

The Volunteer School for Water, VSWater, offers foreigners the opportunity to work at Colombia's Lago de Tota and teach locals about the importance of water and wetlands. Led by Felipe Velasco at Fundación Montecito, each volunteer will be immersed into the culture, have unique experiences with the locals, and positively impact the surrounding environment.

Teachers in the Volunteer School for Water, have a special opportunity to offer their own skills and expertise. For example, volunteers can design a presentation on a specific theme regarding the importance of water and the wetlands surrounding Lago de Tota. With the help of local authorities, OBSA and Fundación Montecito, I presented my material to towns surrounding the lake. Also, I taught English in the afternoons.

Since most of the presentations are for children, teachers should use visuals and physical examples. This really grabs the attention of the students and keeps them involved. Sometimes, students are nervous and shy to participate in front of a new teacher. It is important to break the ice early on in the presentation and try to make the kids laugh. Once the kids start to open up, the presentation goes a lot more smoothly.

A fair amount of Spanish is helpful to teach about water and the wetlands, but there are other options, such as teaching English. Also, volunteers must understand they are going somewhere without much contact from foreigners. So, volunteers must not be alarmed if they receive a lot of attention. The students are just as interested in their culture as you are in theirs.

Also, since the altitude of the lake is over 3,000 meters, it may take time to get used to the environment. Do not be discouraged if you feel tired the first couple weeks or have stomach problems. This is normal and most people take 2-3 weeks to get used to the altitude. This is why I would recommend not over exerting yourself the first week. Pace yourself. This way you won't become discouraged early on.

The people living in Sogamoso and around Lago de Tota are some of the kindest people I have ever met. Since tourism is relatively new to this area, the locals are very interested in meeting you and offer amazing hospitality. The students are caring and loving as well. The community is very open and makes foreigners feel welcomed to their country.

Overall, the opportunity to work with VSWater is an incredible experience. You will learn about a new culture, speak better Spanish, and have a dramatic impact on preserving Lago de Tota and the surrounding wetlands. Felipe and his family are very accommodating and will make you feel at home. I would recommend this opportunity to anyone interested in Latin America, Spanish, the environment or education

Sincerely,

William Harryman

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