

Alex Jaggard from Hong Kong joined the Costa Rica & Nicaragua 2006 expedition as part of his gap year before starting university.

On the Macho trek, starting from field base in Turrialba, 14 of us walked 250kms across a variety of terrains to end up at Playa Hermosa beach. We passed through some of the most amazing scenery I have ever seen. Almost every day was a challenge in some way, but every night we ended up staying in a very friendly and hospitable community where every person we met would be so accepting.

In Monte Frio, Nicaragua: after a three-day bus ride and a 15km walk, we arrived at the isolated farming community of Monte Frio. Our project was to create and fill in trenches to provide running water to the houses there. This was a fantastic experience, especially as we lived with the families we were providing water to, immersing ourselves in their lifestyle, helping them cook and talking to them. They were so accepting that language was not a barrier for having a laugh together. In the end, we managed to get water to seven houses to the delight of the residents and us. I could do without the rice and beans for a long while though!

In Barva Volcano, we were building a path going up Barva Volcano, 2900m above sea level. Because of the altitude, we were quite breathless at first but the cool, fresh climate provided a pleasant working environment. The dense green jungle itself gave a very romantic and mysterious feel to it, which made our work more exciting. What was great though was how the tourists walking along the paths would say, "thank you" and "you are doing a great job", which was hugely motivating for us.

It has been an enlightening and an interesting experience. I got to learn and understand about people from places different to mine and see how our lives differ. Working with the community in Nicaragua was also quite good as we motivated each other to some great heights. Everyone in this part of the world are all so friendly and accepting, it amazed me how the language barrier did not stop us from talking and laughing with each other.

I realise what life in some places is very different to what it is back home: it's one thing to see it on TV, but actually experiencing it is something quite different. You really get to live and understand the lives of different people in different cultures, and that itself is invaluable and wonderful experience.