The Road Less Travelled

We made it. We actually made it. My breath is taken aback by not being able to feel my sore and tight legs, the stun of reaching the apex of my hike, or most likely the strange eerie beauty that I am engulfed in. My spontaneous family abandoned our plans to hike today. The Dahlin’s don’t hike. When we travel, we go to beaches and sight see. But, we don’t hike; especially not for 8 miles straight. I don’t know who had the final say to inspire us all to be pushed out the door and through the observatory gates and down the trail and to the crater lake; but I’m here. We made it.

The Cerro Chata trail sits comfortably 3,370 feet from sea level. It was naturally formed after its neighbor, the Arenal Volcano, spit up huge rocks that created a crater in the Earth. The hole has filled with water and now it’s a one-of-a-kind ecosystem. It is said to be one of Costa Rica’s most prized trails. I don’t refer to it as a trail, it’s a mud pit. There is so much mud that covers my sneakers all the way up to my ankles and seems to be lodged in my nasal cavity. But, nothing can put a damper on my mood because we made it.

My body breathes in my first breath of fresh air as I sit on a stump and relax. The smell of the sweet and sharp plants surround me. I am swallowed by the trees and vines. Ahead of me, I can faintly hear the wallow of Howler Monkeys playing in the canopy. I ponder how they are completely unaware of the beauty they live in while they swing from branch to branch. I open my eyes and peer out onto the lake. Oh, what a beautiful lake! It is untouched by humans and flaunts its crystal clear color as if to boast the fact that it’s so pure. The sun dazzles against the water and the fish leap about its calcium enriched refreshment.

Everyone is silent, my Mom breaks it to drag us all back into reality, “We should start heading back in the next two minutes if we want to make it home before night fall.”

I’m tired of walking. My body is not ready for the four miles of steep rock climbing to reach back to the observatory.

*“But, it’s all worth it,”* I think to myself. It’s all worth it because I get to see the most breathtaking view anyone’s ever see. One of those views that a picture can’t even capture. A view that is only reachable by the most fit and savage people in the world to travel and complete the Cerro Chata.

As I turn to leave, I see an eerie fog rising across the lake.

I stutter out, “what is tha-?”

But, before I can finish, suddenly a large bus screeches to a halt on a dirt road hidden by the trees across the lake. I’m perplexed as to what’s going on. My questions are quickly answered as a gaggle of pale tourists run from the bus right into the crater lake- MY crater lake. A heat rises in me as I turn back towards the trail that I descended from. I move one mud caked sneaker in front of the other. My shoulders sag in disappointment as I slink towards the mud.