

**Costa Rica  
Great People, Magnificent Jungles, Rugged Mountains  
and  
Beaches, Beaches, Beaches**

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<http://www.beachesbeaches.com> [jerry@beachesbeaches.com](mailto:jerry@beachesbeaches.com)  
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**We'd always wanted to see real jungle. But we didn't want to risk our lives or our health to achieve that dream. Costa Rica let us experience the jungle with a relative degree of safety. On February 17th, 1995 we left for a 26 day adventure. We got a free upgrade to First Class and that's how the rest of the trip went - everything clicked, everything was First Class.**

**I'm writing this account so that you too can enjoy this great country. The following sections will help you easily find the information you're looking for:**

**Trip preparation**

**Itinerary**

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**Buses and Planes**

**Puerto Viejo/Caribbean**

**Monteverde/Santa Elena/Cloud Forest**

**La Fortuna/Volcan Arenal**

**La Virgen/Whitewater Jungle Kayaking**

**Dominical/Pacific**

**Golfito/Paradise for us.**

**Osa Peninsula/Corcovado National Park/Pristine Jungle.**

**San Jose/Surrounding Countryside.**

**Trip Preparation**

**Our journey to Costa Rica began in late November with us making plans to go to Kauai in the spring. We'd been there before and loved it. As Pat and I made our plans that evening, she casually mentioned "Do you think we'll ever get to Costa Rica?"**

**Both of us have wanted to see real jungle for a long time. I was a Marine rifle platoon commander in Vietnam but never saw what I called real jungle, triple canopy type stuff. Friends of mine got into the jungle. One of them had a herd of elephants walk through his ambush site one night. But my unit worked in the**

**coastal plain around Da Nang, Chu Lai, and the DMZ. I could see the green jungle covered mountains but I never got into them.**

**Pat and I often talked about going to Costa Rica because it seemed like a relatively safe place to experience the jungle. We hadn't gone because we figured you had to have a month to see the country. Her asking the question got me to thinking. The next day I did a little research and found that a month in Costa Rica would cost about the same as 9 days on Kauai. That night I told her what I'd found and asked if she was up for going.**

**Pat, I think, is more of an adventurer than I am. She said, "When can we leave?" And we started plotting out the dates we could get off to go. The dry season runs mid-December through mid-May. Neither of us figured we needed rain to experience the rain forest. We'd lived in Seattle for 8 years and had seen plenty of rain in the forest. So, the dry season was fine with us. Work wise, for both of us, February/March worked best. So, we booked our flight and began planning.**

**Our two best resources were The New Key to Costa Rica, Beatrice Blake, Ulysses Press and the Internet. When we got to Costa Rica we found that the Lonely Planet Guide to Costa Rica also had invaluable information. I'd recommend both books. The Lonely Planet Guide has excellent detailed maps. The New Key has excellent descriptions of places to stay.**

**I posted notes on the Internet asking for advice on traveling in Costa Rica. Susan Drudings, Travel Talk, Delphi helped me to put the notes in the right places. Within 3 days I had E-mail from 10 people telling me about their experiences. I also tracked down a file that contained the diary of a person who had spent a month in Costa Rica in 1994. Through Gopher I downloaded the file from a computer at the University of Manitoba. The power of communications through the Internet amazed me. That's why I'm sharing the story of our adventure with you. Other people helped us and now I'm adding to that contribution.**

**Our plan was to go simple, light, and flexible. We only made reservations for accommodations at two places, places that you just couldn't come to unannounced. We laid out the rest of the trip so that if we found a place we liked particularly well we could stay there longer. We knew where we wanted to go but only had a rough timetable to follow.**

**Special items that we purchased just for the trip: malaria pills (needed if you go to the Caribbean), two hammocks, binoculars, pocket knife, tape recorder ( for recording jungle sounds), cheap tent, and clothes from the Goodwill store.**

**Violent crime is rare in Costa Rica but theft is quite common. All of the advice**

we'd gotten had said don't look like you have anything worth stealing. By the time we'd finished the trip we'd lost the binoculars, knife, one hammock, and the tape recorder. Did someone steal them or did we lose them? I don't know. We'd just notice that we hadn't seen an item for a few days. When we searched through our gear the item wouldn't show up.

Each of us carried a day pack and a small carry-on bag. Clothing for each of us consisted of 2 pairs of trousers, 2 shirts, 4 pair of underwear (which I didn't need because I stopped wearing underwear on the 2nd day), bathing suit, shorts, tennis shoes, and sandals. We had a cheap tent and a nylon tarp just in case we had to camp. But camping wasn't our plan. It was just an option for us. When you can get rooms for \$10 to \$15 a night why bother camping?

### **Itinerary**

**Leave Los Angeles 11PM Saturday evening.**

**Arrive San Jose, Costa Rica 8:30AM Sunday morning.**

**Bus to San Jose.**

**Bus to Puerto Limon.**

**Bus to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca ( Caribbean).**

**Day 1 - Arrive 2:30 PM Sunday afternoon.**

**Days 2,3, and 4 hang loose in Puerto Viejo.**

**Day 5 - bus to San Jose.**

**Bus to Monteverde.**

**Day 6 - hike in Santa Eleana Cloud Forest Reserve.**

**Day 7 - bus to Tilarin.**

**Bus to La Fortuna/Volcan Arenal**

**Saturday night watch lava flow, hear volcano explode, and soak in hot springs.**

**Day 8 - enjoy town and rain/evening more volcano watching.**

**Day 9 - bus to San Carlos.**

**Bus to La Virgen.**

**Kick back and enjoy the edge of the jungle.**

**Day 10- white water kayaking on the Rio Sarapiqui.**

**Day 11- bus to San Jose.**

**Bus to San Isidro via road over the Cerro de Muerto (mountain of death).**

**Miss bus to Dominical, spend night in San Isidro.**

**Day 12 - bus to Dominical, camp on beach.**

**Day 13 - bus to San Isidro.**

**Bus to Golfito.**

**Day 14 - hang out in jungle town of Golfito.**

**Day 15 - discover paradise of Playa Cacao.**

**Day 16 - breakfast with the toucans.**

**Day 17 - canoe to secluded beach and swim naked in the surf.**

**Day 18 - ferry to Puerto Jimenez.**

**Day 19 - landrover to Carate, 2 hours.**

**Hike one mile up the beach to jungle tent camp.**

**An awesome day at the edge of Corcovado National park.**

**Day 20 - go with guide into the jungle, hello monkeys.**

**Day 21 - scarlet macaws, 21 of them, see us off.**

**Hike down beach. Back of truck to Puerto Jimenez.**

**Day 22 - Ferry to Golfito and Playa Cacao.**

**Canoe back to our favorite beach for more of same.**

**Day 23 - plane to San Jose.**

**Walk around San Jose.**

**Day 24 - tour bus to Caribbean plain and boat ride on river to Tortuguero National Park.**

**Day 25 - bus to Sarchi, ox carts and furniture.**

**Day 26 - fly home.**

**We Remember Most**

**The most friendly and warm people we've ever met.**

**Pristine jungle that sings out at sunrise.**

**Playa Cacao.**

**Taking hours for dinner.**

**Waiting for an hour for a cup of coffee and loving every minute.**

**Clean restrooms.**

**Lots of toilets without seats.**

**Napkins and toilet paper in short supply and falls apart when you use it.**

**Never finding swarms of mosquitoes.**

**Drinking gallons of Fanta Naranja ( Orange Soda Pop).**

**Understanding what siesta is all about.**

**Beautiful doors on almost every house.**

**Up at dawn-in bed by 9 PM.**

**For the first time in my life winning a scrabble game with my wife.**

**An incredible night time thunder and lightning show over the Golfo Dulce.**

**Laying in a hammock again and again and again.**

**The awesome jungle.**

**Monkeys swinging in the trees.**

**Toucans having breakfast with us.**

**21 scarlet macaws in one tree.**

**Volcan Arenal exploding and lava pouring out.**

**Tipping over the first time in a white water kayak.**

**Beans and Rice, arroz con frijoles, gallo pinto.**

**San Jose as a city not worth spending the night in.**

**Seashells and beautiful beach stones.**

**Buses to anywhere, just about anytime, for practically nothing.**

**Buses and Planes**

**It's a major mistake to rent a car in Costa Rica. Rentals are expensive and often break down or have flats. The highways are full of potholes and generally have just two narrow lanes. Being in a rental car singles you out as a target for thieves.**

**Buses, on the other hand, get you there probably faster that you could make it in a car. The bus drivers drove amazingly fast and shocked us when they passed cars and big trucks on curves. I'd rather be in a bus meeting a car than a car meeting a bus. Buses are cheap. You can go anywhere in Costa Rica for \$5.00 or less. Most of the buses are Greyhound quality. Most, we did ride in a few in the country that were old school buses. But the ones for the long hauls were very nice.**

**We met some people who had rented a car for their first week. When we met them they were on a bus with us. They told us how wonderful it was to be able to enjoy the scenery and not worry about potholes and buses coming at them.**

**You can also fly to a lot of places. We only took one plane ride. It was a flight on Sansa, the national airline. But it was cheap, on time, comfortable, and the ride was spectacular. We did this when we flew back from Golfito to San Jose. It would've been a 9 hour bus ride for about \$5.00 each. In the plane it was one hour and cost about \$45 apiece.**

**Puerto Viejo on the Caribbean  
(3 1/2 to 4 hours bus ride from San Jose)**

**Description - We'll go back here again someday. It's the kind of place you've dreamt about. The village, up until the last few years, centered around fishing and agriculture. It didn't have electricity until 1987 and only two phones in town when we were there. Now travelers like us are starting to discover it.**

**But don't despair, or at least not yet. We'd read about the commercial development going on but it's not apparent. You have to look hard for the upscale resorts. What we saw was a village that, at least to us, looked like that's how it's looked for 50 years. Puerto Viejo is very compact, maybe 6 square blocks. Most of the cabins (motels), sodas (cafes), and the market are located on the dirt roads closest to the bay. They all look like they were made to serve the local people and not out of towners. There are lots of places to stay for only \$7 to \$15 a night.**

**Our story - My plan for when we land in San Jose is to take a little time at the airport to get oriented. We'll exchange our money, visit the tourist information center, and then catch a bus into San Jose.**

**Customs is less than a 2 minute wait, the tourist information center is closed and so are the official exchange offices. We are outside the terminal within minutes of landing. At least a hundred people are ganged up outside around the exit. Some are waiting for friends, others are tour guides looking for their clients, and then there are taxi drivers and money exchangers. We're bewildered. Our guide book warns against exchanging money with sidewalk people. They may have counterfeit money or take yours and run off with it. We push our way through the crowd and ignore the taxi drivers and money exchangers who are all trying to get our attention. Finding some refuge away from the crowd we sit down on our packs to try and figure out what we're going to do. We have to have some money exchanged or we can't ride the bus.**

**While we're discussing our predicament a young man approaches us and in English asks us if we'd like to stay at his bed and breakfast for the night. There, he says, we can get ourselves oriented. I tell him that we just want to get our money exchanged and get headed to the Caribbean. I don't want to waste a night**

**in San Josse. He understands. Turns out he's from the States, and tells us he'll help us get a fair deal with a money changer.**

**The exchange is completed in minutes and he directs us to the bus to San Jose. Both of us thank him and tell him we'll stay at his bed and breakfast when we return to go home.**

**Buses leave every 10 or 15 minutes for San Jose. We walk over and climb on and we're off. The ride is about 45 minutes. Neither of us think the scenery is anything to write home about and we spend the time figuring out where the bus will drop us off at.**

**San Jose is nothing to look at. It reminds me of downtown Los Angeles without the highrise buildings. The bus station is on a side street in downtown San Jose. Grabbing our packs from the overhead we get off and walk around the corner to a park we'd seen coming in. We're very conscious that we really look like tourists but hopefully poor ones.**

**In the park, we sit down and figure out where the bus station is for going to Puerto Viejo. It's too far to walk so we hail a taxi and for about \$3.00 he takes us to the station. The bus has left some time ago for Puerto Viejo but we can catch the bus to Puerto Limon and then a bus from there to Puerto Viejo. Our timing is great. Within minutes of purchasing our tickets our bus is on it's way.**

**Both of us are in awe at how well the driver maneuvers the bus through the narrow streets of San Jose. In about 15 minutes we're on the expressway headed out of town. This is nothing more that a 2 lane road without traffic signals. The bus is traveling at least 60 miles an hour and passing the few cars on the road and numerous trucks. We've never been on a bus before that passed cars and trucks. The country is prettier as we climb out of the valley that cradles San Jose. We see lots of pastures and a scattering of trees.**

**The road is fairly straight and climbs a grade for about 30 minutes before we're at the crest and heading down to the Caribbean plain. At the summit there is a dramatic change in the scenery. The eastern escarpment is much more rugged and steep than the western side. Now the descent is winding. The vegetation is lush. Ferns cover the road side cuts. Small waterfalls cascade down the cliff to our right, pass under the road and continue plunging into the deep canyon to our left. The mountain slopes are incredibly steep. I can't imagine hiking up them. We are passing through the national park Braulio Carrillo. It covers 108,969 acres and ranges in elevation from 1500 feet to the summit of Vulcan Barva at 9,534 ft. This is the only national park in the country with a road through it. 84% of the park is primary forest, it's never been logged. This is ohhing and ahhing country.**

**This is what we came to see.**

**After about an hour we come out of the mountains and onto the coastal plain. Here the primary forest is all gone, cleared for cattle ranching and banana plantations. Still it's beautiful. In the distance we can see the backbone of the magnificent Cordillera de Talamanca which rises to over 12,000 feet.**

**This is also where we're introduced to the Costa Rican custom of throwing trash out the window. The little boy in front of me has been drinking a coke. Now he's finished and to my amazement I see that he's going to throw the bottle out the window. "No!" I say and he looks back at me quite startled. His mother gives me a quizzical glance and then takes the bottle from him. A little later a teenager casually tosses a bottle out the window. I realize that this must be customary. Later on the trip someone told me that not long ago they used to have signs in the buses that said "Don't throw trash on the floors. That's what the windows are for."**

**Finally we come into Puerto Limon. The guide books said you don't want to spend a night in this town. It's a port city and one look confirms that we don't want to be stranded here for the night. During the last hour I've been practicing my Spanish for asking "Where do I catch the bus to Puerto Viejo." Now I'm really glad that I've been doing this.**

**If we looked like tourists in San Jose, in Puerto Limon we look like a couple of fruit trees ripe for picking. It's Sunday afternoon and the street is packed with people. The bars are overflowing and as we walk by them we feel dozens of eyes on us. I quickly realize that I can ask the question I've been practicing in Spanish but I don't understand a word of the reply.**

**After walking around town for about 15 minutes hoping we'll stumble upon the bus station, I have Pat sit down in the shade in a park and watch our packs. I'd seen what looked like a police station about a block back and I went back there to ask for directions. Again I didn't understand a word but his hand signs were very clear. We were only 2 blocks away.**

**Walking quickly I get back to Pat and we shoulder our packs and get over to the bus station. The bus is about to leave when we buy our tickets. Talk about timing. This is the last bus for the day to Puerto Viejo. The bus isn't nice like the one we'd come over on. It's an old school bus.**

**For about the first hour out of Limon the road follows the Caribbean coastline. Though there are coconut palms lining the beach, the vegetation is sparse and not the dense jungle I'd hoped for. Every few miles the bus driver stops to let people on or off the bus. I make a note that when we are ready to leave Puerto Viejo we'll**



take the direct bus to San Jose.

