaria had a strong community, strong work ethics, and a strong focus on education. We also recognized that we wouldn't have experienced any of this growth had we not made the trip to Costa Rica and immersed ourselves in the communities that we were trying to help. Even though we had a general idea of what we might learn, interacting with the people and forming relationships with them is what really allowed us to grow, allowed us to alter our perspectives, and allowed us to reevaluate all that we have and remain grateful.

