



Guide to the 2010 Fundación Natura Bolivia Internship Program

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview to life in Bolivia as an intern with the Fundación Natura Bolivia. It covers some of the most important things you may need and want to know about us, as well as what to expect when living and working in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Here too you can find out what Natura can offer you as an intern, and what you will be expected to contribute yourself. If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to call us on +591 3 3395133 or email the program coordinator at joseluisizursa@naturabolivia.org.

Who are we?

The Fundación Natura Bolivia is a non-profit, non-government organization which specializes in the development of financial mechanisms for conservation. Based in the Santa Cruz Department of eastern (sub-tropical) Bolivia, Natura is able to provide a unique experience for masters students or other researchers during the northern-hemisphere summer vacation period.

Natura's flagship initiative, in the Los Negros municipality at the south of the majestic Amboró National Park, involves a direct annual payment to upstream farmers in exchange for the conservation of the cloud forest which ensures the provision of water to downstream communities. Located in a transition zone between Amazonian and temperate regions, the Amboró National Park is one of the eight most biodiverse parks on the planet, with over 840 birds registered, a significant number of amphibians and many species in danger of extinction. The conservation of the Los Negros water catchment is essential to ensure the continued preservation of this natural gem.

As a result of the Los Negros project, 45 farmers have signed contracts since 2003 to conserve over 3000 hectares of cloud forest in exchange for one bee box and training in apiculture for every 10 hectares of protected forest. Natura is replicating the project in three other municipalities where participants will have the option to choose alternative forms of compensation such as fencing wire or fruit trees, depending on local needs. To ensure the self-sustainability of the project at the local level, Natura has helped the communities establish funds for the protection of environmental services to which they themselves contribute by way of a small additional



charge in their monthly water bill. Natura is currently upscaling the initiative to seven more municipalities which together form the newly created, largely pristine Rio Grande-Cruceño Valleys Reserve. This area is one of Bolivia's most important watersheds and home to an impressive biodiversity as well as a rich cultural history, not least as the site of the last stand of revolutionary guerrilla 'Che' Guevara.

We are also starting other initiatives including the potential to protect the El Choré Forest Reserve, which is essential for the alimentary security of the Santa Cruz Department, through an avoided deforestation scheme as part of the emerging global carbon market. Also as part of a project Natura is looking at how to conserve the potential of the Amboró National Park area as a future source of water for the city of Santa Cruz, in light of the fact that the rapidly growing city of 1.3 million people will need a new and complementary water source within the next 10 to 20 years.



What projects are available to work on?

In 2010, Natura is offering internships to work on one of the following projects. For the full descriptions please see the document project description.

1) *Estimating the volume of carbon in the “Rio Grande–Cruceño Valleys Reserve”*

Research question: How many tons of carbon, per forest type, exist in the Rio Grande–Cruceño Valleys Reserve?

2) *Helping to design the first carbon neutral project in a developing country such Bolivia*

Research question: Is there potential for the development of “carbon neutral” activities in a developing country such Bolivia?

3) *Evaluating the potential to produce biofuels in the Cruceño Valleys*

Research question: Is it possible, social and economically, to develop a program for the sustainable production of biofuels in the Cruceño Valleys?

4) *Developing a business plan for the Río Grande Canyon tourism attraction in the Río Grande-Valles Cruceños Protected Area*

Research question: What is the potential for tourism in the Ríos Grande Canyon sector of the Río Grande – Valles Cruceños Reserve?

5) *Developing a business plan for sustainable use the endemic Sunkha Palm in the Río Grande-Valles Cruceños Protected Area*

Research question: What is the potential for sustainable management of the Palma de Sunkha, and economically viable marketing of handicrafts and other products?

Natura will seek to match student interests to project needs, but depending on demand students seeking acceptance may need to be flexible. You will have the opportunity to indicate your preferences on the application form.

What can we offer?

Supervisors

You will be allocated a supervisor for the duration of your internship, whose role will include: helping to define the project; provide information prior to arrival if available; provide contact information and advice about how to obtain information in Bolivia; explain monthly reunions and support your participation; meet with you on a fortnightly basis to consider progress made and any questions that may arise; and write intermediate and final reports for Natura about your work.