As we approach Cahuita, the road pulls away from the coast, maybe a 1/2 mile, and the forest becomes thick enough that you can't see the ocean. The bus stops in Cahuita to drop off some passengers and then continues on towards Puerto Viejo de Talamanca. Cahuita draws a lot of visitors because it's at the entrance to Cahuita National Park most noted for the coral reef found out at the end of the point. The town looks ugly to us, and a little sinister from some of the characters we see hanging around on the street. A lot of people like Cahuita but we're glad we aren't getting off here. At the same time we wonder what Puerto Viejo will look like.

About 20 minutes later our bus turns onto a dirt road. By now the vegetation is thick and I'm excited because we really are in jungle. There's a tree with bright orange blossoms that we've been seeing all along our bus ride from San Jose and now we're seeing more of them. They're tall trees, maybe 100 feet, and the blossoms are so profuse that it reminds me of Fourth of July rockets bursting in the sky. I never did learn how to pronounce the name of this tree but it's presence really gives us the feeling of being in an exotic place.

Mostly now we're driving through jungle. There is an occasional soda with cabinas and we see a farm house every quarter of mile or so. Then the road comes back to the coastline and we see a black sand beach arching around a bay. We cross another wooden bridge and in about a quarter of mile we're in Puerto Viejo. The bridges are barely as wide as the bus, don't look like they'd hold a bus, and have no railings. When we cross over one we look down and it looks like there's nothing beneath us.

The dirt road is jammed with people. This is the last day of a 3 day Mardi Gras type celebration and reggae music fills the air. We feel the energy of this place and realize we have just popped into a new time zone. Not a time zone of hours but of years. This, at least for us, is how things used to be. People who have lived here all their lives have seen the changes but for us this is the way it used to be. And what's neat about this region is that it might not become another Cancun or Puerto Vallarta. It not only represents the past but a vision for the future.

Puerto Viejo is the home of the Talamanca Association for Ecological Tourism and Conservation (Asociacion Talamanquena de Ecoturismo y Conservacion - ATEC). This nonprofit grassroots organization promotes ecologically sound tourism and small scale locally owned businesses.

ATEC, along with other local grassroots organizations, Costa Rican Agencies, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Agency for International Development are conducting a campaign to conserve a unique biological corridor. The corridor runs

from the Caribbean to the upper reaches of the Cordillera de Talamanca at 12,500 feet.

Unlike national parks where settlers and indigenous people are moved out of the parks, the corridor project seeks to preserve the ecological integrity of the region by keeping and returning control to indigenous people and long term settlers who have a history of practicing sustainable and small scale development. The intent of the corridor is to keep out large scale logging, ranching, resort, and mining activities by keeping control in the hands of the grassroots communities. The long term residents of the region live a low impact lifestyle and are essential to maintaining the ecological integrity of the area. You can get more information by phoning or faxing 506.798.4244. They may also be on the Internet by the time you read this.

Pat and I walk over to a soda (cafe), find a table looking out on the lagoon, order a beer and a Lift (like Sprite), and head to the restroom. We hadn't had a bathroom break since leaving the airport at 9:30 this morning and now it's 2:30 in the afternoon. Then, leaving her to watch our packs, I set out to find a place to stay. Using the New Key to Costa Rica as my guide, I go out on the road to find some of the cabinas mentioned in the book. First though, I do a recon. Pat calls it rowing around the lake. I like to know where I am before I settle down for the night, an attitude I picked up from running patrols in Vietnam.

The setting boggles my mind. Coconut palms line the beach which fades into a reef protected lagoon and the Salsa Brava (world famous surfing break) rolls in about 300 yards out. People are in a joyous mood and I hear music from every soda. I'm hot and sweaty but not unbearably hot and when I stay still in the shade I'm very comfortable. After about 30 minutes of looking around, which takes me all around the village, I settle on the Cabinas Tamara. People in this region speak English, Creole, Spanish and a mixture of all. So, with some Spanish and English it was easy to communicate what I wanted and for me to understand the price - \$15/night.

All of the accommodations in the village are simple and spartan. The luxury places are all outside of town and tucked away for the most part in the jungle. But we didn't come for luxury. We came for cheap and to experience the local culture. And that's what we got at the Cabinas Tamara.

I walk back and get Pat and bring her to our new home for a few days. Our plan on this trip is to stay as long as we feel like it at any place we take a liking too. Our cabina is part of a duplex. We sit right on the main dirt road. The structure is concrete block with bare concrete floors. There's a small patio separated from the street with a wrought iron fence. The windows have no screens and there's no

toilet seat on the toilet. We're about 100 yards from the beach and can see it out of our window. Most important, and believe me it's important, there's an overhead fan and a table fan. Without those fans I don't think we could sleep.

We watched our first sunset in Costa Rica from the beach. It went down behind the jungle covered mountains. Off to the east are great cumulous clouds marching in from the Caribbean. We wonder if it will rain tonight and where the mosquitoes are. It's finally dark and we are ready to eat.

There are at least 18 sodas in the village offering a variety from traditional beans and rice to spaghetti, pizza, fish, Chinese noodles, fried rice, and burritos. Tonight we chose Chinese food. It's not great but it's not bad and it's heaped on our plates. It cost us about \$6.00 for the two of us. We also find out that in Costa Rica you have to ask for the check. It's considered rude to bring you the bill until you've asked for it. So, "la cuenta por favor", is one of the first Spanish phrases we learn well. The music is still going on while we eat and look out over the ocean. Both of us feel like we've stumbled into paradise.

We're ready to crash after we eat. Back in our room we get to have our first cold shower. Most of the places we'll visit don't have hot water. It's shocking at first but we came to look forward to the cold showers as a refreshing break from the humidity and sweat.

After showering, we unpack and strew our stuff all over the room. It makes the room look pretty dumpy but if some one comes into our room they won't be able to grab a bag and get away with a bunch of our stuff. They'll have to take time to look over everything to see if there's anything valuable. Of course we always keep our money on us whenever we are out and we store it in several different pouches. My favorite is the one that slings over my shoulder under my shirt and has three different compartments. I didn't like the money belt I also wore. It wasn't as comfortable as the pouch.

We hit the bed at 7:30 PM and fell asleep instantly. The fans made it very comfortable and the music from outside rather than distract us helped drift into bliss.

Day 2 - It's Monday. Today, Puerto Viejo is a sleepy village. Other than the trash left over from the three day party, the town has gone back to it's pleasant slow manner. The celebration was fun but we're glad to see that it's over and doesn't continue into the week. We discover that there are some bugs around. Both of us have insect bites, about a dozen little red welts each, but they don't itch so they're no problem. We'd read about the no-see-ums and I guess that's what got us because we'd only seen one mosquito. During the course of our adventure

people told us that the bugs are bad only around the period of the new moon, or maybe it was the full moon, or maybe both. Anyway they're not there all the time, at least not in the dry season.

At the intersection of three streets and right on the bay we see where a man is preparing coconuts so people can drink their juice. It looks good to me. For a quarter he chops one open and sticks a straw in for me and I'm all set. Pat, sees some bananas hanging outside a little store. We get 5 for 20 cents and discover how much better these little guys are than the ones we get in the states. They're too delicate for shipping so only locals get to enjoy this wonderful tasting fruit.

Then we set out to find a bakery that sells johnny cakes. Our book tells us to be sure and eat some of these delicious biscuits. We find the store that sells them just as the little boy who delivers them from the bakery comes in with hot ones wrapped in a cloth in a basket. We buy some jugo de naranja (orange juice) and we're set. This is our breakfast routine every morning in Puerto Viejo.

We say ola! to every one we meet on the street and they all return a sincere buenos dias! or mucho gusto! to us. I've never met friendlier people. Now that we've walked around town we head onto the beach. I don't know where the day went but soon it's nighttime. Pat and I get out our scrabble game, pocket size, and go outside to play the game. After sundown the street is a constant parade of people walking around enjoying the evening. Music drifts to us from the Italian restaurant down the street about a 1/2 block. People wave to us and some come over to see what kind of a game we're playing.

Day 3 -Tuesday. We're ready to venture further out today. Next to our cabina they rent bikes for \$6 for all day. They're not fancy but you don't need 18 speeds for this mostly level terrain. After eating our daily johnny cakes, bananas and orange juice, we pedal down the road. The jungle is on both sides but it's not all wild. Most of the area behind the road is fenced off and every half mile or so we see another set of cabinas, a house, or a driveway leading to someplace. Most of the time we can't see the ocean. So, we make some detours to ride out on dirt paths to see the water and to rest. Neither of us can take in enough of the trees that tower over us. After about an hour we're at a beach with a trail we can ride on. This takes us past a new resort, but nicely done, and to a beach where we can hitch up our hammocks and swim in an area protected by a reef.

Pat spots an octopus in the shallow water and calls me over to look. He's gone though by the time I get there. The water is warm and very refreshing after our bike ride. After our swim we crash in our hammocks and enjoy the breeze. Earlier we'd met some fellow Americans. They're the first Americans we've met.

**Day 4 - We walk on the beach, swim in the ocean, lay in our hammocks, hike into the jungle and just let the spirit of the place take us over.**

**We did find some of the luxury resorts but we thought they were tastefully done. We wouldn't want to stay in them, we liked being in town and part of village life. But if you wanted to be at the edge of the jungle and the beach and away from the culture of the area, there were some nice places that go for around \$65 to \$80 a night. Las Palmas and Punta Cocles are very nice. Then there is the Cashew Jungle Lodge which we came across on a hike into the jungle. It's a beautiful lodge built in the Caribbean architectural style that makes it appear in perfect harmony with the surrounding jungle. It's high on a hill overlooking Puerto Viejo. There were no signs or ads to attract us or to point the way. We just came across it on our hike. No one was there at the time so we couldn't find out what a room cost or looked like.**

**Day 5 - It's raining lightly this morning and it poured last night. It looks like we picked a good day to leave the beach and head for the mountains of Monteverde.**

**Monteverde/Santa Elena/Cloud Forest  
(3 1/2 to 4 hour bus ride from San Jose)**

**Description - The countryside reminded us of the central coast of California. The hills are rolling ranchland dotted with trees. The last 20 or so miles are up a steep, winding, narrow, dirt road with great views over the Nicoya Peninsula and the Pacific Ocean. Unlike the California coast the forested side is not on the Pacific side. Here the prevailing moisture bearing air is from the Caribbean so the cloud forest is on the east side of the Cordillera de Tilaran. Monteverde is the famous reserve established by Quakers from Alabama in 1951. It's not a town but a community and reserve of the same name. Santa Elena is a town and the reserve of the same name. The forest in both reserves is beautiful. The Santa Elena forest is more dense and has fewer visitors than Monteverde. It's much cooler at this elevation though it's still very humid walking in the forest.**

**It is a full days journey for us to travel from Puerto Viejo to Monteverde. To San Jose it's about 4 hours, then wait for 2 hours for the bus to Monteverde, then another 4 hours.**

**Many people make the mistake of making San Jose their base for sightseeing in Costa Rica. Most of the tourist spots can be visited in one day from San Jose and, at most, with a one night stay over. But San Jose is a terrible town to be in. It is the place where all bus trips begin from. So, we had to pass through it several times to make bus connections. But do not stay there. Not only is it not pretty, theft is rampant. The surrounding countryside is beautiful. If you must stay in**

the central valley then stay in one of the surrounding towns like Escazu or Sarchi.

About dusk our bus turns off the paved highway and begins the ascent to Monteverde. The road is barely wide enough for two cars. I'm amazed that a bus can go up this road. But up it goes. The ride takes an 1 1/2 hours to 2 hours. The hills are rolling and brown. Trees are sparsely scattered. I'd call it an oak woodland in the states. Climbing higher and higher we can now see the Pacific Ocean gleaming in the setting sun.

Pat and I overhear a conversation in the seat behind us. The girl who is talking says that she works at a pension where the rooms are just \$10 a night. Pat turns and asks her if there is room there for us for two nights. She says sure. We join in the conversation and learn that her name is Emma. She's from California and is here for about six months to do volunteer work at the Santa Eleana Reserve. To earn room and board she works at the pension Manakein.

