

Tropical Alcatraz

From fleas to fire, from ocean to sea, lies a prison on Catalina Island. Seventy degrees out, a light, chill breeze brushes my body, it's like a cold desert, with sand filled up in my toes and a bright yellow ball blinding my sight. Tropical Alcatraz, as I like to call it.

Am I in a cell? My bathroom was completely dark with no sources of light during the day, followed by ventilation between each stall, which allows everyone to inhale the absolute monstrosity you have just unloaded in the toilet. Secondly, bugs. Ick. Fleas and Moths swarmed the bathrooms like the Apple Store when the new Iphone released. These insects layed eggs and conquered each stall as their own birthing territory. Spiders were also among the ones that ruled the Catalina bathrooms, constructing massive webs among the walls and feasting on the other critters that lived inside. Where humans did their business, inside held entire 5 link food chains inside.

Then came the tents. Prior to the trip, I was given the option to either stay in a tent or cabin. Considering that cabins are more sanitary and somewhat more civilized, I picked the cabin. Of course, on the shortest notice of two days before we departed for Catalina, school faculty informed the participants that cabins will not be available for everyone. I was among the ones that were told *"No cabin for you, you're staying in a tent!"* On the bright side, I was with my two best friends who also were forced into a tent. Our campside, Dana Point, was a dozen of post World-War-2 looking medical tents that were lined up in a circle. With the size of 7x5 feet, or 35 square feet in total, we basically slept in a minivan. All of us, considerably tall, standing at 5'4, 5'8, and 5'6, the height of 6 feet didn't do us much grace inside the tents. The interior contained three beds, but I wouldn't even consider those beds. Rusted-out frames that were barely holding itself together, topped with a long seat cushion that was only an inch-thick is what we were forced to sleep on. These mattresses contained foam inside, very flexible and soft and were wrapped with a thin layer of a plastic-like material. Although the foam was so soft when you laid down on it, all the weight of yourself would squish the material paper-thin, so basically you slept on the metal bed frame.

Followed came the nauseating boat ride to the island. I've never been on a boat before, so naturally I took it worse than others, who have been aboard a boat in the past. The first thirty minutes was smooth sailing, with light waves and a comfortable temperature inside. I've seen my friends eating their entire lunches and I was getting hungry too. So, I opened up my lunchbox and ate my lunch. Another thirty minutes passed, I was feeling a little queasy but didn't think much about it. With 45 minutes until we docked, I felt something in my stomach, and my head was pounding among itself. Knocking my friends out of my path, I sprinted outside and vomited over the rail. Looking back, devouring my entire lunch wasn't one of my brightest decisions. I had to stay over the rail, as I was still incredibly nauseous and the strong winds in my face

didn't exactly help. Closing my eyes, all I could do was blank out and wait until it was all over. Excitement pulsed through my mind when I heard the words "*We have docked*" over the loudspeaker. Thankful I didn't have to be on the boat anymore, I packed up my belongings and headed out to meet my instructors.

Catalina is a very beautiful island and it's truly a blessing to go on a school trip, however the experience I had at Emerald Bay was extraordinarily different from my life back here in San Marino. Staying in a cramped tent, the sickening boat, and the dirty bathrooms aren't the end of the world, but it just wasn't for me.

Ethan Lew