However, please note that for the most part students will be expected to work **independently, be self-disciplined and use their own initiative and creativity** to seek and analyze the information needed. These capacities are an important pre-requisite for acceptance to the program.

Monthly stipend

For successful applicants Natura is able to offer a monthly allowance of US\$100 to cover minimal local expenses such as transport or food while in the field. Apart from this, Natura will cover the costs of equipment or materials required in order to undertake the investigation, but these will remain with the institution upon the departure of the intern. All other costs are to be borne by the intern; however Natura can provide a letter of support for funding applications to other sources if necessary.

Office equipment

Natura will provide each intern with a desk and chair for use during his or her internship. During your stay with Natura you can request specific items needed for your investigation through the Administrative Director. Natura's office is centrally-located within the first ring of the city and has wireless internet, a kitchen, showers, storage space for luggage, small garden with fruit trees, balconies, etc.

Monthly meetings

At the beginning of each month, the entire Natura team meets at the Santa Cruz office to discuss the month's advances. Each member of the team gives a short oral report outlining his or her achievements, challenges and plan for the following month. It is a great opportunity to find out about the workings of conservation NGO in a developing country and understand where your own project fits into the bigger picture. As an intern you will also be expected to give a short report in Spanish about your project. It will give others a chance to see how they might be able to help you and it will also give you an opportunity to practice your Spanish.



If selected, what will we expect of you?

In order to be eligible for Natura's internship program, you must:

- Be studying or have completed a graduate (masters) or post-graduate (PhD) program
- Be willing and able to intern on a full-time basis spending five days a week for a minimum period of **three months**
- Be able to read, speak and understand Spanish at least at an **intermediate** level, so as to ensure that both the student and Natura may make the most of the opportunity. Please note that non-native speakers will be required to demonstrate their proficiency in a phone interview in Spanish prior to acceptance.



In addition, we will expect you to:

- Participate in monthly team meetings with a short oral report (in Spanish) about progress made on the project
- Provide Natura with a copy of all materials prepared during your internship
- Provide a final written report for the project with all primary data appended
- Complete a questionnaire evaluating your internship prior to your departure, to help us improve the program in following years
- Contribute to an article about your internship for the institutional newsletter
- Allow us to include your photograph and information about your internship in material used to publicize our projects

What will you need to bring?

We recommend you ensure you have the following items to bring with you to Bolivia:

- *Visa*: please check with the Bolivian embassy in your country if you will need a visa to enter Bolivia. For example, as of January 2010 US citizens need a visa.
- *Yellow fever vaccinations* are required to enter the country. Your certificate may be requested on arrival. Be sure to consult your doctor about other medications and vaccinations, well before you come. Note for example, that dengue fever is quite common in eastern Bolivia.
- *Laptop*: you will need to bring your own computer with you.
- *Health and accident insurance*: if you choose not to take out insurance, please note that you will be expected to bear any costs arising from accidents and/or illnesses incurred during your period with us.
- *Sleeping bag*: for use in the field.

- *Money*: to estimate the total amount of money you may need to cover the full internship period, please see our guide to living expenses in the following section. Keep in mind that the \$100 monthly stipend from Natura is principally intended to cover your expenses in the field. Natura can provide a letter of support for funding applications to other sources.
- *Towel*: you could also choose to buy one in Bolivia if you prefer. They are cheap in the markets.

What can you expect in Bolivia?

Santa Cruz de la Sierra is a rapidly growing city of 1.3 million people. Prices in Santa Cruz tend to be much higher than in other parts of Bolivia, although in most cases it will still be cheap relative to other countries.

Money

As of December 2009, the official exchange rate was approximately 7.07 “Bolivianos” (Bs) = US\$1, but the US dollar has been gradually losing value over the past year and we expect this to continue, so check closer to the internship period. US dollars can be used in most big restaurants, supermarkets, hotels etc., but you will need local currency for smaller restaurants, transportation, markets etc. There are plenty of banks and ATMs in the city center which accept Visa and Mastercard, but you will need to withdraw money in advance for field trips, as some communities do not even have a bank, much less an ATM.