It's dark when we get off the bus and we're glad to be with Emma. Santa Eleana is about two blocks long and it would be hard to find a place to stay in the dark. The pensions are all spread out in the surrounding countryside.

Emma has rounded up 8 of us to stay and the Manakein. The owners are thrilled when she shows up with all eight of us. On the drive to the Manakein we learn that Emma speaks fluent Spanish and French. She's an incredible person and just 18.

Our room is small but very clean with wood paneling and very warm and cozy. The bathroom is down the hall and supposedly has hot water but we never do figure out how to get the hot water to come out. The wind is blowing hard outside and it's cold. It feels funny to be snuggling up with blankets over us when just last night we'd been laying spread eagle on our bed with only a sheet over us and both fans going.

Day 6 - The morning is chilly and we wear sweaters to breakfast. For just \$5.00 we get a great Tico breakfast in the small wood paneled dining room of the pension. We have eggs, rice, toast, and coffee. The owners children are having breakfast also and the kids get a kick out of us trying to speak some Spanish to them. They try some English on us.

After enjoying breakfast and a pot of coffee con leche we call a cab to take Emma and us up to the Santa Eleana Reserve. The drive takes about 20 minutes.

As we near the crest of the mountains the woodland becomes more dense and the vegetation more lush. Going over the crest we are in the Cloud Forest. Here the

prevailing winds from the Caribbean carry moisture laden clouds up over the cordillera. Rain falls regularly throughout the year on the east facing slopes and near the crest. But today is beautiful with just big fluffy clouds drifting in the sky. We've chosen to spend our day in Santa Eleana rather than the more famous Monteverde Reserve because several people, including Emma, have told us that the Santa Eleana Reserve is more lush and denser than Monteverde. Also, there are fewer tourists at Santa Eleana.

It hasn't rained for a few days and the trails are dry enough that we don't need rubber boots. Pat and I set out on a loop trail that is about 2 1/2 miles in length. At first we are hiking through secondary forest, land that has been logged and is now growing back. Here the trees are small and the vegetation is dense. Soon, though, we are in the primary rain forest or jungle. Here the trees have never been logged off. They're tall and vines hang down from them.

The air is cool but very humid. Before long we are sweating up a storm as we hike. When you stop there is a cool breeze. We have the place almost all to ourselves. During the hike we only come upon two other small parties of people. Near the end we are at a lookout point where you can look down at Vulcan Arenal. This is an active volcano and we've heard it rumble several times during our hike. Clouds cover the top now. We're a thousand or more feet above the crater and probably ten miles away.

Around mid afternoon we're finished with our visit to the reserve and we catch a taxi to take us back to Manakein. After lunch at a restaurant in Santa Eleana we walk down to the Butterfly Farm. I hadn't expected much and we are both surprised at how interesting the farm is.

You enter the farm through a small building that has some information about butterflies. The farm itself is made up of three screened enclosures. The first two cover about 200 square feet and the third maybe 400 square feet with a 15 foot screened ceiling. One contains butterflies found near the forest floor, the next, butterflies found higher up in the canopy, and finally the last one has butterflies you find in the top reaches of the canopy. A guide takes you through pointing out various species and telling us about how they live. You're free, though, to linger behind and observe by yourself. In each section we see beautiful butterflies but my favorite is a big iridescent blue one. It's probably as big as my hand. It glides through the trees and shrubbery in the enclosure like a stealth fighter bomber. Totally quiet and absolutely beautiful.

With a little time left before sunset we hike out in to a clearing where we can watch the sun set into the Pacific off in the distance. It's getting chilly now and we walk back to the pension in the dark.

**For dinner we go with Emma and two Frenchmen to an Italian restaurant for pizza. The pizza is outstanding. It rates with some of the best I've had in the states.**

**Day 7 - We have to get up early this morning to catch the bus to La Fortuna, which is at the base of Vulcan Arenal.**

**La Fortuna and Vulcan Arenal  
(4 hours from San Jose and 6 hours from Santa Eleana)**

**Description - The journey is again though California oak woodland type terrain. The bus follows a dirt road for about two hours to the town of Tilarin. Along the way the driver stops to deliver packages, propane, and groceries to farm houses. From Tilarin, the road skirts Lake Arenal, passes from the open woodland into jungle, and then into rangeland dominated by the 4,000 foot volcano - Vulcan Arenal. La Fortuna is a tourist town. It is made up of mostly restaurants and tour operators. But it's done well and is in an attractive setting. The Ticos come here to boat on Lake Arenal and to soak in the hot springs at the base of the volcano.**

**Our story - For awhile this morning I feel like we're passing through the rural coastal mountains of California. Tilarin looks to us like many a small farming towns in California. The sky is overcast with an occasional light drizzle. We walk around the town twice and decide that we've seen all of it. So, we find a place to lay against our packs while we wait for a couple of hours for the bus to La Fortuna.**

**Finally the bus arrives. We board it and it heads out of town towards Lake Arenal. Once again we see people throwing trash out the windows. By now we realize that this is customary. The lake also has that California look to it. This time of year the grass is brown. It's a big lake, about 28 miles long. When we get over to the north side the vegetation begins to become more dense and lush. People have told us that this is like Switzerland. Well not quite by our notions. But we do come upon several hills where people have built Swiss looking chalets overlooking the green rolling hills, the lake, and then the mountains of Monteverde in the distance. Certainly no snow capped peaks but it is pretty.**

**Soon we're driving through beautiful jungle. All of this is on a dirt road, by the way. There are several places where there's been small landslides that leave barely enough room for the bus to get by. Now the country is getting really interesting. I'm wondering if La Fortuna will be in the jungle. But after awhile we come out of the jungle and we can see Vulcan Arenal. The road is also now paved.**



The volcano is not real impressive but still quite pretty. And of course knowing that it's still active adds more excitement to seeing it. We cross the dam that makes Lake Arenal and are now skirting the flanks of the volcano and descending towards La Fortuna. About 10 miles out of the town we pass some of the popular hot springs resorts which are packed with people. Then we're out in what I'd call open rangeland. Looks like cattle country to me and the grass is green here.

Shortly, we enter La Fortuna. It's a strip town about 6 to 8 blocks long. Not unlike our towns laid out along heavily traveled highways to get the most exposure to people going down the road. Our destination is the Hotel La Fortuna. The bus lets us off about 2 short blocks from the hotel. We're lucky we made reservations while we were still at Santa Eleana. This is Friday evening and every place will be full by Saturday afternoon. After we check into the hotel they put out the No Vacancy sign.

The La Fortuna Hotel is a funky place. It looks a little dilapidated but it's very clean and has magnificent hardwood floors. They're polished to a high luster. The colors are cheery in a hippie sort of way. I think that this may have been in Haight-Asbury and moved here after the 60's in California. This is a shared bathroom place also but that's never a problem. For \$10 a night it's perfect for us. We like being on the main street where it's easy to walk the town and to enjoy it after dark.

Tossing our gear in the room we then go out to walk the town. This is a tourist place. It's mostly cafes, tour operators, hotels, and tourist information places. The tours are cheap by our standards. For instance, we sign up for a trip to see the volcano at night and to soak in a hot spring for just \$12 a piece. You can also rent horses, bicycles, and take tours to see caverns and wildlife sanctuaries. Seeing the volcano is all we want to do though.

I ask our guide if we'll be able to see the lava flowing out. He's Swiss and been in the town for a month or so. Andres, his name, is earning his room and board by taking people on the volcano tour. Right now clouds are hiding the summit. He says that the clouds often clear at night but that if we don't see the lava he'll give us a free tour Sunday night. I think that this is all tourist hype and that probably no one has seen lava for months or years. It last erupted in 1968 and wiped out a town and killed 78 people.

It's a few hours before we leave for the volcano so we set out to have dinner. The place we pick is roasting chickens over red hot wood coals. They look and smell great. All we want is something simple. The restaurant is open in the front so you can eat and watch people passing by. We have some rice with the chicken and enjoy the view of the cloud shrouded volcano.

**It's time now to catch the tour bus to the slopes of Arenal. Turns out that Pat and I are the only ones in the van. I figure that everyone else knows that there's nothing to see and we're the only suckers in town. Andres gives us a little talk about the volcano, like a naturalist talk, as we make the 20 minute drive to the other side of the volcano.**

**He turns off onto a dirt road and in about a 1/2 mile we come to about 10 cars and 30 or so people. They're all standing outside along the road and looking up at the volcano which is still covered with a cloud cap. Andres turns the van around and parks it alongside a fenced in pasture. It's dark now. The first thing that catches my attention are the fireflies. I've never seen them before. Their little blinking lights make the area look like a Disney attraction.**

**Everyone is very quiet. Any one who is talking is doing it in very whispered tones. Andres tells us to listen. We hear the sound of falling rocks. He tells us that's lava flowing out of the volcano and pushing rocks down the slopes, rock slides. My eyes are accustomed to the dark now. Andres tells me he thinks the cloud cap is thinning. Then I see it. It's a faint red glow in the cloud. Then I see the lava coming out of the side of the volcano and cascading down the mountain side accompanied now by the sound of the falling rocks.**

**It dies out. Then another red tongue appears from another spot. It's joined by another and together pour down the mountain. I'm in awe. Oh, it's a ways away maybe a mile or so. It's hard to tell in the dark but I think it's awesome. We watch in silence for the most part with only occasional whispers. Then, Andreas says it time to go.**

**We climb in the van and head back towards La Fortuna. Maybe 10 minutes down the road he pulls over and says this is where we'll swim. Out of the bus we turn on our flashlights and head down a steep muddy bank. In 30 or 40 feet we're at the edge of the stream.**

**Our bathing suits are underneath our clothes. We undress, hang our clothes on a tree and slip into the water. It's been damned up by rocks to form a pool about 2 feet deep. Andreas, shines his light on the bank so we can see how to get into the water. Creepy, I'd say. The bank is slippery and the water looks dark in the reflected light. I slip my toe into the water and find that it's nice and warm. With my feet I feel that the bottom is fairly smooth and gravelly. I'm in and I help Pat in. Andreas follows. The lights are off now and our eyes quickly adjust to the dark. There's enough starlight that we can see each other. We sit on the bottom and the water comes up to our neck. This is wonderful. Andreas shows us where we can lean up against some rocks and really relax in the warm water. 20 minutes has us**

**totally relaxed and we're ready to go back.**

**A light rain has started to fall by the time we're back to La Fortuna. The air is neither hot nor cool just comfortable. We don't need a fan to sleep and we lay awake for awhile listening to the rain on the roof.**

**Day 8 - Today is Sunday. The sky is overcast and Vulcan Arenal is obscured by clouds. The Catholic church is just across the street situated at the end of a grass park. We decide to go to Mass. This is going to be a lazy day just hanging around town and relaxing. Attending mass will be a good way to start the day.**

**It continues to rain while we're in church. One of the hymns the congregation sings is the Battle Hymn of the Republic. In Spanish, of course. The high ceiling is made from the beautiful hardwoods found in this area. It's a beautiful church.**

**After church we put up our umbrellas and walk around town. It's only about 6 blocks or so long but it's fun to just take our time. There's lots to do from a tourist standpoint in and around La Fortuna. However, we just want to kick back and relax. Besides the owner of the hotel told us we could go to the volcano again tonight for free. So, lets just take the day slow and be rested for this evening.**

**It's time now to go out to catch the van to Vulcan Arenal. But in place of the van there's a school bus. Tonight, instead of a bunch of vans going out to see the lava show, there's one school bus. We board and the driver begins a route around town to pick up tourists from various hotels.**

**At the viewing site the volcano is completely covered in clouds. You can still hear the rocks rolling down the mountainside but we can't see anything. A guy from Minnesota is hanging with Pat and I. He's complaining that we're too far away. Wants to be closer. "People have died hiking on that mountain", I tell him.**

**Then there's a tremendous boom from the mountain. All of us are startled. Against the dark sky we see the plume of ash coming out of the volcano and drifting away beneath the clouds. With the explosion, as though on cue, the clouds clear and we see huge red-hot lava flows coming out of the mountainside and cascading down its side. Now the tourist from Minnesota is scared.**

**"Shouldn't we get further away?" he says. What a screwball I think to myself.**

**After about a 1/2 hour we're all ready to head for the hot springs. Back in the bus and off to the river. Tonight, because there's about 15 of us, we're a little more sophisticated. Andreas takes a car battery down by the stream's edge and hooks up some electric lights. It's nice tonight but not as much fun as last night.**

Back in La Fortuna, Pat and I go over to the nicest restaurant in town. It's has a huge thatched roof, Tahitian style. For days now we've been having beans and rice and chicken. Tonight we'll splurge. First we order jugo con leche. These are incredibly delicious fruit drinks made with milk and ice. You can have papaya, pineapple, mango, and other great flavors. They remind us of Orange Julius but ten times better. Next we order gallo carne, steak sandwich, to split between us and a huge order of french fries. Both are wonderful and greasy. Just what we needed. To finish off the evening we get a banana split and coffee.

It's drizzling again when we begin walking back to the hotel. The air smells wonderful and we talk about the awesome explosion we'd heard at Vulcan Arenal. Tomorrow we have to get up early to catch the bus to take us to La Virgen. So, it's in bed by 10PM and fall to sleep listening to the rain on the roof.

Day 9 - Our alarm clock wakes us up to Monday morning. It only takes us about ten minutes to throw our stuff together. The sun is just now coming up. Before going to the bus stop we cross the street to the park. A dark cloud hangs over Arenal. The first rays of the day are shining on the church with it's high steeple. It's a great picture to keep in our mind.

The bus, as usual is on time. We climb in, put our packs in the overhead storage area, and sit down. Within a few minutes we're on our way to San Carlos. There we'll catch another bus to La Virgen.

