

# Letter from South America

by  
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## IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE!

**WELL,** what a week it has been. I have been off exploring small towns, dense jungle, botanical gardens and the zoo. It's been quite a wild few days.

Firstly and foremost, the jungle. I did a two-day trek in the jungle with a fellow volunteer. I am so pleased she wanted to hire porters as, in retrospect, it would have been incredibly tough without them.

Our guide spoke only Spanish, so it was a chance to see how much we had improved since arriving, and we coped quite well.

Herman pointed out a great many plants and flowers to us but the animals and birds proved elusive. A night hike was an exhilarating experience and we did manage to see a paca (like a giant rat) scurrying along the riverbank.

A night under canvas deep in the jungle was surprisingly noisy and definitely not the best night's sleep I have ever had!

Nevertheless it was an incredible experience, especially the following day when we trekked to a hidden waterfall and swam in icy river ponds. Even the birds and butterflies came out to see us!

Before and after the jungle trek, we stayed in the quiet town of Buena Vista. It was very tranquil and a great place to chill out. Not much in the way of nightlife but still plenty of chance for a beer or

two overlooking the plaza.

The accommodation was great too and the first night we stayed in a cabaña - a jungle-style log cabin which was very comfortable.

Since returning to Santa Cruz I discovered just how many insect bites I picked up by forgetting to re-apply repellent after swimming! Fortunately the local chemist has something to relieve the itch!

I have also been to the botanical gardens, which were amazing. I met a couple of Argentine ornithologists who were getting very excited about some birds.

They now want me to send on my photos - apparently they were very rare species. It was a particular privilege to see flocks of wild parrots flying around.

Then I visited the zoo. While it wasn't pleasant to see some of the monkeys looking distressed, it was generally better than I had expected. Having heard toucans in the jungle, I finally got to see one, albeit in captivity. They look as though they are made of plastic!

Finally, the week finished with a trip to a local brew pub to watch the Bolivian football side take on neighbours Peru in the Copa America.

The atmosphere was electric as they fought out a 2-2 draw by surrendering a two-goal advantage.

The pub had a lemon-flavoured beer but had run out of the cola-flavoured stuff. Probably just as well too!