

From: Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida Rpcvsf@wildapricot.org
Subject: RPCVSF's [June-July] Newsletter
Date: June 26, 2021 at 2:52 PM
To: Marvin Hancock tmhr@me.com

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Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida is *your* group—please join us for fun get-togethers, community service activities, job/life networking, great events, stimulating conversation, and much more. Read on and get involved!



Tropical Currents

The RPCVSF Newsletter

JUNE-JULY 2021

It's
Raining
Poinciana
Flowers





FIU celebrates 60 years of
Peace Corps with the installation of
a
commemorative gift created by our
very own David Garcia!





From FIU News.

As a recognized leader by the Peace Corps amongst Hispanic-Serving Institutions for producing Peace Corps volunteers, there was no question that FIU would make the perfect home for the Peace Corps' 60th-anniversary commemorative gift. Designed by alumnus David Garcia '85, president of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida, Inc., the sculpture is displayed on the north side of the Deuxieme Maison building and highlights the Peace Corps' symbols of peace in the dove and intricacy and collaboration in the bench.

"FIU is an international university, and the more students can learn from individuals outside of their own environment, the better off they are," Garcia says. "Students have the chance to participate in international development right here, at FIU. If I was an FIU student again, I'd definitely be involved." @fiuengagement



**SAVE THE DATE:
"TOGETHER AGAIN"
AN RPCVSF PICNIC**



**DATE: SATURDAY JULY 17, 2021
LOCATION: CRANDON BEACH PARK
TIME: 10:00 A.M. - 6:00 P.M.
MORE DETAILS BELOW**



Now that Covid restrictions are becoming fewer, we're excited and ready to get together in person! So, we've reserved a shelter, #11, at Crandon Park North Beach, for a picnic on Saturday, July 17th! This one will be a "bring-your-own" food and beverages. The shelter is reserved from 10 am until 6 pm, so you're welcome to pop in and stay as long as you want between those hours. Please see our website, <http://www.rpcvsf.org>, for more detailed information and registration (log in to access the event). You may also want to check out the park's website to see all the activities available, <http://www.miamidade.gov/parks/crandon-beach.asp>,

including the beautiful beach!!! Also, the Biscayne Nature Center is near our shelter and is free! See <https://biscaynenaturecenter.org>.

So, pack your lunch, and bring the family! We look forward to seeing you there.



We'd like to get to know our members by featuring a new volunteer each newsletter. To introduce yourself and share your experiences email genb714@gmail.com and we'll send you a questionnaire.





Meet RPCVSF Member & Peace Corps Regional Recruiter, Taylor Majher

Where did you go and what did you do there?

I was an agriculture volunteer in Guatemala; more specifically I served in the department of Sololá, where the famous and commonly visited Lake Atitlán is located. For my first year, I served in the municipality of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán, AKA Alaska, because it is at 10,000 feet of elevation and infamous for being the coldest site in Guatemala. The months of December, January and February are the coolest with sunny, dry days usually in the high sixties, then temperatures dropping to the thirties at night. We would commonly wake up to frost on the ground in the mornings of those months and heavy fog and hail or cold down pours would sporadically occur.

Then, after 11 months in Alaska the Safety and Security team at Peace Corps evacuated me and the other volunteers of the area out and transferred us to new towns. There was a conflict over land rights with a neighboring village, so, Peace Corps deemed it a Red Zone for the rest of our time in Guatemala.

The second town I was in was, San Andres Semetabaj, which is located just a few miles above the famous lake town, Panajachel (Pana), which is on that famous Lake Atitlan. It would only take about 15 minutes by bus to arrive in San Andres from Pana, so the second half of my service was filled with visitors and fun events in and around Pana. This was also where I got connected with a Rotary Group. They would meet every Thursday in Panajachel, so I would go and eat lunch with them during their meetings.

In both towns I carried out the roles and responsibilities from the Rural Extension project, which included training, mentoring and coaching our work partners while we worked as a team to decrease the amount of malnutrition in rural households. We worked toward that goal with healthy food recipe demonstrations, trainings on how to create/maintain a home garden, how to prepare homemade soaps, maintaining a healthy kitchen, etc. The first town was very traditional and quite conservative so many of the Peace Corps trainings were not accepted, so I wasn't able to perform many community diagnostics; but once I got to San Andres (the second community), the municipality team came to me, asking for Peace Corps trainings; I was blown away! Totally different than in Alaska, where many don't want to change their ways or even try, in San Andres they accepted new trainings and wanted to learn something new. So, my work partner and I carried out 5 diagnostics in 5 of the community groups that we were working with and determined that a Fruit Tree Training series would be an appropriate project to carry out. We collaborated on what material to share, we used ERCA as our training model for each training and agreed on applying for a grant in order to raise money to buy 5 fruit trees for each participant: as a sort of incentive for participating in all of the trainings. We did get approved, we raised the money, and we gave the trainings! They were on how to prepare your soil, how to plant the trees, how to maintain the trees, how to harvest the fruits, and finally, how to prepare the fruits in healthy recipes for their kids and family members to enjoy. We also touched on some entrepreneurial concepts, such as selling fruits in local markets and then abroad.

What's a local language miscommunication you'll never forget?

What's a local language miscommunication you'll never forget?