### **La Virgen - Jungle Kayak Trip**

**(3 hours from San Jose - 5 hours from La Fortuna)**

**Description - La Virgen is on the Caribbean Plain in the northeastern part of the country. Logging, bananas, and growing ornamental plants is the basis for the economy. All of this land was once covered with jungle but most has now been cleared for bananas or rangeland. The exception being the two national parks Tortuguero and Braulio Carrillo. The countryside reminds us very much of the Willamette Valley in Oregon.**

San Carlos is a busy farming community. It looks very prosperous. There's lots of traffic. Typically, the bus lets us off at someplace different than where we're to catch our next bus. So, we have to ask around to find the station we need. It's only a block away from where we got off. We strike up a conversation with a German woman. She's about 25 and traveling through Central America on her own. So far on the trip we've only met a few Americans. All the other tourists are European, mostly German but some Swiss and Italians also.

Up to today catching a bus has been a cinch but our luck runs out. We can't figure out where the line begins to board the bus or even if we're in the right line. This is like a commuter bus so few people have luggage or packs like us. Pat finally starts shoving me and saying we've got to push our way onto the bus or be left behind. It seems that there is really no one line for getting on the bus. People are just cramming in from all directions. With Pat's urging I start pushing my way through. Once on, I'm amazed that there are still a few seats. We can't sit together though. I end up about 4 seats back of Pat.

We finally roll out of the station with a bus packed with people both standing and sitting. Now the bus ticket taker is working his way through the bus collecting fees. All the buses we've ridden on have a driver and an assistant. The assistant collects the fare and also packs the people towards the back of the bus to make room for more people. This is the first bus we've been on where there are people standing.

La Virgen is only about 30 miles from San Carlos. However, this bus does not go just to La Virgen. It goes way past to a number of towns near the banana plantations. I'm concerned that I won't know when we've gotten to La Virgen. On the other buses we've taken they were going to the place where we wanted to get off. When the bus finally stopped we knew we were where we wanted to be. Not this bus though. As we passed through village after village, I tried to determine where we were on my map. Seldom, though, was there a village name displayed.

I get out my Spanish phrase book and start figuring out how to say "Please tell me when we're at La Virgen." The bus never seems to let off people but it continues to take on more people. The bus assistant pushes people towards the back to make room for more people.

Finally, satisfied that I know the correct Spanish, I turn to the two guys next to me and ask them to tell me when we get to La Virgen. They nod in understanding and indicate we have about another 15 minutes.

"La Virgen, La Virgen!" they say to me and point out the window. I jump up out of my seat and push through several people to get my pack down. "Pat, this is it. Let's go!" I think that Pat has heard me and turn to push my way towards the back door to exit. I have to hold my pack over my head as I push through the people who are packed like sardines. I can't get both myself and my pack out at the same time. People standing outside waiting to get in see my problem and motion for me to hand my pack out to them. They take it for me and I pop out just behind it. "Mucho gracias!"

I toss my pack down on the ground and turn around to help Pat. She's not there! I

look up at the bus and see her looking out the window at me. She's shocked to see that I'm not on the bus anymore. I shocked to. Fortunately, there's still people getting on the bus and she has time to get her pack and shove her way off.

The bus drives off and here we are. La Virgen appears to be mostly houses and a few sodas and shops and just a dusty little bus stop. We're to go to Rancho Leona where we'll stay two nights and go kayaking. Though we have reservations, it was never clear to me if Rancho Leona is in town or outside of town. Certainly I have no idea of which way to begin walking.

This is not a tourist town like La Fortuna. Several people are looking at us from their porches as though we were creatures from another planet. Both of us are pooped. We've been on the bus from San Carlos for two hours and we only went 30 miles. Now what to do. There's a little meat market about 30 yards from us. I walk in and ask "Donde esta Rancho Leona?" The fellow points up the street.

Back with Pat. "Well, where is it?" she says.

"He indicated up the road."

"How far?"

"I don't know. Let's just start walking."

We start walking up the road without a clue as to how far we're going to have to walk. After only a 100 yards or so we see the sign Rancho Leona. We're there. It's right on the street. We'd thought it was like a ranch off in the boonies. Of course you could call La Virgen out in the boonies. There are no cars on this road and only an occasional truck very 15 or 20 minutes.

Rancho Leona is a restaurant and bunk house right on a small tributary of the Rio Sarapiquí. They prefer to only take guests who are going on one of their kayak tours. The owners are Ken, an American, and Leona, a Tico (that's what the Costa Ricans call themselves). Both are artists who do beautiful stained glass and jewelry.

The restaurant is also of the Tahitian style, a high thatched roof, and open on the sides. Out back is a patio overlooking the small stream and a sauna. All this looks into the jungle on the other side of the stream. There's an indoor area where you can sit and read and then several bunk rooms that can sleep 4 to 6 people. It's all beautifully done in a very tropical way. There are several hammocks which we test right away.

We stow our gear and then go for a walk to see what La Virgen is like. First we walk to the Rio Sarapiquí, about a 1/2 mile away. The country side reminds me of Oregon and there's even logging trucks down the road every once and a while. It's

warm but not real hot. Actually it feels really good. Most of the jungle has been logged off and there's lots of rangeland.

Walking along we notice that every house has a beautiful wood entrance door. Each is different. The bigger houses have fancier doors but even the smallest house has a pretty door. There are a lot of nice homes along the road in La Virgen. At the river we sit out on some rocks and enjoy the serenity of the place. We hear lots of birds, the sky is a beautiful clear blue. In the distance we can see several of the volcanoes that ring the central valley of Costa Rica.

It's about three in the afternoon and we decide to have an early dinner. Since we go to bed early we've found it best to eat dinner early so that there's time for our food to digest. Though Rancho Leona has a restaurant we haven't figured out if they really serve food. When we were getting settled there we never saw anyone cooking or anyone eating. Nor did we see a menu. So, we walked up the road past the Rancho to another little soda.

Pat orders spaghetti and I order black bean soup. We figure we'll split them. We're hungry though and to be on the safe side order a ham and cheese sandwich and two fruit drinks. We're addicted to those fruit drinks by now. I've never had anything so delicious.

The sandwich comes first, sort of an appetizer. Then comes the soup and spaghetti. The soup fills a crock that must hold at least a quart if not more. The spaghetti is heaped high and is hanging over the edges of a meat platter size dish. We both laugh because we know we can't eat all of this. The soup is the best I've ever tasted. It's wonderful. There's big pieces of hard-boiled egg floating in it. All of this costs us about \$7.00 including tip.

The sun is down now and we're sitting out on the patio visiting with Ken and Leona. Their son is starting his first day of school tomorrow and he is really excited. Leona is unhappy with the school system and would like to start a private school. It's a very peaceful evening and the artsiness of Rancho Leona lends to the spiritual setting. Leona asks us what we want for breakfast in the morning. We tell her that pancakes and oatmeal and coffee sound good to us.

Day 10 - We're ready to get up at 6:30 this morning. Both of us are amazed that there were no mosquitoes. Being close to the water we thought they'd be a problem.

The pancakes and oatmeal make a hearty breakfast. It's cool enough this morning that I put on my long pants and thermal shirt. The coffee hits the spot. Being cool feels really good. While we're eating, our guide for the day, Alexander, shows up.

He greets us and then, while we eat, starts getting the gear ready for the day.

Pat notices him getting down protective helmets.

"Why is he getting helmets down? Isn't this all smooth water paddling?"

"It must be for another group."

Finishing with breakfast, Pat and I go over to see if Alexander needs any help. It's clear now that the helmets are for us. Pat wants to know why the helmets.

Alexander says you need helmets when you paddle in white water.

"White water! You mean rapids?" Pat says.

Alexander says "Don't worry. You'll be in my kayak and there's only about 12 rapids."

Both of us have been in rubber boats in rapids and we've both paddled kayaks but never in rapids. Alexander says not to worry. We load up the kayaks and Leona takes us down the road about 10 miles to where we put in. You know when you sign up for things like this you're never really sure what you're going to get. We signed up because we wanted to float on a jungle river. We can see now that we'll get that and more. Pat is worried about alligators but Alexander says they don't come this far up the river this time of year.

At the launch site, Alexander shows us how to put on the skirts that keep the water out of the kayaks and several basic paddle strokes. Then I shove off to show him I can handle the kayak. I've done lots of canoeing and this is pretty simple for me. The one thing that takes some adjustment is that white water kayaks have no keel. This makes it easier to maneuver them in rapids but also more difficult to steer straight in flat water. Alexander watches me for about ten minutes and is satisfied that I'll make it okay.

He pushes his kayak out into the water and then has Pat get in while he holds it steady. With him guiding, they make some practice runs through a little ripple. He wants to make sure Pat understands him when he tells her to paddle a certain way.

I'm still thinking that most of the day will be flat water with an occasional ripple. I'm wrong. The first rapid comes up in front of us just 5 minutes after leaving. From the bank it wouldn't look awesome but from the water level position I have it looks scary. I hold back in an eddy and watch Alexander and Pat take it. Quickly they're in the rapids and all I can see are their heads bobbing up and down. Most of the time I can only see bits of the kayak. Alexander told me to watch carefully and make sure I follow his route.



Easier said than done. I start my run. My heart is beating faster. Paddle, paddle, steer to left, to right, to right, rock ahead, follow tongue around to left, paddle, paddle, river curving around to right, stay in fast water, kayak starts to turn sideways to the right, paddle right side, paddle, use paddle like a tiller to bring kayak nose back to left, rock and waves straight ahead. Right or left? Which way did Alexander go? Kayak starting to spin. Get straight, get straight. Flat water. I'm out. Pat and Alexander have been watching me. he gives me a thumbs up and a grin. Wow!

Alexander says that this part of the river is pretty but will be awesome when we enter the section that flows through Braulio Carrillo National Park. There we'll see monkeys and lots of birds.

He's right. It is pretty but there's not much time to enjoy it. I can hear the next rapid. We come around the bend. There it is. I hold back again and watch them go through. This one is longer than the first. Maybe a 150 yards. There they go. Disappearing, appearing, bobbing up and down. Paddles moving.

My heart is beating much faster now because I now what a rush this is. Mentally, I try to capture each of the turns and maneuvers Alexander made. Now I'm in it. Instinct take over. React. See ahead. Paddle, paddle. Don't stop paddling. I'm losing it. I'm going sideways. I'm going to tip. But I recover. I made it. I almost tipped and I recovered. I made it. I'm almost out.

I'm upside down, my head under water. I thought I was out. What happened. Aren't I supposed to come lose from the kayak? This is an upside down rollercoaster. I don't know how to do the Eskimo roll. Have to get out. Push with my legs. Pop out of the kayak and surface. Still in the rapid. Float on my back. Feet first. My butt is hitting rocks. Let go of kayak. Alexander will get it. Get feet up. Lay back. I'm out. I float into still water where I can stand up. Alexander has my kayak and is grinning.

I didn't flip over again. I learned my lesson. You're not out of the rapid till you're out. I'd relaxed and took my full attention off the rapid and that's when it flipped me. We probably did a dozen rapids and each one was a wild thrill. They'd be no big deal to people who do this regularly. For us, though, this is wild enough.

Finally we reach flat water where we can just drift along with the current. Alexander has been this route many times and knows where there will be birds and maybe monkeys. Sometimes he sees things and points them out to us but often I can't see what he's pointing at. But I don't need to see because the jungle itself is magnificent. The trees tower over the water. Some maybe 100 to 150 high. This is every bit of what I had hoped it would be like and even better.

Once in a while we pass a house. There's kids playing in the river and sometimes someone fishing. Around noon we get out of the river to have lunch. Leona has packed a great meal for us. Alexander turns one of the kayaks upside down. We use it for a table. There's sandwiches, chips, chiles, and drinks and we devour everything. Then we rest and soak up the sun which feels really good. Before getting back in the kayaks we all dive into the clear water and swim around for a bit.

Around 3PM we reach the end of our trip. It exceeded every expectation we had. Alexander points out an iguana in a tree. He said that one time when he was guiding an iguana fell from a tree into one of the kayaks. It scared the daylight out of the guy in the kayak. I could understand. It'd scare me to have one of these 2 ft long lizards drop from a tree into my kayak.

When we got back to Rancho Leona we were ready for a great meal in the evening. I asked Leona how you got dinner at her restaurant. I never saw anyone in there and never saw a menu. Leona got a menu for us and said "Just tell me what you want and when you want it and it'll be there. Give me at least an hour's notice."

We took the menu and studied it for awhile and then found Leona.

"We'll eat at 6PM. First we'll have margaritas, then nachos. Next bring us a cucumber sandwich. For the main course we want your garlic fried chicken and mashed potatoes and for dessert, fried ice cream."

At 6PM we went into the restaurant. We were the only ones in there, just as it had been all the time we'd been here. Pat picked out a couple of comfortable chairs that we could sit back in and enjoy looking at the wonderful thatched Tahitian style roof and the beautiful stained glass art work by Leona and Ken.

Shortly the margaritas arrived accompanied by nachos. They weren't the gooey cheesy type that we see in the states. Each tortilla strip was decorated with cheese, olives, and onions. We took our time eating and drinking. Then the cucumber sandwich with cream cheese came. About ten minutes after we finished the sandwich the garlic fried chicken and mashed potatoes were delivered. Oh, the mashed potatoes you could die for. We sat back and read for awhile. In about a 1/2 hour the coffee and fried ice cream was served.

What an elegant meal. We weren't stuffed just wonderfully full. It was 8PM. Time to get our stuff ready to leave tomorrow. It'd be another early start - 6AM. We'll take the bus to San Jose, then catch a bus that will take us to San Isidro.

