Costa Rica

February 2009

I’m reconstructing this blog in 2021 because it was either deleted or I never wrote one. So it will be brief and vague in the details.

Wed Feb 11 – Vida Tropical

After a 6am departure, we successfully made it through San Francisco and Phoenix, arriving in San Jose at 8:45pm, then took a taxi to Vida Tropical B&B which was a hostel-like economy spot for a one night stay close to the airport. Arriving after dinner was available, we walked a few dozen blocks to a recommended bar, where we had some food. The crowd in the bar was all native Costa Ricans loudly cheering on their team in the World Cup match. Although the game was good, we decided to return to the htel lest their team lost and things got rowdy.

Thu Feb 12 – Luna Lodge

The next morning, we had breakfast at the B&B, then caught a taxi back to the airport where we boarded a small propeller airplane bound for Puerto Jimenez, which is on the eastern shore of the Osa peninsula. Arriving in the small town, not knowing where to go or how to get to our first night’s lodging, we had the remarkable luck of almost tripping over one of Kathy’s patients. She part-time teaches in Jimenez, so we gave her a parcel of colored pencils that our friend Bill had asked us to deliver to someone deserving. Anyway, she pointed out the Colectivo “station” which consisted of a small market with an awning on the side.

After about a two hour wait, an old flat bed truck with canvas cover showed up, and we climbed aboard with about twenty locals, some goats, and a few dogs. The truck rattled off down the road, tossing us back and forth, making dozens of stops, where people would get off, or rarely, get on. After about a three hour ride, interrupted briefly by the driver working up his nerve to cross a swollen river, we arrived in Carate, on the west coast of the peninsula. As we got off the truck, a small plane arrived with a couple with many suitcases, and it turned out we were headed for the same place, Luna Lodge.

A friend had visited the lodge 10 years earlier, and raved about it, so we ignored the high price and had reserved two nights, which was all we could get given their bookings.

A big SUV showed up quickly, and our new friends and all their luggage and we with a backpack each, climbed in for a 10 minute drive up into the mountains. Luna Lodge is owned by Luna, an American ex-pat, and is apparently a big Yoga retreat destination (that’s what they told us had reserved the whole place two days hence).

Anyway, we spent two days in luxurious surroundings, with a beautiful pool/jacuzzi, three beautiful meals a day, private tropical casa with outdoor showers, and regularly offered birding classes and wildlife spotting outings. Mornings started with the howler monkey chorus, followed by all sorts of insects and small animals joining us wherever we went.

Sat Feb 14 – Finca Exotica

On the morning of our departure, we were having breakfast, and lots of new folks seemed to be joining the group, although they didn’t look like yoga types. Some pudge, thick glasses, nerdy looks. Anyway, a woman sat down with us, and when we asked if she was part of the arriving yoga group, she smiled broadly, and said “who told you that?”. She explained that it was a tantric love group who were devoted followers of someone whose name is long forgotten. Anyway, after Kathy explained later what tantric was, we both left hurriedly, wishing the howler monkeys the best.

We took the SUV back down to the small airport, and our next lodging was a short walk down the main road (also, the only road). Finca Exotica is one of many farms in a global network of organic farms where youth volunteer in exchange for lodging. They also take on a handful of paying guest like us, to provide some cash flow. We stayed in another lovely single hut, again with an outdoor shower. Although Kathy had to point it out later since I’m blind without my glasses, there was a giant orb spider living in our shower head (which was actually a bamboo pipe), and whenever the water was on, he’d emerge and wait patiently for the water to stop.

Walking north on the beach, we found a hiking guide who took us and a few others into the Corcovado NP. He was able to point out a group of tapirs, many various monkeys, huge snakes, anteaters, and all sorts of alien small animals. Of course lots of giant spiders.

Carate is right on the beach, so daily body surfing in the warm Pacific was a great diversion, although the beach sand was so hot you had to wear sandals or stay in the shade of the palms.

The next morning, we walked south along the road, and found a sign for a loop trail up into the low mountains. It was early, so there was lots of frantic activity in the forest, and most importantly, we were the first visitors, so I, leading the hike, got to find the spider webs installed overnight. The first one was the biggest, and the owner was right in the middle. I walked right into it, and started spinning and jumping trying to dislodge the owner from my face. I was right on the edge of a precipice, so Kathy started screaming “don’t hurt her”. It took me many minutes to pry my hat and glasses off, clean up the web coating everything, and I let Kathy take the lead.

