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Catherine Kuiper



Catherine Kuiper has been a Spanish teacher for 14 years and loves it! She has taken students on several trips both to Mexico and Costa Rica for language acquisition. What made her want to get involved in Infinite Forest is seeing her own students so excited both before and years after for the trips that she wanted to see other students everywhere get those opportunities. I learned Spanish both in the classroom at University of San Diego, as well as travelling and taking classes both in Mexico and Costa Rica. It was so hard for me to learn Spanish in the beginning that until I travelled, it just wouldn't click. Then, after falling in love with the people and culture of Mexico and Costa Rica as well as the country itself and after actually using the language to communicate in real situations with people that speak Spanish as their first language, I finally got it!

I saw so much of myself in my students, just wanting to learn enough to get a grade, but not really seeing the value in it, so I started taking them abroad. I took students from a missionary group to Mexico to do some service projects and we came back better people because of it.

I took my Spanish students to Mexico and Costa Rica at different times and the results are always the same – they are thrilled for the months leading up to the trip, and years later, they still come back with “remember when”. I get my reward watching them use what they learned in class to get by and have fun in a low stress, but practical environment. All of a sudden, they see me, the teacher, as a resource to getting their point across instead of just the “giver of grades”. They use each other and help each other communicate and truly learn together. All of a sudden, the ones that have worked hard in the class and know a bit more, are the ones that everyone wants to be like and be with.

As a teacher, the trips that we have design hit upon every national standard for Foreign language teaching, so I am happy and as students, it is one of the most bonding and learning experiences that they can have and something that they will always remember. The years that I taught AP Spanish, I found the trips especially valuable. I tried to plan a trip pretty close to the test so that they would get some total immersion right before the test so on the listening comprehension and speaking portions, they were very prepared – it really drove it home in a way that 2 hours of class every other day couldn't. They heard different types of voices and accents so they were not as shocked when the AP test played a voice or accent different than my own. These are all reasons why, after 14 years of teaching, I still make the effort to go this extra mile in my classroom. I believe that these trips are part of the reason I was honored with the title “Teacher of the Year” for my district 2000–2001, among several other awards for teaching.

Before teaching, surfing was my passion. In high school and college, I was obsessed. In college I surfed competitively and was ranked 4th in the NSSA for college women at the National Championships. When I became a teacher, I started a surf club and team at the high school I taught at. I coached for 4 years and, again, nothing makes a team closer or more stoked than an awesome adventure and great waves! It is especially fun when everyone back home is having to wear thick full suits and you get to come back tan and with stories of 80 degree water and great waves. I brought my team to mainland Mexico one year and also did several Baja trips and those surfers really loved it! They came back like kids in a candy store and I felt awesome being able to provide that experience for them!

With all of this background, it is easy to see why I wanted to work for Infinite Forest. We really try to build trips around the needs of coaches and teachers in order to make your job easier (believe me, I know how hard it is already!) and yet still help you to be as successful as possible in your coaching and teaching! The itineraries that we have meet all types of group goals, but if there is something else that you feel you would want, we are more than willing to design an itinerary around your specific needs.