**There we'll make a connection for Dominical on the Pacific Coast.**

**Day 11 - San Isidro**

**(4 hours from San Jose - 8 hours from La Virgen)**

**Description - San Isidro is a bustling farming community located along the Pan American Highway. From San Jose you go up and over what the Ticos call the Cerro de la Muerte (hill of death). The highest point you reach on this road is 10,938 feet. The scenery is pretty but I wouldn't call it spectacular. Again, it looks a lot like the coastal mountains of California but of course much higher. The trees and other vegetation are small and sparse.**

**This is another early morning bus ride for us. Fortunately, the bus trip originates from La Virgen. So, we don't have to fight for a space as we'd done in San Carlos. Yesterday we bought some bread and bananas to eat on the bus. It's just the driver and us as we head out at 6AM. This quickly changes. We're stopping every few minutes to pick up school children and workers. This bus not only takes people to San Jose, it's the commuter bus and school bus. It takes workers to the banana plantations and children to school.**

**For the next few hours we drive up and down dirt roads all over the country side. We're having fun though watching the kids. Summer vacation is ending. This is their first day of school. They're all in their school uniforms and chatting excitedly with each other. The bus stops at several schools and several plantations. It's a wonderful morning. It's cool, the sun is shining, and the air is filled with laughter.**

**Several hours later we pull out onto the paved highway and are now on our way to San Jose. We pass through Braulio Carrillo National Park and pick up the road that comes into San Jose from the east. We're going back up the mountain pass that we'd first come through when we went to Puerto Viejo. It's as beautiful and wonderful the second time as the first time.**

**In San Jose, it's the same routine as before. The bus drops us off at one place. Then we have to find the bus station to catch the bus to San Isidro. Our plan is to make it today to Dominical on the Pacific Ocean. Looking at our map I see that it's too far to walk to the bus station and that we'd have to go through a seedy area of town to get there. We hail a cab. The driver isn't quite sure of how to get to the station we want. He stops and asks directions, takes us to the right station. Then,**

to be sure we're in the right place, he has us wait while he runs into the station and asks if this is where the bus leaves for San Isidro. It is. We give him a good tip and thank him graciously for his service.

We have about an hour to kill. Pat goes out to find us some food while I watch our packs. She comes back with some more wonderful bread, more bananas, and Fanta Naranja (orange drink). In the meantime I've bought our tickets. The bus shows up on time and it's a beauty. It looks like the tour buses back in the states. We even have assigned seats. This is going to be a relaxing ride.

It only takes a few minutes for everyone to get on board. The bus is full. We pull out of the station. Both of us are in awe at the skill of the driver as he maneuvers the bus through the narrow traffic filled streets of San Jose. It's 30 to 45 minutes before we finally leave the city streets and get onto a highway.

The bus isn't air conditioned but it isn't needed. The air outside is cool and we get lots of ventilation through the windows.

Our next major stop is Cartago. People get off and people get on. Now we begin the climb into the mountains. They don't look huge like they do in the Rockies or Sierra. It's hard to believe that within a few hours we'll be at almost 11,000 feet.

Now the road is narrow and just two lanes, one each way. It's just 85 miles to San Isidro but the bus ride is 3 1/2 to 4 hours. Though the bus only averages about 20 mph, I'm amazed at how fast the driver takes the turns. We pass semi-trucks on blind curves. They at least look blind to me. And so it goes for an hour and more. We're hoping for some spectacular views but they never materialize. Though the sun is shining there is a haze that prevents us from seeing very far.

Now the air is cold and we close the window. Well, I close the window. Pat opens it again. She's starting to get queasy from the winding road. The vegetation shows the harshness of this environment. It's small, is windswept, and for the most part hugs the ground. Fog's now whipping around the bus. There's still good visibility for driving, though. The road is frequently closed because of the dense fog that sweeps in and brings visibility to zero. There's lots of accidents on this highway. But it's name, Hill of Death, comes from the days when farmers took their ox carts over this pass to get to San Jose. It was a treacherous journey and thus the name.

I'm hoping for something wonderful at the summit but it doesn't happen. They say on a good clear day you can see both the Caribbean and the Pacific. But not today. At the top of the pass there's a small restaurant and lodge. I don't see anything special about them. The countryside is pretty but not what I'd expected. You certainly don't get the feeling that you're up this high.

Going down is just as torturous as coming up. There's a brief delay because of an automobile accident. It doesn't look like there were any injuries. Finally we are out of the mountains and in the valley. Not a moment too soon for Pat. She hasn't said a word for the last hour.

It's about 2PM when the bus pulls into San Isidro. My planning tells me that this will be a close call to catch the bus to Dominical. There's nothing to see in this town and we want to be on the Pacific Ocean tonight. According to the bus schedule we have about 10 minutes to catch the bus. But as usual, the bus doesn't leave from this station. We have to find the station.

I ask several people, a cab driver and the bus driver, where I catch the bus to Dominical. They don't understand what I'm saying and give no indication that they care. Unusual because up to now everybody has gone out of their way to help us. So, not getting any assistance or directions, I leave Pat to watch the stuff and set out to find the station. My guide book has a rough verbal description of how to find the station and a crude map.

It's hot here. Not cool like San Jose. It reminds me so much of the Central Valley of California and a small version of Fresno. I set out at a quick pace knowing that we don't have much time. Turns out that there's at least four bus stations in San Isidro. Standing on a corner is a guy in uniform who looks like he might be a policeman. I ask him where the station is and he's very helpful. It's just a block away.

No wonder I couldn't find it. The ticket office is inside of a small fast food cafe. There's no sign saying "Bus to Dominical." I go inside and determine that the bus will be there in about 10 minutes. It wasn't as easy as it sounds to find this out. Once again the people here did not seem eager to try and bridge the language barrier.

The station where I'd left Pat was about a 1/3 mile away. I don't want to run but I walk quickly. Now I'm hot and sweaty. I find Pat and we get our packs on. I don't think we'll make it. The pair of pants I'm wearing is held up by velcro rather than a button or snap. As we're walking briskly the velcro comes loose and my pants start to fall down. At the same time the money belt I'm wearing around my waist starts to come loose. Pat picks this moment to ask me a question. Sweaty and harried my reply is a bark rather than an answer.

I think there's still a chance to catch the bus. So, we keep walking while I'm holding up my pants and hanging onto my money belt. As we round the last corner, the bus pulls out and heads away from us. That settles that. Tonight we'll

stay in San Isidro. We can't really complain. This is the only connection we've missed.

The next bus leaves tomorrow at 7AM. We go ahead and buy our tickets. Then Pat stays in the shade sipping a Fanta Naranja while I go off looking for a place to stay for the night. The guide book doesn't show many hotels in the town. It's not a tourist place. The first place has bars on all the windows and a locked gate at the entrance. I ring the bell and a man appears but doesn't come close to the gate. I've been practicing my Spanish for just such a moment and say, " Tiene usted un cuarto por dos gente uno noche?" (Do you have a room for two people for one night?) "No" is his reply.

The next place looks less formidable. I'm able to approach the check in desk without being separated by iron bars. I'm in luck. He has a room for about \$15.00. I pay him and, for the first time on the trip, have to show my passport. I'm feeling much better now going back to get Pat. When I get to her she's cooled off in the shade and finished her cool drink. Both of us agree that it isn't so bad that we missed the bus.

The first thing we notice in the hotel are the beautiful wooden floors. The hotel isn't fancy but the woodwork is gorgeous. Our room is okay. It has a shower. Again we can't figure out how to make the hot water attachment work. And I don't want to mess with the bare wires hanging down from the shower head. But who wants a hot shower anyway. The room is like an oven. A cold shower is fine. The bed is also made of beautiful wood as is the dresser.

After we've both taken a cold shower, we sprawl ourselves on the bed with the fan pointed right on us. We lay spread-eagled for about 30 minutes talking about our adventure and what we'll do tonight.

We're both cooled down now and we each take out a book to read for awhile. One of the jokes of our trip is that I've brought four books to read and until now haven't opened one of them to read.

As the sun sets the air cools off quickly. We dress and go out to look for something to eat. Right around the corner is a pizza place. I'm ready for pizza. We order a couple of Costa Rican beers, salads, and pizza. Our table is on the porch on the second floor overlooking the street. The pizza is good. Really hits the spot. By this time the street is almost deserted. I'd thought that it might be a neat town at night with people out for strolls and enjoying the cool evening. But there's hardly a soul to be seen.

It's only about 7:30PM. Too early to go back and go to bed. We decide to walk

around even though there's not much activity. After about two blocks we pass a bar on the other side of the street. Three guys are coming out of it, clearly drunk. They start to cross the street headed our way. We make an abrupt turn to go an opposite direction. One of them says something to us but we don't understand. We pick up our pace. Turning a corner I lookback and see that one of them has broken from the group and is walking the same way we are. Pat and I pick up our pace and he yells something. We turn another corner and are back at the hotel. Fortunately we hadn't strayed too far from this safe haven. We go in the and the stranger continues on his staggering way.

The hotel also has a balcony. We sit out there for awhile watching the street scene. Most of the people are men going in and out of the bars across the street. San Isidro may be interesting as a bustling farm community during the day but I'd recommend that you avoid spending the night there if at all possible.

The room is still hot but another cold shower helps out. To be on the safe side I brace a chair against the door before we go to sleep. The fan makes the room comfortable and sometime during the night it gets cool enough to turn it off.

Day 12 - The bus leaves at 7AM. We get up at 6AM but plenty rested. We're really into this early to bed and early to rise. That's the way to do it when it's hot, no air conditioning and no TV It's a super morning. We both slept great. The air is cool. Pat and I check out get, guess what, some bananas. Then we go over to the station where we have coffee, rolls, and our bananas.

The bus is on time and also fills up. Dominical is just about 22 miles an hour's drive away.

**Dominical (on the Pacific Ocean)**  
( 5 hours from San Jose - 1 hour from San Isidro)

**Description-** At the base of the coastal mountains about 40 miles south of Manuel Antonio National Park. Palm trees line a straight sandy beach that stretches to the northwest as far as you can see. To the southeast the beach is broken by a few points that jut out into the Pacific. The beach has a very California look to it except for the palm trees. At this writing there is not much of a town. The few businesses clearly cater to the tourists who are primarily North American.

Things are about to change. Few people, even Ticos, have heard of Dominical. Right now the road heading south of Dominical is dirt. It ends at Uvita about 10 miles south of Dominical. A 4wd road extends further but is not passable much of the time. Soon the road will be completed to tie in with the Pan American Highway at Palmar Norte. This will allow travelers to follow the Costa Rican

Coastline for about 100 miles south of Jaco and open up areas rarely visited by tourists. It is assumed that many will forgo the Pan American Highway that goes down the valley bordered by the coastal mountains and the Talamanca mountains and choose the beach route instead. In anticipation of this, you can already see the tourist related development starting to pop up and more is being planned.

The air is really pleasant this morning. There's not a hint of the heat that we sweltered in yesterday. We board the bus, settle into our seats and immediately strike up a conversation with some Americans. They're the first Americans we've seen on a bus since we left Santa Eleana about 6 days ago.

The bus is out of the town with a few minutes. We pass through some farm lands and climb a gentle grade. Then we're over the ridge and heading down the steep slope that ends at the Pacific Ocean. Some have described it as being like the Big Sur country along Highway 1 in California. I don't think so. It's pretty but I wouldn't compare it to Big Sur. I'm guessing that the hillsides were once covered with jungle. I have no way to know that. Now the hills are grass covered, there are coffee fields and scattered trees.

The other Americans have been in Costa Rica several weeks and have extended their time so they could see more and also return to some of their favorite places. The man tells me how nice it is to be riding in a bus. Initially they had a rental car. It was a nightmare. He said he couldn't enjoy the scenery because he had to focus so much on avoiding potholes and speeding buses.

As usual Pat and I pick their brains. Where have you been? What did you like? What didn't you like? They didn't like Uvita and that's where we wanted to go tomorrow. We thought we'd spend a night in Dominical and then catch the bus the next morning down to Uvita. The snorkeling is supposed to be great there. These people said it wasn't. The water was rough. The reef was way out from the beach. There's no place decent to stay.

We took their advice and got off the bus at Dominical. The bus ride was very nice. We got great views of the Pacific as we rounded turn after turn for about an hour or so. The first thing we noticed getting off the bus was that the air was like a blast furnace. Not at all like the warm but pleasant air on the Caribbean side. At Puerto Viejo the temperatures had been in the mid 80's. Here it was in the 90's and still humid. Books had said the air would be hotter but drier here. We didn't think it felt drier.

Where Puerto Viejo was jumping with life when we arrived, Dominical looks like a dusty street from a western ghost town. That's not even right. Dominical doesn't even look like a town. There's scattered houses, motels, and a few cafes but this



doesn't look like a town. Pat corrects me that there are trees. Okay, there are palm trees on the beach and other trees sheltering the buildings. But believe me, this doesn't look like paradise. Not to me anyway.

We start our usual recon. None of the places look like places we'd want to stay in. The nicer motels, the ones with air conditioning, there's only a few, are too expensive. Mind you, none of these places jump out at you. They're placed along little side streets.

Walking over to the beach we see that people are camping here. We've brought a tent just for this purpose. Why waste money on a dump when you can camp right on the beach underneath palm trees for free?

People are scattered out respecting each others privacy. Seeing one young man sitting by his tent reading a book I ask him what the rules are here, if any. He says you can camp anywhere. They're no restroom facilities but you can use one in the restaurant across the road for 50 cents. Sounds good. He suggests we camp near him so we can keep an eye on each others gear.

About 50 feet from his tent I find a nice spot shaded by coconut trees but without any coconuts hanging overhead. One of those things could really hurt you if they fell on your head. We get the tent up and then string a fly over the tent to give us more protection from the sun. Next we string up the hammocks from a couple of trees. It's really hot and we get into the hammocks to relax for awhile. There's a breeze blowing and if we don't move we cool down to a comfortable level.

