

ADVICE FROM A FORMER “TEAM TREEFROG” INTERN:

MOLD: One thing that I have learned from living in the rainforest is that some of your clothing will definitely mold. Unless it is an expensive piece of clothing (or is Gortex), this is not that big of a deal since you can just wash it. However, it is annoying, and I suggest that you keep an eye on clothes that you wear less frequently (i.e. backpacks, dresses, swim suits, heavier coats). I did attempt to keep my electronics in the lab for the majority of the time, and although they did spend a few days outside of it, I had no troubles from the humidity. I also felt better about having my valuables in the lab, where they were behind a locked gate at night (not that Gamboa isn't a safe place, I just tend to be paranoid about those sorts of things). You may want to back up your hard drive before leaving, just in case things go awry.

CITY NIGHTS: If you want to go out in Panama City- you probably will at least once- bring some fancier clothing with you. Some nights I just wore jeans and a nice top but others I wore a dress with heels. People generally look nice around the city, and will probably stare at you if you look like you came straight out of the field. I went out a few times to the Amador causeway, where there is an enclosed bar hopping area, allowing you to safely (they frisk you before you enter) go in and out of bars, and even allowing you to carry your drink from place to place. Although we went out to other places around the city, I felt safest there. Walking downtown was also fun, but that's an activity for the day time.

FIELD GEAR/CLOTHING: A pair of quick dry pants will be your best friend. You'll likely get somewhat wet every day in the field, either from rain or splashes from the tadpole tanks. I usually wore tshirts that I didn't care about, so I could feel free to wipe my dirty hands and really sweaty face on them. When in the woods, boots are helpful since things get muddy and any extra protection from the mosquitoes is welcomed. Otherwise, hiking sandals (the kind with lots of straps and a sturdy sole) are the best footwear since it gets really hot and humid! When out in the woods, I'd typically wear a long-sleeved, breathable field shirt (they have some good ones at EMS that go on sale every once in a while), a bandana around my neck (extra mosquito protection), quick dry pants, long socks, and high rubber boots. I got the kind of boots that Karen recommended, and although expensive, I really liked them. I typically only wore bug spray on my face/neck when working, to avoid exposing the froggies, so long sleeves in the field were pretty necessary in my opinion. When in the lab, I usually wore sandals, quick dry pants or shorts (both also from EMS), and a tshirt or tank top. You'll need a light sweater if you plan on hanging out in the air-conditioned computer area of the lab building (if you like the internet, you will), since it's slightly chilly after you sit there for a few hours.

If you decide to go out at night, I recommend a good head lamp. Although the triple LED headlamps are light and bright, I don't think that their beam is bright enough to see up into the trees or over a long distance, so I'd recommend the Black Diamond Icon (with the rechargeable battery pack), if you're planning to do more field work in the future and are willing to make the investment (~\$90 with battery pack). If you are not sure, the smaller LED headlamps are definitely decent enough for the time being, and you may not need such a bright light for working or work much at night anyways.

As for rain, there are some great thunderstorms to look forward to. And when those come, forget your rain coat and umbrella; they can't help you. Umbrellas were sometimes useful,

and I don't think I wore a raincoat at all. A raincoat is probably only useful if you work at night, when it's slightly cooler and less comfortable to succumb to the rain.

SHOPPING/FOOD: Panama City has a few malls, and they were all larger than any mall I'd ever seen in the US. **CLOTHING IS CHEAP.** Very cheap! If you forgot shorts, shirts, sandals, socks, no worries because you'll probably get a better price on any of those in Panama than you would at Target. Have to say that I made off with a few good deals on shoes and running shorts. Food is also well-priced, and the fruits & veggies are fantastic. Look forward to some delicious avocados, tomatoes, mangoes, and bananas! Alcohol is also very well-priced. (Think a bottle of Jose Cuervo for \$12). If you've never had a *batido* (fruit milk shake), try one. Actually, try everything. The little blue "chicken cart" in Gamboa has these things called *ojaldras*, which are kind of like fried dough except 100000x more delicious. They run out of them by 10am so get there early! I think one *ojaldra* and a coffee costs about 50 cents total.

MISCELLANEOUS: I wish, I wish, I wish I had brought cleats! If you like soccer or ultimate Frisbee, both of which are played weekly in Gamboa, you may want a pair, although playing barefoot is also an option. A deck of cards would have also been nice. You probably won't have internet access in your apartment, so having a book to read, movies to watch, or something else to entertain yourself may be a good idea. Bring a bathing suit, too, if you plan to enjoy the beaches or try to sneak into the Resort's pool (sometimes they have someone down there checking room keys, but try taking the handicap ramp off the right of the lobby entrance & walk down to the pool). There is most likely a washer and dryer near or at your apartment.

TRAVEL: I decided to meet up with friends in Costa Rica for a week at the end of the summer. On the way there, I took a bus to Bocas del Toro, which is an archipelago off the Northeastern coast of Panama, close to its border with Costa Rica. I stayed there for five days to sit on the beach and do some snorkeling. It was gorgeous. Our hotel was of moderate quality (ie better than a hostel) and cost us something like \$10 a night per person. Food there was delicious. I recommend the "Barco Hundido" bar and the French-spanish food fusion café (forget what that was called). The Sea star beache was fantastic. Crossing the border to Costa Rica felt safe, but it was annoying to coordinate taxis without feeling like I was getting ripped off or like someone was going to steal all of my things. They actually separated people and their luggage into two separate vans. However, it went well and none of my stuff was stolen. One important note: you must have some proof of leaving Costa Rica before entering (a plan or bus ticket), or else they will make you purchase a bus ticket to Panama (\$15).

COMMUNICATION: Internet is usually working in the lab, but there is no internet in your apartments (unless you get lucky). I bought a cell phone for \$25 and paid for it by the minute. It wasn't too expensive, and after you pay for 4 minutes of international calling, I think you get another 10 for free, so I made a number of 15 minute calls to friends just to say hi. I think incoming calls are free on those phones, which makes it free for you to talk to friends and family if they call you.

MONEY: Don't forget to tell your bank you'll be abroad. Some banks charge nasty ATM fees and you may want to know what those are. Bank of America, for instance, charges me \$5 every time I use the ATM in a different country.

You can reach me, Becca Tarvin, at rdtarvin@gmail.com if you've got any more specific questions.