

Three days in Chira, Costa Rica- Journal Entries

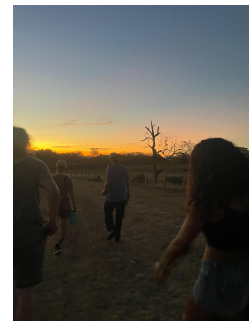
February 20th, 2023

On Monday at 8 am me and my classmates headed out on our first day down to Chira Island. The journey of getting there involved a car ride down to Costa De Pajaros, from there a boat to the eastern side of the island. After that, we got picked up by Melvin, the president of La Asociación de Cuerderos (ASOPECUPACHI). The trip there showed me how Chira was more remote than most of the places I have gone to in my life. I appreciated this, though if I were visiting Costa Rica on a personal trip rather than an educational one, I might not know Chira existed or how to get there. After three to four hours of travel, we arrived at La Amistad the Woman's lodge in Montero, run by Liliana Gonzalez. We ate fresh caught sea bass, one of ASOPECUPACHI's commercial fish. This is an example of common pool resources on the island. Fish have become exploited due to poaching populations have decreased as water quality has gone down in the Gulf. After spending some time at La Amistad, we talked to Liliana, the woman in charge of the lodge. It was very interesting to hear about her story about opening the lodge and forming a women's group. They did this in response to the individualistic "machismo" attitudes on the island. Yet the formation of the women's organizations began



to shatter this ideology because they created new frameworks of thinking based around persisting in adversity and finding new options. Many people on the island were against the woman in the organization and often there were acts of domestic violence incited against them. Additionally the woman felt the most prejudice to the men they were closest to so it was dangerous for them to partake in the organization at times. I thought this is a sad reality that men would try to suppress women actively trying to grow and do more. I wonder if they had thought women's only purpose was for

families. Though it made me really happy and inspired that the woman persisted because at the end of fighting for empowerment they succeeded, which changed the course of culture in Chira. Moving on, later that day we hiked up to a water tower in Palito to see the sunset. This was a moment of reflection where I was able to take in the island for what it was at a higher view point and digest what I learned that day from Lily and my initial impressions of the island.



Feb 21, 2023

Our Tuesday February 21st started very early as we woke up at 5am, had a light breakfast and made our way down to the docks in Palito in order to check out the Mangrove forests. It was important to time our day in this way because as the tide goes out it can become impossible for boats to come into the mangroves. Therefore, we needed to get into the mangroves early in the morning just after peak high tide had passed and enter the mangroves. Our trip to the mangroves was centered around our previous lecture on the ecosystem. We saw up close the different kinds of mangroves: red, black, white, and buttress mangroves.



We identified the tree depending on the leaves and root systems. I thought this was a really interesting and hands-on experience. I like learning from the life around me, therefore I believe this kind of learning of going into the mangroves to understand what we talk about in class is the best thing we can do to further our knowledge. That said, we saw roseate spoonbills, crocodiles, blue herons, and a handful of other animals. This braided into our knowledge of complex systems and ecosystems, seeing the biodiversity I could begin to understand the stands of connection of interrelated systems. After seeing the mangroves we went to a small island off the coast of Palito. This island is very important for bird species because it's where many lay their eggs in nesting season. I made a connection between the

mangroves and the bird nesting island as these are places where species are born and nursed until they are mature enough to leave, or not leave, those areas. For example after fish have matured to a certain level they will leave the mangroves where they might have been born and go into Nicoya Gulf. This is important as fish are common pool resources and accounts for Chira's natural and economic resources. Following that experience we got back to the lodge, rested, then got to work on a Radar that will be used by fishermen on the



island of Palito. This garmin device will be used to attempt to monitor poachers in the region. This in turn, will aid in protecting the common pool resources that are being over exploited. As the device was being installed onto a boat off Palito, Jada and I stayed back to develop a map of Chira and the surrounding area. In the process we taught Liliana, the owner of the woman's lodge, how to map. Bringing garmin, providing a map, and teaching locals to map felt like steps to actually help this community and I really appreciated that opportunity.

Feb 22, 2023

The final day on Chira student went with Melvin to practice fishing, which is important to the community as an economic and livelihood resource but also it has a strong cultural importance. Historically, the people of Chira Island didn't necessarily fish in the way that we fish today, but instead they spearfished. This is when the Gulf was very clear and there were many rocky reefs where locals would go to harvest fish. This is environmentally important because it marks the changes in sediment load from upstream effects of the Tempisque river from plantations. Now the Gulf is a brown green color, with the pollutants affecting fish populations. This is a concerning change that should be addressed on a government level in my opinion. From Melvin we learned a lot about the fishing organization and the future of fishing for the community. We stressed the importance to manage the common pool resources in the Gulf and to adapt to changes if any. Melvin noted how the association is trying to connect with the community, because there is a lack of interest in fishing for the younger generations on the island. Nowadays they don't think that fishing is economically feasible and are trying to switch to other modes of economic development. It makes me hopeful on a baseline that the people of



Chira seem to think about these systems on a broad level and can critically think about the changes that are occurring and how to work with them. The people of Palito are trying to think of new ways to adapt to the changing system, like oyster farming, and even fish farming has come into question as a possible alternative. After our day fishing and talking with Melvin we headed to the beach to have an incredible last night in Chira.

David and I built a fire, but in the fashion of the women's association and persisting, I started the fire even when it was difficult. I walked away from Chira feeling

like I had learned so much and I did leave a positive impact on the community. I hope that the people of Chira are well and continue to learn to adapt to the changes in the future.