Mon Feb 16 – Encanta La Vida

The next day we packed up, said goodbye, and climbed into a summoned taxi for a 90 minute ride to our next lodging, Encanta La Vida on Playa Matapalo. It turns out the surfing is famous for the longest left-hand break in the hemisphere, whatever that means. Anyway, what that really means is that everything is owned by American surfers, including all the lodging, restaurants, and bars. Sort of a tropical version of Venice Beach.

Although the lodge was beautiful and the food was good, the best story involves the wildlife. We were out hiking in the morning, and when we returned to our room, we found there were innumerable ants in a tight column across the floor, up the shower wall, and out the roof. We decided to leave them be, and on our way out to our next hike, we asked the front desk what should be done, and he just shrugged his shoulders and said “the army ants do what they do, and you can’t stop them. They’ll finish cleaning the bugs out ot the thatched roof and move on soon enough”. When we got back a few hours later, there was no trace. On one of the hikes we saw a column of leaf-cutter ants, which was spectacular.

Wed Feb 18 – Manuel Antonio

Time to move on again, so we packed up, took a taxi back to Puerto Jimenez, and took a ferry across the bay to Golfito. Since it was time for lunch, we went to a hotel/restaurant next to the docks, and since the menu was in Spanish and full of unfamiliar foods, we settled on a pizza. We ate half of it, got a to-go box, and went next door to arrange a rental car, which turned out to be a Suzuki Side-kick, sort of a mini-land rover. We headed out of Golfito, expecting a three hour drive to Quepos.

About half way, the portable GPS warned of a traffic slowdown, which is sort of remarkable, since the GPS had no realtime communications. I think it was a testament to how slowly construction projects proceed, allowing them to be included on base map data. While waiting in the traffic, we both became acutely ill, with some sort of stomach ailment.

We did find a detour along a frontage road and made it to our next lodging in just an hour late. Our lodging was a modern hotel with pool in Manuel Antonio, and was next door to a flashy bar/night club. I was feeling pretty bad, so I stayed in the room while Kathy went to a butterfly sanctuary.

The next morning we drove to the National Park and took a guided hike through the jungle, seeing lots of giant sloths hanging from the trees in addition to the famous Quetzal.

When we got back to the hotel, I ate the leftover pizza and almost immediately felt ill, confirming it was the pizza that caused all the problems. Not sure what can go bad on a veggie pizza!

Thu Feb 19

No clue where we stayed.

Fri Feb 20 - Monteverde

Leaving Manuel Antonio, we headed north towards the cloud forest. We stopped for a nice lunch at Costa Pacifico in Esterillos and continued on to the Arenal Vista Lodge on Lake Arenal.

Along the route, we found that our GPS disagreed with a turn we took, and while Kathy studied the map we found that the 50mph road suddenly turned into a small town with a huge speed bump. After heading our heads on the roof, we stopped to regroup, and were swarmed by you boys offering to give us driving instructions for a few dollars. It turns out these fine folks had messed with the street signs, which accounted for our original confusion. We explained that our GPS could handle it, so we drove away from the disappointed little scammers, eventually making it back to the highway after many “recalculating”s.

We stayed in the town of Santa Elena and our hotel was right next door to a butterly garden.

Sun Feb 22

We eventually arrived at our target B&B overlooking the lake.

We had some friends that were renting a house near Tronadora where Mark was getting dental work, so we met them and yet another friend (Jim Herod) who was building a house in the area the next morning.

Mon Feb 23 – Villa Blanco

We left Lake Arenal, headed for the Villa Blanco Cloud Forest Hotel, which would be our last stop before returning home. On the way, we found ourselves stymied by a road closed sign, which meant we would have to do a major backtract, but the trusty GPS recalculated and found us a route on a dirt track going through front yards and pastures, but it got us to our destination, which was a very swanky place, with reasonable rates since it was off the beaten track.

Tuesday Feb 24

After a nice breakfast and short walk, we headed back to the San Jose airport, dropped off the Suzuki, and flew to Birmingham to visit Sally before returning home on Feb 28th.