Accommodation

Accommodation prices vary greatly. A private room with shared bathroom in a recommended hostel close to the city center and Natura’s office (*Residencial Bolivar*) currently costs US\$9 a night. However, hostel prices start as low as US\$2.50 a night for those on a very tight budget. Opportunities to rent are limited by the short period of the rental, pushing prices up. You will usually be expected to pay a bond and a month’s rent in advance. Also, you will also have to cover the full month, even if much of it is spent in the field. Expect to pay maybe US\$200 up to US\$300 a month for a short-term rental of a one bedroom apartment in or close to the city center. However, sharing with other interns will reduce costs, as will choosing to live further from the city center, where prices may be significantly lower. Be careful about choosing accommodation where cleaning staff have access to your room: there have been cases of belongings being stolen.

When you first arrive, Natura recommends booking a room at the Residencial Bolivar or another nearby hostel until you are able to find something more to your liking. We also suggest you get in contact with the other interns prior to your arrival to determine whether you might like to share a rental place. The Sunday *El Deber* newspaper is the best day for rental advertisements. We have a map of the city and will advise you on locations and prices. When possible we will make a staff member available to accompany you on your housing visits, and you will be able to visit housing options during work hours when necessary. However, please note that the responsibility for finding suitable accommodation will ultimately be your own.

Transport

In the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, there are four basic forms of transport:

- 1) Buses called “micros” will take you anywhere along their route for 1.50 Bs (about 20 cents). They can be hailed from any point on the route and are very frequent: in the city center you will rarely have to wait more than a few minutes. Destinations painted on the front of the micro indicate the route, as there are no bus schedules, although you can buy a map of the bus routes of the city at some shops in the city center.
- 2) “Trufis” are vehicles which have a set route around one of the concentric rings of the city. These are shared with other passengers and can be hailed from any point of the ring. Like the micros, the price is 1.50 Bs regardless of distance. They have a sign fitted to the roof of the car which will say “1er anillo” or “2do anillo” (1st ring/2nd ring).
- 3) Taxis can be hailed off the street. However, this is to be avoided if possible due to the potential of robberies or assaults. If you do take a normal taxi, be sure to ask the price beforehand. There are no set rates and no meters, and taxi drivers will often try to overcharge foreigners. Prices have increased over the past year and are likely to continue to do so, but the following is a general guide as of December 2009: within the first ring, 7 to 8 Bs; 8 to 9 Bs to the second ring; 10 to 12 Bs to the third ring; 12 to 14 Bs to the fourth ring; and 15 Bs to the fifth ring. Expect to pay more the further you go, at nighttime and when there are more than two people. If you drop someone off or pick someone up on the way, it will usually be charged as two separate journeys unless on a direct route.
- 4) “Moviles” o “radiomoviles” are taxi services linked to a central agency by radio. You call the number and the agency sends the taxi to your location. As with the unaffiliated taxis there are no meters; in this case general rates are fixed by the central agency, although it is worthwhile asking beforehand if you have doubts. You can also request that the driver call the agency to ask a price if you are not confident you have been given a reasonable quote. Prices should be similar to those described in (3).

In the field, transport may be by bus, trufi or taxi, depending on the destination. Often communities can only be reached by motorbike or four-wheel drive. In these cases you will need to coordinate transportation with Natura administrative and field staff. When it rains, transportation even on paved roads may become difficult or impossible for a few days, due to landslides on the main route to the areas where Natura’s projects are located. However, the rainy period does not coincide with the usual internship period from May to August, so this is less likely to impact on interns.

Food



Santa Cruz has a surprisingly wide range of culinary options. Apart from the many places offering national fare, there are also restaurants serving Italian, Spanish, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, pizza, fried chicken, hamburgers, salad wraps, Greek kebabs, vegetarian food, etc. Food prices start at 10-15 Bs for a typical Bolivian lunch or “almuerzo” which includes soup, main and sometimes dessert. You choose from the daily options, usually there will be two to four options. Otherwise, 25-35 Bs will pay for most medium-level meals, whereas for a better quality meal you should expect to pay 40+ Bs. There are a quite a few decent vegetarian restaurants for those who don’t eat meat, and the number of places offering salads or healthy wraps is increasing, but don’t expect many vegetables with your “almuerzo”; Bolivians love carbohydrates and it is quite

common to be served rice, chips and yucca on the same plate. Alternately, there are plenty of markets for buying fruit, vegetables and bread etc. while the supermarkets stock a reasonably good range of local and imported products.

