



An Intern's Tale: Jaqueline Aguilera



Hello and welcome to White Sands National Monument! My name is Jaqueline Aguilera, although I prefer to go by Cha Cha—it's a nickname I've had since I was born. Currently, I am a fourth-year student at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), majoring in Environmental Science with a concentration in biology. As part of my major, I am doing my internship at White Sands.

You may be wondering how I got this awesome internship. Last year I went to my advisor and asked him what I needed to do to get an internship. He gave me several ideas, ranging from doing research in a lab to going out and doing field studies. As I was leaving his office that day, he stopped me and said, "Hey, why don't you become a park ranger?" My next question was, "What is a park ranger?" After he filled me in on what interpretive park rangers do, I knew without a doubt that I wanted to do that for my internship.

After making the decision, my advisor sent me an e-mail from White Sands National Monument detailing their available summer internships. I didn't waste any time! I immediately contacted the Chief of Interpretation, applied, interviewed, and accepted the position for the summer. White Sands National Monument hired me through the Youth Internship Program, which targets area college students who speak Spanish and are interested in careers with the National Park Service. I learned a lot about

myself, and it really opened my eyes. It gave me the opportunity to think "outside the box" in regards to career choices and what I wanted to do with my life.

Taking this internship was the best decision I've ever made. As an interpretive ranger, I am able to help visitors in the visitor center and tell them all about White Sands, develop and lead interpretive programs such as sunset strolls, swear in Junior Rangers, and create posters, flyers, and other publications. And I wasn't limited to interpretation, either!

At various times during the summer, I also got the chance to work in different divisions, such as Resources, Maintenance, and Law Enforcement. While helping out with the Resources Division, I went out into the dunefield and made sure areas in the park were maintained. I helped the Maintenance Division make sure the trails were safe for visitors. I also got to ride around with law enforcement rangers and learn how to protect the visitors and our resources. Working with all of

these different divisions matched perfectly with my major.

I was already well-informed about nature, and this internship just improved my knowledge with scientific explanations and gave me a chance to apply what I know. I loved my time at White Sands. The knowledge and experience I gained during my time here are invaluable. I strongly suggest that students who are searching for an internship look into opportunities with the National Park Service. It might just be exactly what you're looking for, and you never know what doors it could open!

