

## Courtney | Kings | Dominican Republic | 2013



I wake up to the sound of *bachata* or *meringue* music. Sometimes it's a little earlier if the roosters are particularly loud in the morning. My little host sister sometimes sleeps with me and kicks a lot in her sleep. When she doesn't sleep with me, I wake up peacefully after a good night's rest and do some morning yoga in my room. Those mornings are definitely more tranquil! I arise to hugs from all my family members (mom, dad, two uncles, brother, and sometimes sister), have a variation of plantains and eggs for breakfast, and then I head off to work!



This actually means walking an hour across a river and up a mountain to reforest all day. I dread it pretty much every morning, but once I am up there it all seems worth it: the view is phenomenal. I awkwardly climb across mountains to plant, shovel, and weed pine trees, and try to tell people through broken Spanish that even though I am a woman, I am okay with having calluses on my hands (even though they say my boyfriend won't like it) and that I can work in thorns just like the men can.

I sweat in the Dominican heat like you wouldn't believe, but I have to wear full length clothing or the thorns and sun would do massive damage to my skin. We eat mangos right off the trees, and everyone shares their lunches of rice, plantains, and cornbread.

We head back down the mountain at a time that is never the same as the day before.

Then it's beans, rice, and meat for a second lunch (soooo much food) then nap (oh how I love siesta), shower, and/or journal. Rise for reading, baseball, or visiting, then it's supper time. My mom is a phenomenal cook. If the power is out at night, which is more often than not, we play some dominoes instead of watching TV, and have conversations that are getting progressively more complex before I go to bed and rest for another day.

