

[This Will Certainly Make Your Only Life More Interesting](#)

Wednesday, January 21, 2009 at 8:35pm

I received a letter in the mail from [Youth Challenge International](#), asking me to plug the organization to new prospective volunteers. I had forgotten about it until a good friend of mine asked me how I went about going to Costa Rica last summer.

In my opinion, YCI is more about developing your own self than helping out other communities. Keep that in mind. It is almost half funded by the Canadian government, essentially to build leadership, experience and life skills for those who are willing to work to get it. No matter which program you choose, from Central and South America, to all over Africa to Vanuatu in the South-West Pacific, you'd come out of this an entirely different person, as one would expect.

I went to Costa Rica in summer 2008, simply because, at the time, it was the country that offered "construction" as work, as opposed to teaching, helping out with women's issues or HIV awareness. I still thought highly of those causes, but I wanted to play to my own strengths (I have since learned that said social issues are much more important and rewarding fields in which to work).

I won't bore anyone with any anecdotes, but I have absolutely no regrets from embarking on the project. I say that, even though it cost me about \$5000, with airfare and all other expenses, and three months of employment (a lot of cash). I was one of the lucky ones who weren't homesick I took the longest project, but there are shorter ones, I was barely ill during the summer and I didn't mind the repetitive diet, not did I have a girlfriend at home. However, it's not called Youth Easy International.

You come out of this experience with a well-fortified personality, a sense of self-confidence and pride. You will forge lifelong bonds and maybe learn a language. Your perspective will shift, and your long-term goals may shift. I know one thing's for sure, I only live once: and to not allow myself such an opportunity would be a crying shame.

There's my well-biased take. I would be more than happy to answer anybody's questions pertaining to the programs offered.

Cheers!



Facilitating discussions with the local high school class
<http://www.yci.org/>



[Michael Leukert](#) at 9:06pm January 21

is there any benefit to the local communities who host a yci member? what kinds?

how different was the social culture when you were, and how much did your presence change the way people think? for better or for worse?

just very curious.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 9:27pm January 21

Do the communities benefit? Yes - but how much depends on the location and project. We were affiliated with another nonprofit while in Costa Rica, and different countries have different partnerships/funding/needs. Reto Juvenil, our partners, paid for the building materials, our rent and food. This came with strict conditions, such as requiring the ... Read Morecommunity to provide with their own workers/foreman to help and guide us, which was tough at times, because they had farms to work on.

Social culture? Hmm. It varies between urban and rural. I noticed pronounced sexism, and what we would call barbaric treatment of animals (including pets). They have much less connectivity with the world, narrower perspectives, but are incredibly curious. They are probably happier than us, in general (we get mad if our text message wasn't sent because of interference).

We weren't the first group in that particular area, but we were told that the influx of, gringos did change their perspectives over time.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 9:28pm January 21

"For better or worse"

Heh, I'm *still* struggling with that one. I'll actually say better - but like the Big Brothers program, the difference can only be seen over the long term.