

2011

Volunteer Information



Abriendo Mentes



Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to Playa Potrero and thank you for volunteering with Abriendo Mentas! As a community driven organization, volunteers play a vital part in our ability to achieve our goals of providing enhanced education and resources in rural Costa Rica.

We hope that your volunteer experience with us is rewarding and positive. The attached information package includes details about our organization, Playa Potrero and the roles and responsibilities of our volunteers. If you have any questions please feel free to let us know.

We will plan to get together each day around 1:30pm in the Abriendo Mentas office, Casa del Sol #9. The office has wifi access and you are welcome to use it at any time – password: lascat5846.

Thank you for joining us, we are excited to have you!

Enjoy,

Meradith and Drew



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Abriendo Mentas Class Schedule

P.M.	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2:00-2:30		Ages 2-4 Casa del Sol			
2:30-3:30	Kinder	Kinder 4 th grade	Kinder 4 th grade	1 st & 2 nd	
3:30-4:30	1 st & 2 nd	1 st & 2 nd	3 rd , 5 th , 6 th	3 rd , 5 th , 6 th	
4:30-5:30	Adult	3 rd , 5 th , 6 th	Adult		

A Note About Classes

We are very flexible with volunteers and classes. On a regular day we would meet about an hour before classes to plan lessons and then all go to the Salon together and stay until the end of class. Most mornings would be free to explore and experience Potrero and the beautiful beaches.

Class Structure

We currently offer our classes in two community spaces; an open air community building called the Salon Comunal and a newly built classroom next to the Salon, the Kid's Club. Generally, classes begin in the afternoon around 2:00 and are divided by age groups.

If the class is very large we may split off into groups or stations for more efficiency and one on one interaction. In the children's classes we can have anywhere from 6 - 20 kids at a time. Attendance is never consistent; there are many obstacles that occur in daily life here which prohibit the children from coming on a regular basis. It is difficult to predict exactly how the class will be each day, but that is part of the fun!

The adult classes are more structured, with a beginner and advanced level, and are taught in the new community classroom next to the Salon Comunal.

What do we teach?

Classes focus on ESL instruction, paralleling the curriculum taught in the public school, but also incorporate arts activities, sports, guest speakers and sometimes outside excursions. We are very open to new ideas and creative input; any new opportunity is a new way to open minds. In this sense, although our classes are structured, they are very flexible in what they entail. Usually, we (along with volunteers) teach together as a team, with one person leading the class while others help, maybe someone different leading an art project, sport activity, game, etc..

Bring your energy, creativity, and kindness to the classroom!

A Note About AM Students

- Many are shy at first, but don't let that discourage you from talking to them. Once you make a connection they will embrace your attention and friendship.
- They have a lot of energy! They get a little wild sometimes, so we try to keep them as focused and structured as possible during lesson time. During other times they are usually free to play.
- The AM students range in age from 4 years old to 12 years old. They are in grades Pre K to 6th.
- They are all used to hearing English, but few are highly advanced. It is important to speak slowly, use hand motions and enunciate if you are speaking to them in English. If you speak Spanish, encourage them to fill in words in English by asking them how to say "blank" in English.
- Most children know the colors, numbers, animals, food, family and weather vocabulary.
- They also know the following questions:

How are you?

How old are you?

How do you feel?

How is the weather?

What is today?

What is your favorite – color, food, animal, activity?

The children are used to having new faces around, so jump right in and have fun with them!



In and around Potrero

Banks

There is an ATM in the Italian village, near the gelato place. There are also two banks in Flamingo. Let us know if you need to go to the bank and we can find a time to drive to Flamingo.

Dining

Sol y Mar restaurant is one of the best places to eat in Potrero. It is a traditional, small Costa Rican restaurant and serves some of the best food around. The prices are very reasonable and the portions are generally a great value.

Las Brisas on the beach is a great restaurant too with some traditional and tex-mex type food. **Penca Restaurant** on the road to Playa Penca also has good traditional food.

On the corner of the Soccer field, **Costa Azul** has a little lunch spot that is good for fried greasy food. The traditional dish in Costa Rica is called a Casado and usually consists of rice, beans, plantains and salad and some meat or fish.

Arabica is in the Casa del Sol office complex near the office. It is Mediterranean café and is a good place to have coffee and use the Internet. It is also the only place that is indoors with A/C, so a good break from the heat.

The Heladeria Italiana (Italian gelato), **Diablo Tun Tun** restaurant and **Marco Polo** Italian restaurant are located in the Villagio Flor de Pacifico which is just a few hundred meters east of the soccer field. You cannot leave Potrero without trying the gelato, it is delicious and the pizza at Marco Polo is a good break from Costa Rican food if needed. Diablo Tun Tun has good pastas.

Beaches

Playa Penca is a wonderful beach with great views and calm water for swimming. The next beach north from Penca is **Playa Prieta**. While a little bit smaller than Penca, it is equally as gorgeous and can be a good spot for body surfing. The string of beaches to the north, are all wonderful as well. In geographical order, they are **Sugar Beach**, **Playa Danta**, and **Playa Dantita**. You can easily walk to Playa Penca and Playa Prieta from just about anywhere in Potrero. When the tide is low, it is possible to walk around the rocky points that separate these beaches.

Internet

Free wifi Internet can be found at Las Brisas, Sol y Mar, Arabica and Penca restaurant. Penca also has a small internet café with computers you can use hourly. We have Internet and laptops at our office and house which you are welcome to use as well.

