

Costa Rica 2008

Well, 2007 was quite a hectic year for us—we sailed on 4 cruises plus took 2 other short trips. It also included our marriage in November on Santorini, the sale of Kathy's house, and the purchase of our new home. After surviving 4 Trans-Atlantic flights in 3 months, we decided to stay in this hemisphere for 2008!

Kathy had wanted to go to Costa Rica, and the 3 times I was there I did not see much of the country as I was on cruises. I found a great 10 day trip that covered most of the country and went to 2 volcanoes. We will also be doing a canal boat trip and a treetop tram excursion.

About 2 weeks before our trip, we got the final papers and a very detailed booklet about each day on the trip.

We were picked up on schedule and met another couple, Marilyn and Lyman, who live about 45 minutes from us. We were then taken to the airport and caught our flight to Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, where we had a 2 hour layover.

In our normal way of making lemonade out of lemons, we had some coke cans left from our flight, and picked up a couple of smoked sausage sandwiches. We walked out of the terminal and sat on a bench outside and had a little picnic in the fresh air and sunshine.

SAN JOSE

San Jose is surrounded by mountains, and we landed in this valley with lightning off in the distance. Other than that, the flight to San Jose Costa Rica was uneventful and we were picked up and taken to our hotel. By the time we checked in and got to our room, it was close to 10 PM, but we decided to check out the bar. Well, they had a salsa band playing, and the Ticos (Costa Ricans) were really dancing up a storm. We watched them until after midnight and had to give up because of an early morning departure the next day.

The room had one of those deals where you had to put your room key in a slot to make the lights work, and I had been in hotels like that before. Well when I made the in room coffee the next morning it was vile, so I volunteered to go down and get some fresh. Kathy went in to shower, and I took the key and went downstairs to get the coffee.

Well, half way through her shower, the lights in the bathroom went out! She called for me, but I was gone by then to get the coffee. When I got back she told me what had happened, and I was very apologetic, and the good coffee sort of smoothed things over.

The view from our hotel was great, and we were met by our tour director Eduardo, and our driver Luis. The bus was a brand new Mercedes and was really comfortable.



Our first stop was at the Poas Volcano, which is 8,871 feet high, and some people had a problem with that altitude. I took some pictures of the crater, and then headed to the lagoon, which is a water filled older crater.



There was a sign that said it was a 30 minute walk, but the sign failed to mention one word-uphill!



I had to stop 3 times to get my heart rate under 150, but the trip was worth it! The lagoon was really beautiful.



We were taken to lunch at a local restaurant, Luis had to back the bus down a hill to get there. I thought he did a fantastic job, but when I got off the bus, I saw a little TV screen in the dash that let him see where he was going! The lunch was typical Costa Rican fare, some form of meat, chicken or fish along with rice and black beans. And then we were served the local coffee which was great.

After lunch we were taken to the National Museum, which was quite interesting. While we were there a large rainstorm moved in, and we got back to the bus only slightly damp, but the heavens really opened up and the last 2 couples got drenched!

TORTUGUERO NATIONAL PARK

Since it was Sunday, and the band was not playing in the lounge, we hit the sack early as we had an early morning departure. It was bags outside at 6 AM (shudder) and on the bus at 7AM as we had a very full day.

We first drove through Braulio Carrillo National Park, and then stopped at the rain forest. We first took a walk through the rain forest with a naturalist, who pointed out a red Poison Dart frog. We then came across some leaf cutter ants that crossed the path, so there was a little warning sign there!



There were all manner of flowers there, but there was one called "hot lips" which looked like a pair of red lips. We were loaded into the aerial tram, and I thought it would be just a short ride, until I realized that the tram stopped every time they had to load each car. There were 6 people per car, and in the back of each car a naturalist sat with a green laser pointer to point out things of interest. The ride was set up so that the first half covered the lower section of the rain forest, and the return covered the canopy.



There were all manner of trees, palm, ferns, etc. We did not see much wildlife, but we could hear the birds hiding in the canopy. There was one interesting fern that looked like a six-pointed star.



After the canopy ride, we had time to shop in the gift shop, and were told by our tour director that the best shopping was at the end of the tour, so we did not have to haul all our purchases around. I took a picture of a display of local butterflies and of some of the flowers.



After the canopy tour, we were taken to a restaurant that had a butterfly garden. While everyone was getting food, I headed to the garden to photograph the butterflies. There were all kinds of butterflies, but the most beautiful ones were called Blue Morpho, but the #\$\$%^ thing would not hold still. When they did light, they folded their wings and looked like they had eyes! Well this called for desperate measures, so I bought a postcard and took a picture of it!



There were all manner of small butterflies there, but leave it to me, I found a pair that were mating! Our guide also got out a stick with a Rhinoceros beetle on it, and you can see the size by the size of his thumb on the left of the picture!



Our last stop before the river was at a banana packing plant. It was quite interesting to see the blue wrapped stalks come from the fields on an overhead conveyer. This gave someone the idea for a chair lift for skiers. The bunches of bananas were cut off the stalks, washed and boxed. It was hard work, but at least the people had jobs.