The young man comes over to take a look at our hammocks. He's from Australia, name's David. Nice guy. David is 21 and is on a years trip seeing and surfing the world. We learn that he has been in Costa Rica for 3 weeks. I ask him how much longer he will be staying in Dominical. He looks at his watch as though he might say "Well, I'm going to catch the 5PM bus today." But he doesn't say that. He says "I'll stay here till the end of March. Maybe not at Dominical. I might go further down the coast."

"Why did you look at your watch to tell me that?" I ask.

"Oh, it reminds me what month it is." he replies.

David is doing this all alone. He tells us that he surfs at sunup, sometimes in the afternoon and goes to bed when it gets dark. Dominical, he says, is pretty safe from thieves. Still he buries his valuables in the sand underneath his tent. Most thieves will only take the time to grab something quick. He's met several people traveling with backpacks that had their best gear stolen when they camped further

north near Jaco and Quepos.

I tell David that we're going to be resting in the hammocks for awhile. So, if he wants to go surfing we'll watch his gear. He takes us up on the over. Shortly David is out in the waves which are running about 5 foot. Not great surfing waves this afternoon. After about an hour he's back and we go to look the place over.

I still don't see anything to impress me. There's a new looking pinkish colored building up on the hillside. We walk up there to see what's in the building. It's still under construction but already open is a mini-mart and a restaurant. A Laundromat will open soon. In the market, Pat and I get a jug of ice cold water and sit out on the porch to drink it. It's cooler up here. Seems to be more of a breeze. The young man who is running the store comes out and joins us. He's from Canada and his brother is the one who owns the little complex.

Within a year or so, he tells us, the road will be completed down the coast. People like his brother have been buying up land for some time in anticipation of the surge of people that will come with the opening of the road. About 10 miles down the road near Uvita a German guy is building a water park that will feature huge slides.

We say good-bye and go off exploring more. Back near the beach there's a restaurant serving ice cold jugo con leche's. We haven't had one for a few days and go in and grab a seat. First it takes us forever to get waited on, then the waiter isn't friendly, and finally the guy tries to keep all of our change as a tip. I've tipped generously on this trip but I'm not going to let this guy decide how much he gets. I tell him in Spanish that I want my change. He pretends not to understand. Pat gets into the act and uses sign language. When he sees that we're not going to leave he gives me back my change, several dollars, and says in a sneering way "Compensation." Not from us buddy. Fortunately he's the only rotten waiter we meet on the whole trip.

The waves are too big for swimming so we walk along at the edge of the surf. We think that if we walk far enough we'll get away from people and be able to go naked on the beach. I wouldn't call this a crowded beach. There's only a couple of people every couple hundred yards but still we can't get out of their sight and skinny dipping is frowned upon in Costa Rica. Finally we climb over some rocks and go around a little headland. Ah, here's a beach that's deserted. I call Pat to come around. Then we see that there's a restaurant on this beach. Further down, just when we think we're all alone, some horseback riders come along. Neither one of are comfortable with the situation. The locals in this town don't seem very friendly and now we're away from our camp and yet still running into local guys. We decide that someone could attack us here and there'd be no help. So, we head

back to the tent.

The hammocks beckon us again. We climb in and swing in the breeze and watch the sun set into the ocean. It's a nice sunset. After an hour or so we go looking for a place to eat. Several people recommend a Mexican place. After a 5 minute walk we arrive. The restaurant reminds of similar places in Malibu and Newport. It's full of young men and women with lively music playing.

One couple calls us over to their table. They'd been out swimming today. When we walked by where their stuff was on the beach the waves were about to wash it away. Pat and I picked up their shoes and things and moved them to higher ground. The couple waved at us from the waves but I couldn't make out their features. Apparently they could ours and called us over now to thank us. We sat down to have a drink with them.

Turns out we're the only Americans who don't like Dominical. This couple thinks it's paradise. They're buying property here while it's still cheap or at least available. Each summer for the last 4 years they've been coming to Dominical. They explain that it's really an American enclave. Maybe that's why I don't like the place. It looks American. I don't have anything against being American. It's just that we came here to see a different culture and exotic places. Puerto Viejo is exotic. Dominical, by me anyway, isn't.

The dinner is good but I didn't come to Costa Rica to eat tacos and burritos. I'm glad that we have a little walk back to camp because I've stuffed myself and downed a few beers. At the tent we walk for a bit on the beach and then go to turn in. The breeze that had been blowing into the tent has now shifted. In the tent there's not a breath of air. I decide to try sleeping in the hammock. I've never done that before.

Pat spreads out her sheet in the tent and I take mine to my hammock. For camping in the tropics you don't need or want sleeping bags. A sheet is plenty. We learned that on a camping trip to the Virgin Islands several years ago.

The hammock is really comfortable and the breeze is making it cool enough to wrap the sheet around me. I go right to sleep and sleep soundly until 2PM. Then I wake up and I feel sick. Not throw up sick by stomach upset, diarrhea sick. I'm sure it's the hot sauce that I'd poured all over my burrito. I try to ride it out. Finally I have to get up and find a place to go relieve myself. There are no restrooms. By the starlight I pick my way down the beach till I find a place where I can dig a hole and squat. I sit there for awhile trying to force everything out of my body. You know the feeling. Finally I feel better, cover up the hole and go back to the tent. I wake up Pat and have her make room for me.

The air is hot and completely still in the tent. None of the breeze is getting in. Both of us lay sprawled out on our backs and try to sleep. Finally Pat is snoring. Suddenly I'm chilled and wrap my self up in the sheet. That only works for a bit then I have to go relieve myself again. This time when I come back I take an anti-diarrhea pill. I should have taken one at the first sign. They work almost instantly and this one does the trick. No more chills now just hot and sweaty.

Day 13 - The sun seems to take forever to come up. I must've slept some but I don't feel like it. Looking out at the waves I see David out there catching the first rays of sunlight on the ocean. The bus leaving Dominical leaves at 7AM and I don't want to miss it. I've had enough of this place. Later I'll learn from other people that we should've went to Uvita. It is different from Dominical. It's a real village with native people as well as Ticos. I'm sorry I took the advice of the Americans we'd met on the bus.

Dominical caters to tourists. It has no early opening bakery or market. Whereas Puerto Viejo, that serves the village people, is open early in the morning for the people who go to work. Well, that's what we brought power bars for. We split one and have some water while we wait for the bus that'll take us back to San Isidro. There we'll catch a bus to Golfito. I'm not crazy about spending any more time than I have to in San Isidro. I hope we can catch a bus without waiting too long.

We're back in San Isidro now and we're in luck. It's much this cooler this morning. Both us find that it's quite pleasant walking around. Again we have to scout to find the bus station where we catch the bus to Golfito. This time, though, it's easy.

Anyway, a bus leaves for Golfito in an hour. Pat watches our packs while I go out to find the central market. This turns out to be a short walk. I buy some fresh bread, orange juice, and, you guessed it, more bananas. The bananas are twenty cents, the bread thirty cents, and the juice fifty cents. This will keep us till we get to Golfito.

I'm back at the bus station just as the bus for Golfito rolls in. We're a bit confused because people are getting off and getting on and we're not sure when we're supposed to board. After a few minutes the bus driver motions that we can board. We find a couple of empty seats and sit down. The people across the aisle from us immediately start speaking to us but we don't understand what they're trying to say. Several other people join in and we finally realize that we're in someone else's seats. We learn that, unfortunately, all the seats are taken and that we'll have to stand for the five hour bus ride to Golfito.

### **Golfito (on the Golfo Dulce)**

**(8 hours south of San Jose about an hour north of the border with Panama)**

**Description - Golfito (meaning little gulf) is a deep water harbor connected to the magnificent Golfo Dulce (Sweet Gulf). This is a working harbor town. There isn't a souvenir shop to be found. The hills behind the town are covered with jungle. The setting is magnificent. American tourists only pass through Golfito on their way to fishing at Playa Zancudo.**

**Lots of Ticos come here, though, because of the outlet stores. The banana shipping business shut down here in the mid 1980's and left a large number of people unemployed. To help restore the town's economy the government established a duty free zone at the north end of town. Ticos can buy appliances and other goods here for about half the price in San Jose.**

**There are regulations governing who can shop here. You must spend a night in the town and you can only spend \$400 a year. This has boosted the town's economy in two ways. First, there is now a thriving motel trade to serve the people who must spend the night. Since it's a nine hour drive to San Jose you're going to spend at least one night anyway. The second way is quite interesting. The \$400 limit per person per year is controlled by the issuance of permits to purchase. You must apply for your permit in person. So, local people get their permits and then sell them to people down from San Jose.**

**Back to the bus ride. We haven't ridden on any air conditioned buses in Costa Rica and this one is no exception. They may have air conditioning but we haven't seen it in use. However, with windows and roof vents open there's always enough ventilation and the buses are comfortable. Pat and I find a roof vent to stand under so we can get air and not get too hot.**

**I'm reminded of the great central valley of California. The two lane road takes us past thousands of acres of cultivated fields. To the east we can make out the hazy outline of the Talamanca Mountains that reach up to over 10,000 feet. To the west is the much lower outline of the coastal mountains. We're on the famous Pan-American Highway.**

**After about two hours the driver pulls in at a roadside open air restaurant that caters to bus passengers and truckers. There's several hundred people here but service is quick. Pat and I just get a couple of the milk**

**In another hour the bus leaves the valley and follows a river that runs towards the coast. Now the road has a few more curves and Pat is starting to feel sick. An older woman sees that Pat isn't doing well and gives up her seat to Pat. Able to push her face out an open window and to sit after 3 hours of standing Pat begins to**

feel better.

Now we're passing small farms. In a little town we stop to let some passengers off. Children come up to the windows of the bus and offer fruit and fruit drinks for sale to the passengers. I can finally sit down now.

We'll be in Golfito in about an hour. I can see the scenery better now because I have a window. There's a tiny school and 5 boys are out in the school yard cutting high grass with machetes. I'm amazed that they have the school children do this and more amazed that they're doing it with machetes. You'd think that they would have a safer and more practical tool. But I like the idea of having the children involved with the maintenance of their school.

The road is now passing through a narrow valley. Small hills are to the left and right about a half mile distant. This was probably jungle at one time but is now just occasional clumps of trees interspersed with the small farms.

Off to the left now I see water. This must be the southern end of the bay of Golfito. Houses line the waters edge and some are built out over the water on stilts. We're coming into the town now. It stretches out for about a mile and is only several blocks wide. The jungle covered mountain comes right down to the bay. The town has the look of a port town. I wouldn't call it seedy. I wouldn't call it quaint. It just looks like a working town that you'd see in a movie shot on location in a jungle port town. I like what I see.

It's 3PM when the bus lets us off in what is about mid-town Golfito. It's hot and humid. The only other Americans on the bus are a couple of people from Oregon, a man and a woman - college students, who are going backpacking in the jungle. They get off too. It's the end of the line. Though the backpackers have lots of equipment they'd don't seem well prepared. The guy asks me which way they should start walking to get into the jungle. It seems to me he should have known this before he got here. He told me on the bus that they were just going to walk into the jungle and spend a week there. I'm already dripping wet from my sweat. I'm not looking forward to looking for a place to stay and here they're going off into the jungle. I'm guessing that it'll be at least an hour hike for them before they get to a place where they can camp.

Well they're off on their adventure and I'm off to find a place to stay. The New Key to Costa Rica tells me that there's two parts to Golfito. There's the port part with the bars and motels above the bars and there's the Zona Americana. When the United Fruit Company was shipping bananas out of Golfito the executives, mostly Americans, lived in the north end of town. They lived in spacious homes on landscaped grounds covered with great overhanging trees. Now, many of these

homes have been converted to provide accommodations to the Ticos who come to shop in the duty free zone. This is where I headed off to.

Pat gets a cold Fanta Naranja and finds some shade to sit under while I scout for a place to stay. It's Friday and every place I stop at is filled up. All the Ticos are down for the weekend for shopping. Finally, a place called Casa Blanca has some room. It takes a while with my poor Spanish to communicate to Rosie that I want a room for two people for three nights. She first shows me what looks like a jail cell underneath the house with two twin beds. I finally get it through to her that I don't like the room. She says the only place she has left is for 3 people. I ask her to show me the room. It's beautiful. There's a double bed, a twin bed, our own bathroom, and an overhead fan. The bed the dresser and the door are all made out of beautiful hardwoods. I ask her how much. She say's \$16 a night. I tell her I'll take it.

Pat thinks I've gotten lost. I've been gone close to 45 minutes when I return to get her. Both of us are thirstier than we've been on the whole trip. Even though we each had about two quarts of water during the bus ride down to Golfito we're still thirsty. Before taking Pat to show her our new home we go into a little market to get some bottled water. They don't sell it. We later learn that they have a great water system for the town. That's why they don't sell water. Why would anyone buy water when the water out of the tap is so good. We don't know this at the time so we have to settle for more Fanta Naranja.

It's only a 5 minute walk to our room. Though we're both hot, sweaty, and tired we can't help but be in awe of the beauty of Zona Americana. Great trees put their limbs out over the street. Each home is beautiful yet different. All of the yards are kept in perfect condition. There are flowers everywhere.

At Casa Blanca, Willy the small dog greets us with his wagging tale. I open the door for Pat and she is taken back by the nice room. This is many times nicer than anything we've stayed in. She gets to shower first. Then it's my turn. The cold water feels great. Then we lay down naked on the sheets with the overhead fan turned on full force. The moving air feels wonderful on our bodies.