Super markets

There are 3 in Potrero, **Super Catalinas** is next to Sol y Mar and usually has a good selection. **Super Potrero** is by the Salon Comunal and **Super Ceimy** is closer to the entrance of Potrero. The only thing to shop around for would be fruits and vegetables, on any given day one may have something different than the other.

Food

In Costa Rica the milk comes in rectangular boxes and is not refrigerated until opened so you find it on the shelf. Vegetables, fruit, rice and beans are staples in CR so they are usually very inexpensive. Anything imported from the US will be much more expensive. Cheese is one thing that is very pricey, usually around \$5 for a small chunk. Chicken is always a good option for cooking dinners, most of the time you find it frozen, but it is good quality. Good inexpensive snacks are deligurt (drinkable yougurt), peanuts, crackers (soda crackers of all different flavors come in 8 packs) and the bioland products.

Night time activities

Las Brisas Bar on Potrero Beach (50 meters south of the soccer field) is a popular hangout on the beach. Most nights are pretty relaxed with mostly locals, but Wednesday is Ladies Night. Wednesday night at Las Brisas is an experience in itself; the bar transforms with dancing and a beach bonfire and is sure to be packed with people. Playa Penca has a small tranquilo bar as well as Costa Azul on the corner of the soccer field. **The Shack** in Surf Side is a fun place to hang out, with a dart board, games and daily happy hour. Playa Potrero is pretty tranquilo in terms of nightlife overall

Day time activities and weekend excursions

Day tours through EcoTrans. Please see following pages and let us know if you want us to inquire about pricing.

If you want to rent a car we will get in touch with **Economy Rental** in Flamingo. The price is generally around \$50 a day depending on the car they have available and how long the rental is.

We have a friend in Potrero (Walter) that offers **kayaking** and a friend (Maritza) that offers **horseback riding**. Let us know if you are interested and we can set something up.

Sea Bird Sailing, Lazy Lizard and Hibiscus offer **catamaran snorkeling tour** which we can call and book for you. It is a half day trip in the morning or afternoon.

There are also opportunities for half-day and full day **fishing trips** and **surfing lessons** or surf trips. Again, just let us know!

There is plenty to do in and around Potrero, just ask!

About Abriendo Mentas

The Need

U.S.-based Opening Minds Latin America, or Abriendo Mentas (A.M.), aims to enhance education and empower communities in the rural Guanacaste region of Costa Rica. A.M. is located in the small rural village of Playa Potrero, Guanacaste. Potrero is situated in the Chorotega region, the most impoverished region of Costa Rica with a poverty rate of 29.3% as of 2009 (www.inec.go.cr).

In the Chorotega region, access to educational resources, occupational skills training, and convenient and affordable continuing education are scarce. English and computer proficiency are increasingly important skills, as job opportunities in the region shift from agriculture to tourism. More than half of Costa Rica's national tourism investment is focused in the Chorotega region.

The Response

In response to these needs, Abriendo Mentas has designed a community literacy program to supplement the current educational offerings in Playa Potrero. The program's curriculum encompasses English language classes, computer literacy classes, and job readiness training; all at no cost to the community members. Abriendo Mentas also incorporates guest speakers, art workshops, a pen pal program, beach clean-ups, and educational excursions to local cultural and environmental awareness destinations such as the Africa Mia Wildlife Reserve in Liberia.

The program is supported by the help of volunteers, monetary/in kind donations, and organizational partnerships, all of which are integral to the sustainability of the organization. Abriendo Mentas welcomes both local and international volunteers for any length of time. Over the past 21 months, A.M. has collected resources equivalent to a dollar amount of over \$12,000, which has fostered the creation and continuation of classes including field trips, guest speakers, and artists.

Abriendo Mentas is a recognized 501©(3) nonprofit organization in the United States, and therefore is able to accept tax-deductible donations. The organization relies on donations from friends, family and personal contacts to keep the project functioning on a daily basis.

The History

Abriendo Mentas was formed in June 2009 by Meradith Leebrick and Drew Ragland. After three years as community members in Playa Potrero, Meradith and Drew recognized a lack in educational resources and extracurricular activities available to community members. Primary school children in Potrero attend school for three to four hours a day, and many fail to advance to high school or university. As of 2009, only 11% of residents in the Chorotega region had completed high school. In addition, most primary schools in this region are only able to provide very limited English instruction (1 ½ hours per week), limited access to computers, and are completely unable to offer extracurricular activities such as art, music, drama, and sports.

In 2009, Abriendo Mentas began its effort with just 15 students and a handful of resources. The program now serves more than 25% of the village population, including more than 100 participating community members, and has accumulated over 1100 class hours in just 21 months.

Ever since the inception of Abriendo Mentas, Meradith and Drew have dedicated themselves to improving the current educational situation and offering the members of Potrero every possible opportunity to expand and open their minds through language, creativity, literacy, and critical thinking, with the ultimate goal of empowering community members and improving economic stability.

The AM Community

The Omprakash Foundation in Connecticut; Las Catalinas Development, Bahia del Sol Hotel, and Sugar Beach Hotel in Playa Potrero; Tamarindo Surf School and Point Break Surf School in Tamarindo; La Paz Community School in Playa Flamingo; Unique Adventures Costa Rica in San Jose; UNC-Chapel Hill Business School in North Carolina; Denver Business School in Colorado; La Escuelita de Esperanza; Beyond el Campo in Amherst College, Mass; Ecotrans Shuttle Services; and Womanars.com.

Thanks again for joining us in Playa Potrero, don't hesitate to ask us for anything you need while you are here!