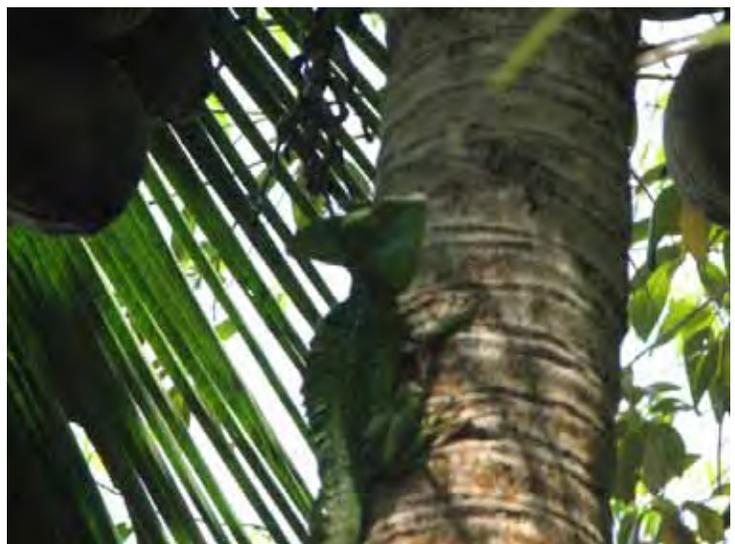
TORTUGUERO NATIONAL PARK

Our bus took us to the dock where we were to catch the boat to the Tortuguero Park, and our accommodations for the next 2 nights. We were loaded into a large covered boat, and we took off! We must have been doing between 35 and 50 mph, and Kathy, being an experienced water skier and jet boat driver loved it! She had the same look on her face that I must have when I was riding on the outside of the locomotive around Lake Baikal in Siberia!

The place fit my definition of "roughing it"-no cable TV! The rooms were simple, but clean and new. Each room had a private bathroom with a shower and 2 beds. There was a nice porch with rocking chairs and a table, and we all sat out there in the evenings. Our guide came around to show us another nastier beetle.



The next morning we were loaded into small uncovered boats to view all the bird and animal life in the park.



One of the most unusual birds is the oropendola, which is black with a gold tail, and makes its hanging nests similar to the weaver bird of Africa.

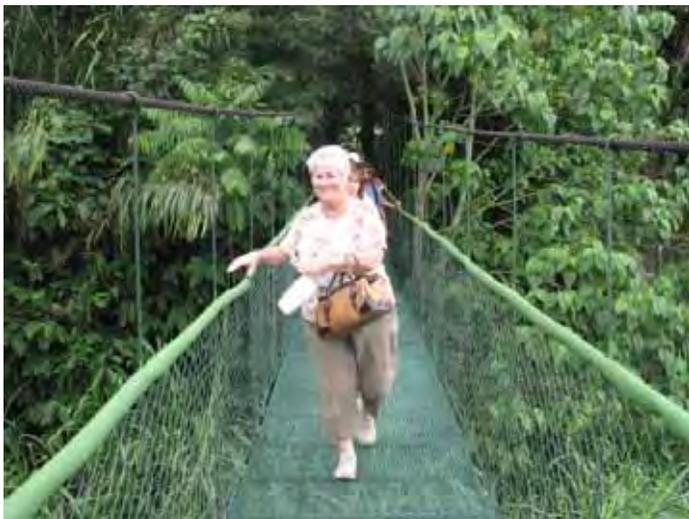


Upon returning to the resort, we took a walk down to the beach and sat under a Sea Grape tree. I had never seen one, but Kathy had been to Jamaica where she saw them. The ocean was inviting, but we were warned about the rip currents and sharks, so we just walked to the edge of the water.

The next day we went to the Tortuguero village. We saw a short video on the turtles and the problems they were facing from poaching and seaside development, as well as pollution. We went out again to look at the wildlife, and it was very relaxing just to be on the water.

FORTUNA

The next morning we were loaded into the big boats and rode back to the dock to meet our bus and our luggage. We were taken to the Selva Verde Rainforest Preserve where there was a 300 foot long suspension bridge. There were also some people near the bridge that had been rafting.



The hotel we stayed at in Fortuna was beautiful, with a nice pool area that had a swim up bar. Right outside the hotel grounds there were cattle grazing!



Dinner that night was a disaster! The hotel was new, but had been open some time, and one would have thought they had their act together. They ran out of food in the buffet when only half the people were taken care of. Kathy and I said the heck with it and ordered off the menu. The food was quite good, and when I asked for the check they said there would be no charge because we were with the group.