After about a 1/2 hour we're cooled down and refreshed enough to go outside. The air really isn't hot. Not like Dominical. It's the humidity that gets you. If you stay out of the sun and move slowly or not at all you're okay. We pull up a couple of chairs and get out our books that we've been dragging around with us. The trees are full of singing birds. We hear the distinctive cry of a Toucan and finally spot one high up in one of the trees. Once you've heard one there's no mistaking their call.

Dusk is at hand and we're both starved. We walk into town and stop at the first restaurant. It has a high thatched roof, south seas style and overlooks the harbor. We're really not that hungry but still thirsty. Both of us down a couple of beers and then order a huge platter of fried rice to split between us.

After dinner we go out and sit on a bench for awhile and look at the small harbor. There's not many boats in it and no ships tied up at the dock. It's a wonderful evening. Back at our room it's only 9:30pm but we both crash.

Day 14 - We slept great last night. Now we're eager to explore the town and to visit the duty free zone. Buses run up and down the mile long town every 15 minutes. For ten cents you can ride the bus. It stops wherever you want it to stop. Just whistle and the driver pulls over for you.

Breakfast is the first order. We have an appetite this morning. The cafe we choose is up above the street and looks out over the harbor. It's completely open and gets a nice breeze in from the water. On the menu we see bacon and eggs. There's no hesitation on our part. We order bacon and eggs, toast, coffee.

Our waitress brings us our coffee quickly. We sip and enjoy the view. Below us is a park with statues of dolphins. Apparently dolphins abound in the Golfo Dulce. Next to the park is a covered basketball court. Several kids are shooting hoops.

Our breakfast arrives. The bacon is heaped high on a plate. There has to be a half pound. It's delicious and so are the eggs. They have that deep yellow color that my mother says only comes from chickens raised on the ground with room to roam and nibble.

Before heading out to the duty free zone we check out downtown. There's not a souvenir shop to be found. This is a real working town. It's Saturday so people are out walking on the streets, shopping, or sitting in bars having a beer.

We run into a couple of Americans who came here via sailboat. They tell us that it used to be a great port for sailboats to put into. But an overzealous customs officer harassed them so much they now all put in down in Panama. I'd wondered why I saw so few yachts anchored in this great harbor.

Pat calls to my attention how most shops in Costa Rica are set up. All the merchandise is behind the counter. You have to ask for whatever it is you want. I want a toothbrush. The shopkeeper goes to three different locations in his small shop and brings me three toothbrushes to look at. I pick one and pay. He puts the other three back.



Well it's time to explore some more. We easily catch a bus and ride it out to the duty free zone. It looks like a military installation. The shops are surrounded by a thick and tall concrete wall. To get in you have to pass through what looks like a military checkpoint. It looks very intimidating. Before preceding we have to decipher some Spanish to see if we can safely enter this place. Turns out that you just walk in through the gates guarded by armed guards.

Inside it's very festive. It fills an area about the size of three football fields. The buildings are all new and don't look much different than our outlet malls. The fronts are all painted in bright colors. All the stores are air conditioned. This is the first air-conditioning we've seen in Costa Rica. Little boys run up to us and invite us to come to their stores. Refrigerators and other appliances are being hauled around on dollies apparently to be loaded on trucks.

Sitting on the steps of one store are two Indian women. They're dressed in very colorful dresses. We've noted that Ticos dress in very dull clothing. The Indian women stand out. One lady is the prettiest woman I've seen in Costa Rica.

The stores carry everything from appliances to clothing. The prices aren't cheap by our standards but apparently they're about half the price you'd pay in San Jose. Food stands are all around the grounds like at county fair in America.

About an hour is enough time here. We're going to sit back and relax today. It's getting close to noon and it's heating up. Neither of us want to get as hot as we did yesterday. The bus drops us off right in front of Casa Blanca. Willy's there to greet us. We each take a cool shower and then just sit out in the shade and read.

After dark we walk down the street to a Chinese restaurant. They have fans all over the place. It's worth it to eat there just to sit by the fans. While we're eating a small storm comes up and it sprinkles for awhile. The food is good, not great but cheap. The restaurant is packed with Ticos in town for shopping.

Back in the room we play a game of Scrabble and I beat again. There's something about Costa Rica that improves the Scrabble side of my brain. It's hot tonight. Even with the overhead fan and another shower it's hot. The cloud cover has kept the humidity and temperature high.

Day 15 - The entry in my log reads: "Both Pat and I were uncomfortable last night. We've exhausted things to see and do in Golfito. Tonight is our last night and tomorrow we'll take the ferry across the Golfo Dulce to Puerto Jimenez on the Osa Peninsula."

After writing this entry we decide to take a water taxi over to Playa Cacao. Our

guide book says that the water there is relatively clean and okay for swimming. We could take a taxi to it but that would be longer and more expensive than a water taxi. The water taxi takes about five minutes.

To give you an idea of the shape of the bay and where Playa Cacao is in relationship to Golfito put your arms out in front of you. Point your elbows straight out and hold your fingers four inches apart. Your chest is where Golfito is located. Playa Cacao is where your right wrist is. At low tide you can walk out to the headland (around your thumb and to your index finger). The distance between is about 3/8ths of a mile. The water is very deep here and big cargo ships pass through this entry to Golfito.

The water taxi takes us close to the beach where we get out. The water is about up to our calves. We wade ashore. There are some houses, children are playing in the water, and there's an open air restaurant with palm thatched roof about 100 yards on the beach from us. Walking to the restaurant we pass several people lounging in hammocks. About a half dozen people are eating and drinking in the restaurant.

I order a couple of beers and we sit down to enjoy the sight. From this vantage Golfito and the bay are beautiful. It's also much cooler here. There's a nice breeze blowing. After about a half hour we get up and climb down the steps to the beach. The tide is way out and we start walking along the bay towards town. There are several more houses. One of them is a small ship, about 50 feet long, that has been pulled above the high tide mark and shored up to be a permanently landlocked residence. Our book says that rooms are available on the ship but it doesn't look that way to us. Everything is locked up and there are no signs. The captain who used to own the boat is buried right out front.

Now there's another restaurant with a big grass lawn and people playing volleyball. Everybody here at Playa Cacao that we've seen so far is Costa Rican. Further down the beach we pass by a dock with a sign on it that reads: "Rancho Notsoneato"

I figure that only an American could've made that sign. Rock stairs lead up to a thatched hut structure. We walk up them. Maybe there are cabins here for rent. At the top of the stairs we're just 10 feet from a beautiful home made in the style of the South Seas. It has a high, probably 20 foot, roof and is open on several sides. A man is sitting in a chair reading a book. I'm embarrassed for having stepped almost into the gentleman's living room. I apologize for coming into his yard and tell him that I'd thought there might be cabins for rent.

He says they do have cabins to rent and calls his wife over. We all introduce

ourselves. His name is Art and hers is Isabel. I ask what they charge for a cabin. \$25 to \$35 a night she tells me and says "Come, I'll show you." We follow her. About 50 feet away are 6 smaller versions of the thatched roof house. She takes us into one and both Pat and I are taken back by the exquisite beauty of the cabin. The room is simple and elegant.

Isabel tells us her husband personally built each cabin. The floor is tiled and the shower in the bathroom is made from local stones. An overhead fan circles above us. The beds can be separated from the room with a curtain. One section of the wall lifts up to form a large unscreened opening that looks out over the bay. There's a counter top, a hot plate, and a refrigerator. Pat and I tell her we'd love to stay here but tonight is our last night and we've already paid for our night at Casa Blanca. Isabel, quite a businesswoman, tells us that we can stay tonight for free if we'll stay at least one more night. We don't have to be in Puerto Jimenez the next day and we laid out our trip so that we could alter our schedule to stay longer at places we liked. We tell her we'll take it and that we have to go get our stuff.

Pat and I walk back to the first restaurant we came across. There's no need for her to go back. She decides to stay at the restaurant and enjoy the music they're playing and have something to eat. I signal a waiting water taxi that I want to go to Golfito. It takes me less than an hour to go to Golfito, catch the bus to Casa Blanca, get some stuff out, catch the bus back to the water taxi port, and go back to Playa Cacao.

Pat is finishing up a whole fish when I walk up. She's found an American couple, who are in Costa Rica for a year teaching English, and they're enjoying the scene together. Pat tells me that when she asked for a menu they told her there was no menu. She asked what do you have to eat and the waiter said what do you want. Pat said fish. The waiter had her come over to the kitchen. He pulled out a drawer full of fish laying on ice and asked her to take her pick. She got a whole fish about a foot long with french fries for a little more than \$3.00. It was all eaten when I arrived but she said it was delicious.

We began walking towards our little resort which by the way is officially called Las Palmas. The tide was coming in now. A creek that I'd jumped across several hours ago was now waist deep. I put our packs on my head and waded in. I got across okay and told Pat to come on. Just then a young Costa Rican in a canoe with his girlfriend came paddling by. Pat asked him if he'd ferry her across. He did.

We got our stuff put away and then came out and laid in the hammocks. I couldn't believe how much cooler it was on this side of the bay. The palm trees gave us some shade and we just laid there and looked out across the bay to Golfito and the jungle behind the town.

**I don't know where the time went but it's getting dark and we're getting hungry. The other restaurant is only about 300 feet away. It is packed with people enjoying the evening. When I say packed there are maybe 20 people here. Dinner is our typical chicken with rice and beans washed down by a couple of Fanta Naranja's.**

**At the restaurant we meet some of the other guests staying at Las Palmas. Six couples are from New England and are down here to check out the prospects for commercial fishing. They're leaving tomorrow morning and are having a blowout party tonight.**

**Another couple is from Germany. They invite us to join them for a beer. Over the next couple of days we get to know them and their interesting story. They've been here two weeks now and are plotting to stay longer. Tomorrow he's going into Golfito to find a doctor who will say that he has a tropical illness and can't return to work in Germany for at least another week. During our stay we never see him in anything other than his skimpy European style black bathing suit. She, on the other hand, does change clothes. How they found out about Golfito is amazing.**

**She's an engineer from East Germany. He's a social worker from West Germany. She planned the trip. Being quite well trained in getting things down to the last detail, she'd written out a daily plan for them that was about ten pages long. They wanted to be thrifty during their stay in Costa Rica. She planned their trip around staying in a cheap hotel in San Jose and taking day trips from there to different parts of the country. I may have mentioned that many people make this mistake. Because you can see most of the country from San Jose in day trips or at the most overnight trips, many people plan to stay their whole stay in San Jose.**

**Well their hotel turned out to be in the middle of the red light district. When the taxi driver drove them to the hotel from the airport. He asked them if they hadn't made a mistake. He told them this was a very bad part of town. They paid him no attention. The hotel was a grimy place. On their first walk outside a pickpocket tried to steal his wallet. Feeling the thief's hand go into his pocket he turned and pushed the thief to the ground. The thief had the German's wallet in his hand. The German stepped on the thief's wrist and took his wallet back. During this struggle no one came to assist.**

**Though they were not robbed again during their next few days in San Jose, every evening they had to listen to a taxi driver say "Surely, you're not staying here.?"**

**On the third day they were waiting to catch a bus and speaking in German. A Costa Rican woman spoke to them in German and asked them where they were**

from. They were delighted to find someone who spoke their language. The woman turns out to be Isabel of Las Palmas. They tell her what a horrible time they're having. She tells them to pack their bags and come to Golfito.

The next day they do just that. They're going to stay here as long as they can.

We go to bed after dinner. The overhead fan feels wonderful gently moving air across our bodies. Both of us quickly fall asleep.

Day 16 - We sleep in today. It's 9AM when we finally decide to get up. It's not hot here like it was in Golfito. I'd call it sexually warm.

We have to go back to Golfito to get the rest of our things. Yesterday, I'd only grabbed the basics. Isabel has her hired guy take us over to town and we set a time with him to come back and get us.

First stop is our favorite breakfast restaurant for more bacon and eggs. Then we head off to Casa Blanca to get our stuff and check out. Then we purchase our plane tickets for flying back to San Jose when we come back from the Osa Peninsula. That done, we've seen enough of Golfito. Today we just want to lay around Playa Cacao. Isabel's guy is there on time to meet us and we head back to paradise.

It's lunch time now and we have porkchops and beans and rice. It's a nice change from our typical just beans and rice. After eating we paddle around in the bay in Art's dugout canoe and then decide we need to spend the rest of the day in hammocks. That's what we do.

For dinner we're back at our favorite restaurant next to our cabin. Tonight we have egg sandwiches and beer. There's a festive crowd here tonight. The German couple joins us and we have some good conversation before heading back to go to bed. There's a wonderful sweet balminess to the air.

Day 17 - At 6AM we're ready to get up. Both of us are rested from a great night's sleep. We slip into shorts, t-shirts, and sandals and walk over to Isabel's and Art's dock. She has coffee and orange juice ready for her guests and we can make toast. Sitting at the table on her dock we watch two Toucans fly down to join us. One of them comes over to Pat's glass of orange juice and has a drink.

Isabel joins us and tells us that a woodcutter found the birds in the jungle. They had fallen out of their nest. He gathered them up and brought them to Isabel for care. Now they're full grown but stay around the house. They like to join the guests for breakfast. There's also a pet parrot. The toucans don't like the parrot

and chase him away.

We enjoy this setting for about an hour. Then we take Art's dugout canoe for a paddle in the bay. Wanting to see what it's like out in the gulf we paddle against the incoming tide towards the mouth of the bay. It takes us a good hour to get out. Then we paddle north along the coast for about a 1/4 mile till we see a good beach to land on.

The beach is small and we have it all to ourselves. Dense jungle comes down to a steep hillside to within 50 feet of the water. Offshore a large ship is waiting for the right tides to sail into Golfito. For the first time on the trip we have total privacy. Both of us strip off our bathing suits and run into the surf.

The water is wonderfully warm. It feels great pushing against our bodies. Pat jumps into my arms and we bounce out through the small waves till the water is right up to my chest.

