



Hi all,

It's hard to believe that only a month ago we were returning from our adventure in the Peruvian Amazon. Now that we're back into the routine of life in the United States, it feels like the expedition to Peru was just a dream (except for the mosquito bites to which I am still tending). I think I can speak for all travelers when I say that we really had the trip of a lifetime. I want to thank the parents, guardians, businesses and students who worked hard to finance our expedition. I know the financial cost can be great, but I have no doubt that the knowledge gained and conservation efforts funded are well worth the expense.

For me, the best memory of the trip is watching my students develop skills, self-reliance and friendships over our ten days together. Each student went to Peru with different levels of understanding and abilities related to conservation field work. I loved watching the confidence in my students' blossom over the week. Each student faced their own personal challenges (for example: sickness, physical limitations, mosquitos) with a "growth mindset". In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. I am proud of the students for facing their challenges head on and viewing them as opportunities for learning and personal development.

Each night we were in Peru, we all wrote short reflections on our experiences for the day. Here are a few of the highlights:



Sang songs
while on a boat going
down the Amazon
River for the 1st time

Seeing the stars,
with no lights
and no noise. One of
the most surreal
moments of my life.

I saw leafcutter
ants for the first
time

Standing out
on the sundeck
and looking out
onto the shore.

First time in Peru
😊

I learned to identify
macaws ~~among~~ by
their sound and
coloring!

I appreciate VB, Mrs.
Nelson, and my parents
for sending me here

I'M THANKFUL TO
HAVE DRINKABLE, CLEAN,
RUNNING WATER
AT HOME...

I saw monkeys in
the wild for the
first time

I loved the three
silent minutes
on the boat.
First time I've seen
so many stars.

I learned that
Pirañas are very
clever... and hard to
catch! ☹️

I'm grateful for
all the wonderful
people on this trip,
and the opportunities
we've been given as
a part of this
expedition!

I'm thankful
for the chance to
have seen the stars
at night on the
Amazon

I am thankful
for the friends
I've made on
this trip. I hope
the friendships
continue when we're
back home.

I learned about
the differences between
flooded forest and
upland forest.

I am thank
for all of
friendship
built with

I HIKED IN THE
AMAZON JUNGLE FOR
THE FIRST TIME.

~~Collecting~~ Collecting
Data on the
dolphins and
recording the
information
into the database

I learned that
fish are big
contributors to seed
dispersal when the
forest floods.

I learned how
to play more
card + mind game
than I can even
remember, thanks
Andy!

I learned how
the Amazon
basin was
formed and
why there are
dolphins in
the river.

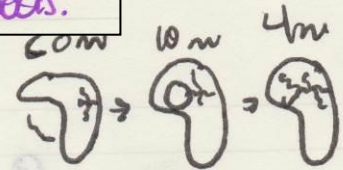
I learned that
gray dolphins are
a much more modern
species than pink
river dolphins

I am thankful
for air conditioning
and flushing
toilets.

I learned that
fishing is a lot
harder than I
remember from
when I was little

I am thankful
for Amazonian
rainstorms.

I saw a
sloth for
the 1st
time



geographic
isolation

I learned that
I love the ~~smell~~
~~and view~~ of
smell + view of
a million trees
w/ not a single
building in sight

I have learned to
be happy with less.
And that to live
without social media
is like a gift in
and of itself.

I APPRECIATE
EVERYONE'S
POSITIVE ATTITUDE!



I really enjoyed
the deep talk under
the stars during
bats tonight.

I also very much enjoyed the cultural connections the trip afforded. Students experienced a community in which personal connections, rather than possessions, were most valued.



At the end of our expedition, I asked students to reflect on how being in Peru had forced them to consider what they value in their lives in the United States. None of the students focused on missing material goods from home (cell phones, computers, TV, car and electricity), rather, the learning was much more personal and profound. For me, the learning outlined below makes the time and money spent on this kind expedition worth it. I'll highlight a few of the anonymous responses here:

Understand that life isn't always linear. Sometimes you just have to throw caution to the wind and believe in yourself that you'll eventually get to where you're supposed to be.....

Remember how communication did not always have to be in words, but rather in smiles. Remember that life is not about things, but about people.

Go tell someone you love that you love them, and that you're grateful for everything they do for you. Go dance in the rain, do something spontaneous, and make someone's day. Don't let the little things get to you.

You are happy. I am happy. We are happy.
Purely, genuinely happy. The little worries of
yesterday have faded away, and the bumps
in the road today won't get you (me?) down.
I hope you still feel this way. I hope
you still recognized what's important in
life. Let your little stressors fade, they
aren't worth it. Remember this trip. Go.

ALL I WANT TO DO IS GO MAKE AN
IMPACT ON THE WORLD AND DO SOMETHING I'M
GOING TO BE PROUD OF.

There is beauty in the human kind
that you have just realized. After being welcomed by
dirty Bolivian children onshore and danced and
play games with them; After playing the best volleyball
games of your life with 6 strangers that cannot verbally
communicate... you have realized that we are
not very different.

What's next? Earthwatch would like to hear from the students through a [Survey Monkey survey](#) asking for an evaluation of the expedition. Additionally, I would encourage any of the students to consider joining us next year on another expedition.

Again, thank you for giving the gift of a lifetime to our kids.

Cheers,

Gretel von Bargaen