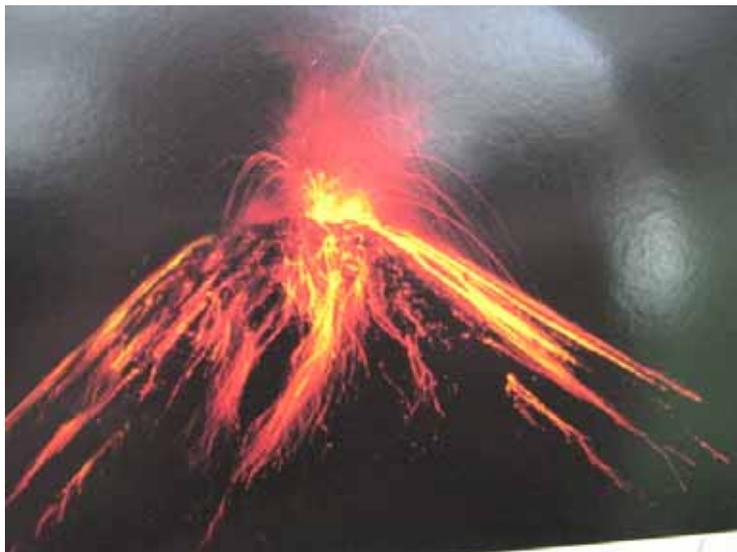
The next morning we were taken to the Cano Negro Wildlife Refuge where we went on another boat ride. We saw more birds and animals including a partially submerged caiman giving us the eye!



We also saw a bird called the “piano bird” because of the black and white coloring on its wings. Our guide also took what looked like a stick and cur around it and pulled the bark off. It exploded into a beautiful flower that looked like one of those fiber optic lights!



We also took a short trip into Nicaragua as we were at the border. We returned to the town, and while we could not see the top of the volcano, I got a postcard that I took a picture of showing the eruption.



After we had lunch a local restaurant that also featured some beautiful wood trays and other objects were returned to the hotel to get out bathing suits. We were taken to a beautiful resort that featured hot springs. One of the other things they had was a water slide. I had never been on one, so I figured I would try it. It turned out I was the only one in my group that did, and as I hit the pool at the bottom half of them were cheering me on. I figured it was fun, so I did the same slide again. I then saw there was another one with some curves in it, so I tried that one. It was higher than the other one and there was a sign saying you would be going about 30 mph at the bottom. Well, I tried that one and when I hit the pool at the bottom I must have skipped across the water like a flat rock!

We headed back to the hotel for dinner, and were told there would be no problems that night. We checked out the buffet, and then called a taxi to take us into town. Our tour director recommended a restaurant called Don Ruffino. We both ordered steaks that were huge and dessert. We could not finish either, so we had them box them up for us. The next morning we had little steak sandwiches and dessert for breakfast.

PUNTA ARENAS

We left Fortuna in the morning and headed for the cloud forest. We had a guide, and it was an interesting walk, but again saw little wildlife other than hummingbirds. There were some beauty orchids growing, however.



We had lunch at another local restaurant, and then headed for the Doubletree resort. It was a huge place with many pools and other activities.

The next morning we headed to Manuel Antonio National Park, which has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. It was kind of exciting because we had to go over a single lane bridge called the "Oh My God!" bridge. If you look closely at the vertical support, you can see where the bottom of the 4th cross brace from the top is rusted and the 5th one is missing!

We got to the beach, and there was about a half hour walk into the area where we were to go. The bathrooms and changing areas were primitive and nasty. The beach itself was beautiful



I tried snorkeling, but there was a sandy bottom and no sea life in sight. I looked over, and there was Kathy, the water baby, floating without a care in the world.



We did have a little excitement there as a young deer wandered across the beach and everyone wanted to get a picture of it.



We got back to the bus and were given box lunches that were vile- a sandwich of some mystery meat and some unidentifiable fruit. We were fortunate, however, to see some scarlet macaws in a tree. They are getting very rare, and go for \$3000 each! The pictures are upside down because I was lying on my back on the bus seat and shooting out the window!



We got back to the hotel in early afternoon, and just lounged around the pool area. We watched assorted wildlife come into the pool area as if it did not have a care.



SAN JOSE

We left the Doubletree resort and stopped at a town called Sarchi, which is famous for oxcarts. We found a place that would make them to order and ship them to us. We thought it would look cute on our porch. The top had 2 removable trays, and there is room inside for an ice bucket and some wine bottles.



Our next stop was at Grecia, where we visited a metal church. The church was built in Europe, disassembled and shipped to Costa Rica by boat. It was hauled here by oxcart and reassembled.



We arrived back in San Jose and had our "Farewell Dinner", which was sort of boring-the food was so-so, and the service was lackluster.

The next morning we were taken to the airport, and instead of routing us back through DFW, we landed in Miami, had to go through customs and immigration, and then had a 5 hour flight to Los Angeles.

We finally got home about 11 o'clock starving, as we were not fed on either leg. I had enough stuff in the house to make chimichungas, which I did then we crashed.

In summary, we both enjoyed the trip thoroughly, as there was some down time to relax instead of "If it is Tuesday it must be Belgium".

We are home until next month when we go to Florida to see my mother and for her to meet Kathy.