Tipping

It is normal to tip ~10% of the bill at restaurants, a Boliviano or two for the bag-packers at the supermarkets, and also for hotel porters etc., but you don't need to tip taxi drivers or in other locations.

Climate and clothing

The tropical climate of Santa Cruz de la Sierra is warm and humid virtually all year round, with average temperatures of around 30 degrees Celsius for much of the year. However, with the periodic arrival of strong southerly winds in winter (June to early September) the temperature can drop dramatically to around 10-15°C and a winter coat will be needed for a few days until the "surazo" passes over. The rainy season is from December to February, while the winter period is relatively dry. In the field where Natura's projects are located, temperatures tend to be much lower due to the higher altitude. We recommend you bring a range of clothing for warm and cold weather, including a waterproof/windproof jacket for use in the field, plus swimwear, hiking boots, sunglasses, hat, and clothes/shoes for special occasions as well as nightclubs you may like to visit.

Tourist attractions/entertainment



While the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra does not boast many natural or cultural tourist attractions in itself, there are plenty that can be reached within a couple of hours drive. To the south, sleepy and attractive Samaipata is not only the jumping off point for Natura's projects, but it is also a big draw-card for tourists seeking ecotourism or adventure activities in the Amboró National Park (mentioned above) or in the Río Grande-Cruceño Valleys area (which includes the sites of revolutionary Che Guevara's last battles). Samaipata is also home to the El Fuerte ruins, the largest carved rock-face in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site. On the way to Samaipata you can also visit beautiful waterfalls and natural pools at Bermejo.

To the north of Santa Cruz, Bella Vista is another traditional town and access point to the Amboró National Park, as well as coffee tours and other activities of interest. Five hours from Santa Cruz city is the town of Concepcion, the biggest of a series of towns established by Jesuit missionaries between 1691 and 1760. The impressive churches of these towns are also UNESCO World Heritage sites and are worth a visit. You can also see the workshops where local people learn to make the intricate carvings used to decorate the churches and on sale to tourists.

Within the city of Santa Cruz, we recommend the following activities: visit the zoological gardens, enjoy some traditional hot cocoa and cheesy *arepas* at the nearby pueblo of Cotoca (which looks like Santa Cruz must have 50 years ago), walk around the botanical garden, have lunch at the cabañas near the Río

Piraí, go see a 3D movie at Cine Center, hang out at one of the many eateries on the Calle Monseñor Rivero, get wet at the Aqualand or Playland theme parks, enjoy the lagoon and orchids at the Biocentro Guembe, stuff yourself at the Sunday buffet while enjoying the lily pads of the Rinconada, or dance until you drop at one of the city's nightclubs or salsa bars.

Safety issues

The political situation has led to confrontations between pro-government supporters and the rest of the opposing Santa Cruz population over the past few years, which have resulted in police interventions with the use of tear-gas. However, such confrontations are widely publicized by the media and thus very easy to avoid. In Bolivia as in many South American countries, visitors need to be much more conscious of their safety than if they were at home. This means not walking around with anything valuable if you can help it, not taking photos in the markets unless you want to lose your camera, being careful about using your mobile phone on buses, using radiomóviles instead of taxis off the street whenever possible etc. Armed robberies have occurred in broad daylight in the city center. When you arrive, ask Natura staff about which areas of the city are safe and where you need to be careful.

Conditions in the field

Conditions in the field are generally quite basic, an opportunity to find out how the majority live in Bolivia! In a few communities Natura has a small office with one or two beds; we are in the process of adding a cooktop to the Santa Rosa office. Otherwise you will be placed in the houses of community members or in local lodgings, and will need to buy or prepare meals according to what is available. Despite the humble surroundings, past interns have said that the time spent in the field—getting to know the people and customs of rural Bolivia—was the best part of the experience.

How does the application process work?

The application process is competitive and only five students will be selected in 2010. Interested students should send their **completed application form, cover letter and curriculum vitae** to jose Luisizursa@naturabolivia.org by **12 February 2010**. On the basis of these documents, students will be selected for oral interviews in Spanish, and successful applicants will be notified by **12 March 2010**.

