

## **Students Catch a Wave in Costa Rica**

Some students travel to popular ski lodges to enjoy the slopes during winter break or travel out of state to visit family for the holidays. Others go surfing.

The group of nine students, most of whom were members of the USF St. Petersburg Board Club, spent twelve days basking in the sunlight of Quepos, Costa Rica, along the northern Pacific coast, practicing their surfing skills and enjoying the scenery.

“It was just the Board Club originally, and we got a bunch of cool people to go,” said senior Amanda Hoff, a psychology major who came up with the idea. “It was a lot of fun.”

During their trip, students took time to explore Manuel Antonio National Park, one of Costa Rica’s biggest tourist attractions, where they enjoyed a Titi Canopy Tour – a tour of the jungle canopy by way of zip-line followed by a hike to a nearby waterfall.

“We saw a couple different species of monkeys,” said sophomore Emelia McNally, an elementary education major who had experienced zip-lines before this trip. “It was a really amazing view. It was really cool and I enjoyed it.”

Back at the beach, surfing lessons were taught by sophomore Brent Stephens, a criminology major who had surfed with friends in Costa Rica on two previous occasions.

“The surf wasn’t huge this time,” said Stephens, describing his first trip to Costa Rica where he was surprised to see swells up to 16 feet high at Playa Negra, another beach.

Stephens described how different the easygoing attitude in Costa Rica is from the often hectic lifestyles of people in the United States, saying that most people they encountered wore nothing more than swimsuits and flip flops.

“Everyone’s there to be real happy and have a good time,” said Stephens.

Hoff and McNally talked about a more stressful experience during the trip when the group realized they weren’t the only ones surfing.

“There were crocodiles in the ocean, and a local Costa Rican man had to come chase them away,” said Hoff

“I asked a kid if they attacked often,” said McNally. “I didn’t even see it but I heard him yell in Spanish, ‘cocodrilo’, and I was out of there.”

To save on money, the group stayed in a nearby youth hostel, costing each of them a mere \$10 per night. They were able to save more money by using local buses to get to different beaches and attractions.

McNally said she had spent between \$600 and \$700 on the entire trip, including the airfare from Tampa, twelve nights in the youth hostel, activities and food.

“It’s cheap to begin with, but taxes were extremely high,” said McNally, mentioning that a 13 percent government tax had been added to her bill at a local restaurant in addition to an included 10 percent gratuity rate.

McNally also said the Costa Rican government charged a \$27 exit fee for anyone leaving the country.

Besides such financial inconveniences, the group really enjoyed their time in Costa Rica.

“The food was incredible; everything was mahi mahi,” said Hoff, describing other perks of the vacation. “The weather was always in the 80s and 90s.”

“We spent a lot of time just hanging out on the beach. The hostel had a really beautiful porch that overlooked the water,” said McNally.

Hoff talked about an unexpected nuisance the group later encountered during their trip.

“The monkeys were everywhere in the trees,” she said, mentioning that they had crept so close as to steal some of their snacks.

Stephens said the Board Club would like to plan other trips where participants could hone their surfing skills, and also hopes to do a snowboarding trip later this semester.

“Anything we can get our hands on we’d want to try to do,” said Stephens.

Hoff agreed.

“Maybe we can get more instructors and get more people to do another surf trip,” she said. “A lot of people enjoyed it.”

Whether it’s surfing the cool waters of the Pacific, hiking to exotic waterfalls, exploring a jungle by zip-line or chasing monkeys away from your food supply, Costa Rica has much to offer for those seeking a quick getaway.

“Just go out and do it,” said Stephens. “I always try to make time to go to new places. It’s always nice to get away from the normal for a little bit.”