In Spanish we know, "sí" means "yes"; but in some regions of Latin America there is a slang for "yes" which is, "simón". I was at a town fair with a few friends, and we bumped into some guys that ended up going on the Ferris wheel with us. I was talking to this man that was going on about his girlfriend. I remember asking a question to which he answered, "simón", I proceeded to ask, "oh, so your girlfriend's name is Simon?" he then looked confused... and then every time I asked a question he would answer, "simon, simon, simon"... I was so lost by the end of this ride. I asked my Peace Corps friend later about it and she explained the slang and laughed in my face... now I know Simon is more than just a name.

What's one local custom from your country of service that you wish Americans would adopt?

In the first town I lived in, every home had a small sauna called a Temescal which is used for bathing 3-4 days a week. Envision an enlarged doghouse, this is what the Temescal looks like. Most are large enough to accommodate 2-3 adults, all have a few boards used as benches to sit on and there's always a spot for a fire to be made, where a large pot of boiling water sits, with a different pot of cold water nearby. Once in the Temescal, the bather uses multiple buckets to mix the cold and hot water to the perfect temp and then give themselves a bucket bath.

I always loved pouring water on the hot coals to create steam, making it a true sauna. This tradition has been passed down for thousands of years in the Mayan culture, and many midwives have used them to aid in the labor of newborns. It's a whole family affair and a great way to soothe sore muscles after a long day's work. Like I mentioned before, this town is at 10,000 feet in elevation, so it was typically quite chilly, especially in the evenings; so eating a warm dinner, taking a hot, sauna bucket bath before jumping into bed was always very nice. I wish the Temescal was an American tradition for the way it slows everyone's life down a bit and for the great medical benefits it has on the body.

How has your Peace Corps experience shaped the person you are today?

My time as a volunteer in Guatemala has made me a better person in so many ways. I am more open minded and understanding of others and others' ways of life. I appreciate differences more and celebrate the diversity we have in our everyday life. I don't take anything for granted, I have learned that we, as Americans, are so privileged in so many ways. Not only in money and resources but in the support and care that is afforded to us. I have also learned that even though we do have so much available to us as Americans, these material things don't buy all happiness. I met so many Guatemalans that have so little, resource-wise, but are happier than some Americans I know that "have it all". I feel like a happier person, I am more easy-going, and I feel I can solve most problems that are thrown my way. Peace Corps teaches you to just "make it work", maybe it's not the most glamorous, but finding some solution is better than nothing. I am forever grateful for the relationships I have formed through this experience; I have become fluent in Spanish, I understand what it means to be an ally for my friends in the BIPOC community and have been humbled more than I ever thought.



I RAVEL

By Greg Zell (Nigeria)

TRAVEL TIDBITS

By travel@rpcvsf.org

Lots of travel news in bits and pieces. No time to put it in a cohesive form so you are getting it as I got it: in tidbits.

1. Iceland is accepting fully vaccinated international tourists. Several of our members and friends made a pre-pandemic visit there and came back with excellent reviews. Quite an eyeful adventure.
2. Israel has vaccinated enough of its citizens so that masks in public are no longer required. Similarly, much of the USA; the EU too.
3. Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT) is requiring proof of vaccination from all its travel customers. Its trip leaders and guides are all required to be vaccinated.
4. The rains came to southern Africa this year. Locals are hoping the drought that has plagued the region for nearly 10 years is broken. Parks and wildlife management agencies had to bore water holes to fill ponds and catchments. Rain means wildlife should be teeming and Victoria Falls in full glory when *Travel's* birthday safaris are rescheduled.
5. When planning the air portion of international travel, look into Qatar Airways for fabulous service which encourages an overnight in Qatar, an emirate on the Arabian peninsula. This gives a break in your journey with enough time for a city tour of Qatar and a stay in a 4 star+ hotel for about \$25 a night. The sidewalks are air conditioned from underground machinery! An Islamic country so it is not easy to get an adult beverage but there are specific hotels licensed for foreign tourists. *Travel* has been told Emirates airline out of Dubai, a nearby emirate, has a similar

program and great service but *Travel* has not used it.

6. Travelocity recently announced air tickets purchased through them carry no change fees.

7. Paris is the most beautiful city in the world when the weather is good. April in Paris? Nice tune; crappy weather. *Travel* is seeking 2 or more virgins for a week in Paris sometime between June 10 and September 30. (A virgin is someone who has never been to Paris or someone who has been to Paris but does not speak French.) September is probably better in 2021. There are plenty of one week Paris bargain packages. We upgrade to the 4 star level. Planning starts by comparing the list of what you want to see with *Travel's* suggestions. There are many options for you as to the amount of participation by *Travel* who pays his own way, an overall guide who costs you nothing. Most sights offer rental recorded self-serve tours which we avoid because they are too long. You are free to leave the group and use them.

8. *Travel* would like to lead a group to Belize with a member who served there as co-trip leader. A major activity is diving in the cayes (pronounced keys). We avoid that and only do the mainland. If you want diving, stay home. The sights are definitely on the small side but do not tell Belizeans that. They think this is a piece of heaven. It is a hoot.

9. Whenever travel opportunities are offered by RPCVSF, these are official activities of the group. Neither the volunteer Trip Leader nor the organization receives any compensation from the trip though. We just like to see the world. There's such a lot of world to see.