Forever SEE Turtles
Lauryn Cate Green

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In Costa Rica, there is a popular phrase that goes “pura vida,” meaning pure life. Not only do they use this phrase as a greeting, a goodbye, or just an expression in everyday life, but it also describes the culture and country itself. During my two visits, in the summer of 2017 and the summer of 2018, I witnessed this “pure life” that they speak of, and also got involved myself to make this country, which is no larger than West Virginia, as pure in nature as possible. Headed by the EcoTeach Organization, we were able to receive “hands-on ecology work, authentic cultural exchange and real-world encounters” as well as assisting real scientist in their work involving protecting newborn and endangered sea turtles [1].

In the first summer, sixteen classmates and I, chosen and led by two former teachers, were invited on what we thought was a once in a lifetime opportunity. On the Osa Peninsula, located on the Pacific Coast, I was able to work side by side with local researchers with in-water monitoring and tagging of turtles. After becoming aware of the devastating sea turtle endangerment information, I began to become an adamant learner and preserver of this beautiful species. During these summers, I actively participated in this organization’s efforts to raise awareness to the common mistreatment set forth by humans onto sea turtles. While in Costa Rica, we would patrol beaches, keeping lookout for helpless turtles captured in fishing nets, while checking nets along the coast as well. My second year there, I was able to direct my attention more toward the nesting mothers. Working with scientists and environmentalists at the Estacion Las Tortugas, we monitored the beaches at night with red lights, watching for any turtles looking to nest. Once finding one, I was able to assist the scientist by holding a fin of the leatherback while the eggs were collected. The volunteers collected the young eggs, and re-nested them, with extreme accuracy and care, closer to their camp which allowed for more protection for the eventual newborns. It also helped to deter poachers commonly seen amongst the Costa Rican coasts.

These coasts are home to dozens of important nesting beaches for four turtle species—Leatherback, Green, Hawksbill, and Olive Ridley. As of now around the world, Leatherbacks, Olive Ridleys, and Loggerheads are all categorized as vulnerable. Hawksbills and Kemp's Ridleys are both Critically Endangered, and Greens are endangered, while Flatbacks are
data deficient [2]. A major reason for this is due to roughly only 1 in 1,000 baby sea turtles surviving the journey to adulthood. They become a source of food for crabs, birds, and other animals. However, the biggest threats to sea turtles by far are human related. Commercial fishing, loss of nesting habitat and climate change are all caused through human carelessness, pushing sea turtles towards extinction. Each year, hundreds of thousands of adult and immature sea turtles are accidentally captured in fisheries around the world [5]. The capture, injury and mortality rates are unbelievable: “150,000 turtles of all species killed in shrimp trawls, more than 200,000 loggerheads and 50,000 leatherbacks captured.” Sea turtles everywhere are deeply and most commonly affected by fisheries, including long lines, trawls, and gill nets [4]. Due to these careless mistakes; death, habitat destruction, and food web alteration are all devastating consequences, and alter vital in the ocean.

Sea turtles no doubt play a vital role in maintaining the purity of the world’s oceans for more than millions of years. These roles range from maintaining coral reef ecosystems to transporting necessary nutrients from the oceans to land. Learning this information and much more through the teachings of environmentalist, biologists, and local researchers, my sea turtle knowledge has allowed me to pass on vital educational and environmental information to others.

Not only did we gain several educational lessons from Costa Rican scientists and environmentalists, I was also able to receive an up-close and personal view of these species during my excursion, while being able to work side by side with the experienced conservationists who have made it their life’s mission to protect them. Their enthusiasm and hard-working efforts have guided me toward a future that will no doubt contain further preservation of our marine family. I also plan to continue this act of conservation, and one day taking students of my own on this life-altering involvement.

After taking part in this organization, I took my experience back home to continue raising awareness of Costa Rica's efforts. Spreading this information through family, friends, and peers, many have reduced use of plastics, including the elimination of plastic shopping bags and straws. I know that my work done in Costa Rica has both helped to preserve the endangered lives of sea turtles, and allowed large numbers to become aware to this growing issue, taking momentous acts to fix it, so that we will never have to see a world without sea turtles.
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Bringing an Olive Ridley to shore to check her tag and statistics.

Releasing baby Leatherbacks, while keeping away crabs and other disruptive animals.
Assisting researcher with measurements.

Myself (left) assisting the return of a sea turtle back to water.

Opening the unhatched to find out the reason and to prevent future occurrences.

Doing all I can to preserve the lives of these gentle creatures.
Works Cited


Sea Turtle Conservancy,
conserveturtles.org/information-sea-turtles-threats-sea-turtles/.


Photos: All my own