



Megan

From Burlington Lakeshore

to Brazil

*Tired, Muddy, Stung by Fire Ants, You Learn to Savour it All*

Here it is; my last beaver tail of my exchange. Wow, it seems just yesterday I arrived here and was fascinated by all the things I saw. Now, I am accustomed to my surroundings and I am about to return to Canada. Just shows you how fast time goes by.

I currently have a month left and I am spending it wisely!

Last month I went on the most amazing trip of my exchange. I spent nine days in the Amazon Rainforest with 70 other inbounds. I have to say it was one of the most amazing times of my life. We started off the trip with a 5 star hotel, just for one night unfortunately. But, the hotel was really pretty. Apparently it looked like the hotel from "The Shining", but I haven't seen that movie so I wouldn't know. Some inbounds were pretty freaked out though. We just spent that day waiting for the 70 inbounds to come pouring in from the airport in Manaus. I met up with some old faces and was introduced to a bunch of others, everyone was awesome. The next day we ended up going to a little hotel in the middle of nowhere, the kind where the rooms are all separate buildings. That night we took an adventurous night hike into the pitch black rainforest. When I say pitch black, I mean the kind of pitch blackness where you see

nothing past your flashlight. I fell about 3 times, but I was fine! At the midpoint of the hike, we stopped to swim in a water fall. This waterfall was hidden away in a cave and it was gorgeous. Unfortunately that was where I broke my camera. Long story made short; I fell into the water with it in my hand. After four hours of hiking and swimming we arrived back at the hotel, all of us tired, muddy and exhausted. The rest of the trip was spent on a double-decker boat, three double-decker boats to be exact. The seventy inbounds were split into three groups and we all stayed on them for 6 nights. We slept in hammocks and the hammocks were actually very comfortable!

On our stay on the boats we did so many things that everyday had something interesting and fun to do. One day we visited a native village in the middle of nowhere. It was really interesting, they had their own dialect and they taught us about their own unique culture. Each Amazonian village has their own special culture that differentiates them from the others. This village had a ritual that to turn a boy into a man, he needs to get his hand bit by these gigantic fire ants fourteen times. We got a chance to look at the type of ants; they were about the size of your thumb nail. I got bit by some normal sized fire ants, and it stung so much, I couldn't imagine the pain of getting bit by fourteen of those huge ants. They also had a little market of crafts they have made for the tourists that have a chance to pass through their village. It offered bracelets, necklaces and other jewellery. They also did tattoos as well by staining the skin with this fruit juice.

I got to hold a monkey which was pretty amazing. They had it as a pet, which was even more amazing I thought. Another activity we participated in was swimming with pink dolphins! It was so cool; we had to stand on this submerged deck in the water while the man drew them in with fish. He held our hands up to them and they felt so weird! Then we had the chance to swim off the deck and move around in the river. We would get so excited and scared when we felt something against our feet, knowing it was a dolphin. The rest of the trip we spent fishing for piranhas, walking in the forest, and enjoying life on the river with all the other exchange students.

The last weeks have been really busy. I have been to two Rotary conferences in two different cities in the North East of Brazil. The first conference was in a city called Maceio, it was a four hour drive to the city and I went with all the 6 inbounds in my city.

All we had to do was go for a day and talk in front of a crowd. We introduced ourselves and did a little presentation. Unfortunately, we had to leave the next day to go back to my city.

After a few days I travelled again to another city by plane for another conference. This conference wasn't part of my district but a lot of inbounds that I have grown to love were there and it was my last chance to see some of them. I travelled with the Finnish girl from my city and we had an amazing time. We stayed at a hotel with all the other 50 inbounds and it was so much fun. Rotary was so awesome because they covered the funds for our hotel. Thanks so much Rotary.

So since this Beaver Tail is my last and I am going home very soon, I would like to thank Rotary in Canada and Brazil for making this experience happen. Thanks to Burlington Lakeshore for sponsoring me, and thank you to Paulo who took care of me all throughout my year in Brazil. Words can't express what you learn on this exchange. This year will be the best and worst year of your life, because you learn to love and live in a culture that you are thrown into. You make friendships that you will never forget but then at the end of your year, you have to say goodbye to all of it. So any outbound or future outbound reading this, just remember to savour everything about your exchange.

*Megan*