

5/15/2010

Dear Class of '55,

I wanted to say thank you for the award that I received for the BMB 485 Bahamas course for February 2010. While abroad I learned that the Bahamian people hold family and religion very close to them, they are trying to preserve their natural history and wildlife, and create jobs for future generations.

San Salvador has one main road that circles the outskirts of the island and is a total of 26 miles round trip. There are small towns around the island but it is still like one big community, everyone knows everyone. From what I could tell all of the families hold religion very close to them. All households went to church on Sunday morning as a family. Unlike the public school systems of America, all the schools have church associated with them.

I feel that this has an impact on the crime rate. While on the island we heard of no crime and that the jail on the island was being transformed into a museum to hold the natural history of the island. The island does have police officers but I think that they were there more for if there were any accidents. I'm from a small town in Iowa, so it was nice to feel the same safety of home while in San Salvador.

Also, while on San Salvador, we had speakers come to the base and talk to us about the culture. A couple of the issues that are important to the people of San Salvador were saving their local history and wildlife for future generations. I think that it's wonderful that they are trying to preserve things for future generations. They have a foundation called "The Living Jewels" foundation that is focused on maintaining the marine life, animals, and plants of San Salvador, Bahamas. The marine life that they are focusing on is the coral reefs, which are homes to thousands of animals. Some of the animals that the people are trying to protect include the Brown Boobies, the San Salvador Rock Iguana, and the Cuban Tree Frog.

I was lucky to have experienced the wildlife of the island first hand. While there we went cave exploring and were extremely lucky to see the Blind Bahamian Cave Fish, a small white "blob" that is only found in the Bahamas. I was also one of two people in my class to become SUBA diving certified. So we used our Sunday mornings to go diving with Craig Tepper and Ben Greenstein (a diver master). Funny little story:

Dr. Tepper has been diving for twelve years and has always wanted to see a hammer head shark. One morning we're getting ready to get into the water at a spot called The Notch (Picture attached) and one of the girls from the other class couldn't get her air tank to work, so Dr. Tepper was nice enough to give her his because he's gone diving at this spot many of times and did not want the student to miss out on this opportunity. So we're getting into the water and Dr. Tepper yells out to his other student and me "If you guys see a hammer head shark I'm failing both of you". So we swim out to the wall, also known as the drop off, and descend to about 100 feet. We're beginning to swim around a bend in the wall and only about a minute of being at depth, and around the corner comes a hammer head shark. It was about 7 feet long and 10-15 feet in front of us (Picture courtesy of Mrs. Greenstein). It was amazing! The shark didn't even recognize that we were there, swam around us and disappeared into the water below us. Upon returning to the surface and exiting the water obviously we had to tell Dr. Tepper of our encounter. Of course he was upset that he didn't get to see the shark, after twelve years of waiting and both of his students that were in their first year of diving got to see it, but he was happy that we got to experience one of the beauties of the water.

Thank you again for helping me to experience the culture, wildlife, and people of San Salvador,
Bahamas.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ellison

Michelle Ellison



Hammerhead Shark



Cove



Seascape