

CSUM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE ROATAN, HONDURAS 2023



OCEANOGRAPHY IN THE CARIBBEAN

My name is Lisa Hamner, I am a rising senior at Cal Maritime Academy (albeit with two more years to go), majoring in Oceanography, with a concentration in chemistry. Travel day to Roatan from San Francisco Airport. All taking part, can agree: It was a looooooonng day. Thirteen of us intrepid travelers boarded the redeye flight to Houston, Texas and then after a short layover, we flew to the Island of Roatan in Honduras. All combined, it was approximately 9-10 hours of travel which went off with pretty much without a hitch. I was amazed as I'm used to hectic travel and things going wrong in transit. Dr. Chisholm had come to San Francisco airport to see us all off. Dr. Parker's young son helped him haul in a box of textbooks into the airport. As soon as the son got a kiss goodbye from Dr. Parker; it was then that it hit me, we were really going to Roatan after months of anticipation, the hectic pace of Cal Maritime classes kicking our butts and then finals (of which I was still shellshocked by).

I was struck by the welcoming and relaxed nature of the islanders. I wonder if perhaps in the Bay Area we are doing things wrong, because everybody is in a hurry there. Not here in Roatan!

As soon as we landed, I noticed the difference. There was a contingent of runway agents in yellow vests ready to meet us as we descended the staircase when we came off the plane. I noticed the friendliness of the immigration and customs officials as they checked over our passports and scanned our fingerprints. We were welcomed by the resort representatives driving us in an airconditioned bus to Anthony's Key Resort. I noticed the distinct Central American themes that I had only previously seen on TV or films: Boys riding dirt bikes everywhere, an abundance of palm trees, tin roofs on homes, the humidity, and the heat.





I love the melding of the Caribbean with the Latin which manifests in the food, the language, the accents, and the attitudes. I can understand Mexican Spanish well enough, however, with Honduran Spanish, due to the dialect difference, I can only catch every other word. The Hondurans can understand my Mexican Spanish however, so it's all good. I really like gentlemen who are not afraid to use terms of endearment and the men of Roatan do not disappoint; the many times I've been called "my dear" or "baby" today warms my heart (no sarcasm intended), this includes the residents and the tourists. I've made friends with Timmy, the guy working the pool bar and he told me (when I mentioned I must open my laptop and do some writing, with a drink in hand): "Some vacation you are having, my dear! You need to come back here when you can lay by the pool and relax!" I like the vibe of the pool crowd. Mostly middle aged or elderly folks, a couple younger newlyweds on vacation, but the vibe is so chill and welcoming, and I fell into conversation with a few interesting folks from New York.

The Roatan Institute for Marine Science is really cool. It is where we will attend our lectures for the next three weeks. The building was once a nightclub, and I can see the vestiges of its former use. Jen Keck the resident scientist, is awesome, and I look forward to learning more about tropical coral reefs with her. I also look forward to snorkeling to see the coral in situ.

I was also struck by how much the island resembles Disneyland or the Los Angeles Zoo.

Then I remembered that the coral reef at Disneyland and the tropical environment at the zoo are modeled upon this environment. This is real, Disney is fake.

I am covered in sand flea bites because my bug spray got washed off. I looked up on the internet some info about these offending creatures which insist upon sucking my blood. They're crustaceans and look like microscopic lobsters or crawfish. They're so adorable that I'm no longer offended to be bitten by them. However, the welts they leave make me look like I'm infected with a horrible tropical disease, so I better make sure to keep myself slathered in bug spray (I spent enough money on it at REI). I asked Roxanne if she agreed with me that the sand fleas are cute (they're cute). She shook her head at me (I can't imagine why!). I still think sand fleas are adorable and they can bite me all they want to, now.

Another new pool friend I've met here has just told me to get off my laptop and enjoy myself and jump into the pool. Soon, my new Roatan friend, soon.

