

Abriendo Mentas Testimonial

My fiancé Kate and I spent the better part of June and July working with Abriendo Mentas, and it could not have been a better experience. We decided to spend 2 months away from home, and after doing some research, chose Costa Rica as our destination. After contacting a number of non-profit organizations throughout the country, we chose Abriendo Mentas because we felt confident in the organization, and particularly, in the founders, Meradith and Drew. They were very responsive to our questions and concerns before the trip, and made us feel that we'd be welcome and helpful in Potrero.

Upon arriving in Costa Rica, we immediately felt very comfortable. Potrero is a small, quiet, and safe beach town. The people are happy, and because it is near a number of tourist destinations, we never felt like we were unwelcome.



Working at Abriendo Mentas, we quickly became comfortable with the kids (and vice-versa). The students who participate in the program could not be a sweeter group. They enjoy life and, despite being young, seem to appreciate the hard work that goes into teaching them English, a language that hardly any of their parents understand.

We found the day-to-day activities of Abriendo Mentas to be extremely enjoyable. It is a relaxed atmosphere with a focus on learning – but also one where everyone has fun. The lessons varied from daily work on basic English (with a highlight being two boys who always responded to the question of “How do you feel today” by saying “I feel estroooooong” while flexing their 6 year old biceps) to arts and crafts to piñatas to songs to games of ‘pato, pato,

ganso.’

On the last day of our first month there, we threw the kids a carnival including a cakewalk, pin the tail on the donkey, and an amazingly successful water balloon toss (which, not surprisingly, eventually turned into a water balloon fight).



Meradith and Drew are not only great teachers; they are great hosts as well. Being in a foreign land, we constantly had questions about the country, travelling, and daily life in Potrero -- and they were extremely helpful. They've lived in Costa Rica long enough to know where to go/what to do (and what to avoid), and they made us feel like part of the community.

Additionally, they let us take ownership of our teaching experience. Due to the program's growing popularity in the community, by the end of June we had enough students to run two classes simultaneously, and Drew and Meradith let Kate and I help plan the daily activities, and take turn leading classes. This turned out to be very good practice because in early July, when we unexpectedly returned to Potrero for a week while

Meradith and Drew were in the U.S., Kate and I were able to run the program ourselves, putting together a wildly successful (maybe I'm a little biased) 'Animal Week' where we made elephant masks and origami frogs with the kids while trying to get the message across that the English word for 'vaca' is actually cow, not 'moo.'



Our time at Abriendo Mentes was a fun and meaningful experience. We felt that we were really able to make a difference in the lives of the students, while also enjoying ourselves immensely. If you are thinking of spending time volunteering, I would highly recommend taking a trip down to Costa Rica to experience the "pura vida."

If you'd like to read more about our experience, check out the blog we kept of our trip:

<http://toddandkate.wordpress.com/>.