After playing in the water for awhile we go back to the beach to get our snorkeling gear. The water is clear but with no reef or rocks there's very little fish life to see. Finally we launch the boat back into the gulf. It's time to get back and have some lunch.

By the time we get back to Playa Cacao we're starved. Pat and I go over to our restaurant and tell the cook we want papas frito (fried potatoes), and huevos con jamon (eggs and ham). I show him with my hands that we want the potatoes and ham chopped and scrambled with the eggs. He understands and starts cutting up the potatoes. Pat and I settle down at a table out front where we can take in the magnificent scenery.

While we're waiting for breakfast we strike up a conversation with a Canadian woman and a Dutch woman. Both of them live here at Playa Cacao. One for 15 years and the other for 2 years. They tell us they love being here.

Breakfast finally arrives. It's a huge mound of potatoes, eggs, and ham. It's greasier than all get out and tastes wonderful! I ask the waiter to bring us some coffee. It's an hour before he comes back with two steaming cups. The service wasn't slow. They just didn't have any coffee. They had to go into Golfito to buy the coffee and then come back and make it for us.

The rest of the day we lay in the hammocks that Art and Isabel have strung out for their guests. There is absolutely no sense of time other than the sun slowly moving across the sky.

As evening approaches a thunder storm comes up. From our thatched bungalow we

watch the storm come in across the bay. Lightning and thunder give us a great show. The rain is coming down hard now. Then the lights are out. When it's apparent they're not coming on right away we get out the candles provided in the bungalow and light them.

By candle light we play scrabble and listen to the rain coming down. The storm passes us but the lights still don't come on. We go over to the restaurant but it's closed down for lack of electricity. Once again Power Bars save the day. They're dinner for the night. Around 9PM we go to bed and again sleep like babies.

Day 18 - Today we're going to take the ferry across the Golfo Dulce to Puerto Jimenez. It's about an hour crossing. There's no rush to leave Golfito though. We have our breakfast with the toucans and then go for a walk along the beach.

It's mid-morning now and time to go. We leave most of our stuff with Art and Isabel. We'll be back in a few days and spend a couple of more nights with them. Isabel has her handy man bring the boat up to take us over to Golfito.

We have about an hour in Golfito before the ferry comes. So, we get some stuff for lunch. We buy rolls at the bakery and cheese and drinks at the market. Then we head down to the dock. Finally the ferry pulls in. It looks something like the African Queen. I wouldn't want to be it in rough seas.

Boarding is quick. There's about 20 people going over to Puerto Jimenez. We're the only non-Costa Rican people on the boat. An active little four year old is sitting next to me. He is jabbering to me in Spanish. I answer him with a mixture of Spanish and English. He and I are laughing and gesturing as he tries to teach me some Spanish without knowing any English.

The crossing takes about an hour. The water is as flat as glass. Thank goodness. About ten minutes out of Puerto Jimenez some dolphins join us and stay about a 100 yards off our bow for a few minutes. It's like they're welcoming us to the Osa Peninsula.

This is the beginning of our real adventure in Costa Rica. We'll spend one night in Puerto Jimenez. Then we'll find transportation to the Pacific side of the peninsula where we begin our hike up the beach to the Corcovado Tent Lodge at the edge of the jungle. We have no idea what to expect except that we know that the Osa Peninsula has some of the most pristine triple canopy jungle in the world.

Before we left Playa Cacao the owners of the restaurant had called ahead and made reservations for us at a motel on the beach in Puerto Jimenez. I'm glad we did this because Puerto Jimenez looks pretty rough and I wouldn't want to be

wondering around looking for a place to stay.

The discovery of gold put Puerto Jimenez on the map. Just ten years ago this town was a lawless place much like California's gold rush country had been in the mid 1850's. There was no policemen in the town and shootings over gold were common.

Now the town has calmed down. The gold miners, for the most part, have been replaced by ranchers. The creation of Corcovado National Park has also brought adventurers like ourselves.

When we first get off the ferry we're not too sure which direction to go. But everyone seems to take the same path which winds along the edge of the bay towards town. In a few minutes we see our motel. It's about another five minutes walk and we're glad it's no further. It's hot.

Waiting for us is the motel manager. She knew what time we were coming and is on the walk to make sure we find her okay. Las Brisas isn't much to look at. It's your typical concrete building but once we get out of the sun there is a nice breeze coming in off the gulf.

Our room looks pretty much like a jail cell but it does have it's own bathroom, a fan, and it's only \$15 a night. Besides we're just sleeping here. We'll be off early tomorrow.

We toss our stuff on the bed and go out into the breeze way to sit down and figure out our next move. That's to figure out how we get to Carate about an hour and half away. Joining us in the breeze way is another motel guest, Jane, and her daughter. They're from Nevada City, California and have been here for months.

She helps us ask the motel manager how we get to Carate. But she doesn't know of any cheap way. She says we have to hire a taxi. We know though from "The New Key to Costa Rica" that there is a cheaper way to get there. So we walk into town, about a 1/4 mile to do some exploring.

Finding the way to Carate turns out to be a snap. I'm wearing an In-N-Out T-shirt. In-N-Out is a popular hamburger chain in Southern California. The first store we walk into we hear someone say "Wow would I like an In-N-Out burger!" I look to my left where I heard the voice and there's an American sitting behind a travel information desk. We chat for awhile and I ask him how we get to Carate. No problem. A local truck leaves Puerto Jimenez at 6AM in the morning. It costs about \$3.00 apiece. He tells us that we may have to ride in the back of the truck but that's no big deal. He even sells the tickets for the ride.



Having gotten that out of the way it's time for dinner. Jane, the lady from Nevada City, told us about a great fish place at the edge of town. Puerto Jimenez is only about 4 blocks long so it's an easy walk to the restaurant. She told us to have the cerviche. We'd never had it before and she guaranteed us that you could find none better. She was right. It was terrific. We also had an order of fried fish and french fries.

After dinner we walk around town for awhile and then head back to the motel before it gets dark. Jane is there and we visit with her till it's time to go to bed. She reminds us of a 60's hippie now in her 40's.

The room never cools down and we sleep with the fan on full force pointed right at us. But we do sleep.

Day 19 - 5AM and our alarm clock wakes us. The landrover taxi that takes us to Carate leaves at 6AM. It won't take us long to pack our stuff because we're carrying very little. But we don't want to miss our ride so we need to get over to the pick up point. It's maybe a 1/4 mile to the middle of town where we catch the taxi. On the way we stop at a bakery and get some fresh baked bread for our breakfast.

There's four other people waiting. We strike up a conversation with two of the guys. They're German physics students off for a 6 week holiday. The other two people are locals who use the landrover to commute to work out in the country.

For about the first half hour we pass through open range with cattle grazing. The road is gravel but not too bumpy. Then the rangeland begins to give way to hills and denser vegetation. Now the road narrows and there are more potholes. We come to a small stream that is and we drive through it. I can see though that in the rainy season this stream would not be passable.

The vegetation is approaching what I'd call jungle. There are clearings where we see small farms and sometimes big clearings with cattle. At one place where we ford a stream workers are building a bridge. It's not big but it'll allow a small bus or truck to cross when the stream is swollen.

About an hour or so into the drive the Pacific Ocean comes into view. It's on our left. To the right there is open range and about a 1/2 mile away the jungle begins as do the mountains. 30 minutes later we are driving alongside a small runway and then we're at Carate.

Carate has just one building. During the gold rush days miners bought their last supplies here before heading off into the jungle of the Osa Peninsula. Now the

store is a beer and snack stop for tourists like us. I guess locals stop in to for a cold beer. A palm thatched roof provides shade out in front of the store. A monkey comes over to greet us and look for a food handout. Before our driver leaves we confirm with him the schedule for returning back to Puerto Jimenez. He says that yes it leaves twice a day. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon. He takes off and we join the German guys for a beer before we head up the coastline to Corcovado Tent Lodge.

The Germans are going to spend 4 nights and 5 days traversing the Osa Peninsula. When they get to the eastern side there's a place where they can catch a ride back to Golfito. We're only walking about a mile along the beach to the tent lodge. I envy the adventure these guys are embarking on. The Osa Peninsula is still a wild place. Besides dealing with snakes, mosquitoes, and other wild animals there's a chance of running into bandits or poachers.

They tell us that for food they're just carrying some noodles and lots of water. We joke with them that we'll be eating steak and lobster and thinking of them. Actually, though, we don't know what we'll be eating or what to expect. The brochure for the Corcovado Tent Lodge says "Be prepared for 100 degree temperatures, high humidity, biting insects, and maybe a boa constrictor lying by the bathroom - Do you really want to come here?"

We chose to stay at the tent lodge because of the guided access it offers to the pristine jungle of the Osa Peninsula. The quality of the accommodations didn't matter to us so long as we could hike into triple canopy jungle with a guide. We also took the hard, but cheap, way to get here. If you don't count the time we stayed over at a few places like Golfito it takes two days and two nights to get here. If you have more money than time you can fly directly to Carate from San Jose. The difference is that it cost us \$180 for the two of us for two nights at the tent lodge while those who flew in paid around \$450 apiece.

The four of us wave good-bye to the store manager and walk over to the beach. For the four of us this is a big adventure. The manager sees people like us everyday. We ,though, are walking into new territory. At Carate the mountains and the jungle come down to within 400 yards of the beach. There's the ocean, the beach, a piece of land elevated about ten feet above the beach, a wave cut bench, and 100 yards wide covered with coconut palms, and then jungle and the base of the mountains.

It's 9AM now and it's hot and humid. Pat and I are drinking water steadily as we walk up the beach. Our German friends are carrying 60 pound packs. Ours only weigh about ten pounds. After about 30 minutes we see a sign announcing that we've arrived at Corcovado Tent Lodge. In Spanish it says "Rustic Elegance."

Before saying good-bye to our hiking companions we exchange E-Mail addresses. I ask them to send us a message on the Internet telling us about their adventure. Then we wave good-bye and climb up the bank to the camp.

We're in awe with what we see. There are two rows of wall tents on platforms. Each tent is sun bleached white and covered with a deep blue canvas fly. They're beautiful and fit in to the setting so much better than a hotel. Higher up on the hillside backed up to the jungle are more tents. There must be about 30 all together. I ask a cleaning lady where we check in. She points up to a thatched roof building up on the hillside. We walk up there and go inside.

Lana, the camp manager is doing some paper work when we go in. It turns out she's from Colorado. She came down here a few years ago and fell in love with the place. Lana gets us oriented. First, though, she says we look hot and offers us some water. Both of us realize that though we didn't think the walk had been strenuous we were red faced and needed to sit down.

The office is also the dining hall. Seated at the table we look out over palm trees, over the tents, and can see the pounding surf. Which by the way is running 5 to 7 seven feet and pounding the shoreline with a constant roar. Lana gives us the routine. A bell calls us to breakfast, lunch and dinner. If you're not here you don't eat. She takes us over to the hammock hut which is another Tahitian style building with a very high roof. There's about 8 hammocks strung up in here and a nice breeze blowing through. A long bar is at one end of the hut. During the day, Lana tells us, you can grab a beer or softdrink. In the evening there's a bartender to make mixed drinks.

Back in the dining hall Lana tells us where the showers and restrooms are located and fills us in on activities we can sign up for. Behind the camp there's a trail about a 2 miles long that we can take ourselves. Several guided trips are offered. There's a sunset horseback ride, a hike into the jungle, and a hike up the beach several miles. We want the jungle hike and sign up for it for tomorrow. It costs us about \$30 apiece. Lana also tells us that there is a group from Berkeley, California who takes people into the jungle and hauls them up into the top of the jungle canopy to an observation desk. The charge for this is \$70 apiece. We think it's a rip off and decline.

Lana takes us down to our tent which is located right at the edge of the 10 foot bluff overlooking the beach. Inside, the beds are covered with blue spreads and a red hibiscus is on each of our pillows. Lana leaves us to get settled in. Pat and I hug each other and kiss and marvel at how wonderful this place is. This is better than I could have ever imagined.

We go up to shower and change. The restrooms and showers are immaculate. Afterwards we walk on the beach till lunch time. Lunch is a gourmet treat. I can't remember what we had but it was delicious and plentiful. We spend the afternoon on the beach and playing in the surf. We don't go out far because of the huge waves but the warm water feels wonderful. All around the camp are small iguanas. Maybe 1 1/2 to 2 feet in length.

Now it's 4pm and we're going to take the self-guided jungle hike. We pick up the trail just behind the dining hall. The trail starts right up the mountain into the jungle. It's steep. We take our time and in about 5 minutes are into the primary, never been cut, jungle. The trail continues to be steep and it's hot and even more humid than on the beach. We take our time though and drink lots of water.

We're still in the jungle as dusk is approaching. The insects and birds are coming to life now. The jungle is humming with sounds. We hear a crashing sound. Staying still and looking up at the treetops we see some movement. Quiet, still, Pat points. There's a monkey way up there maybe 75 feet or more swinging from branch to branch. Quickly, he's out of site and we continue. We run into a couple from Holland. They ask us if we've seen any monkeys. Yes. They haven't seen any.

On the way down we find a clearing where we can watch the sun dip into the ocean. Then we continue on back while we still have light to see. The jungle is alive now with sounds. It's awesome.

By 9pm we're in bed. Several times I wake up during the night, listen to the sound of the crashing waves, and then drift back to peaceful rest.

Day 20 - It's 6AM. Pat is still asleep. During the night it got cool enough to pull a sheet over me. It's early morning light but the sun won't shine directly on us for several hours. I'm going to hike into the jungle and be there when it wakes up. We've learned that the jungle is most active at dusk and early morning. During the heat of the day animals and insects rest.

Quietly I get out of bed and put on my trousers, long sleeved shirt, and tennis shoes. I climb up to the dining hall and refill my water bottles. Then I start up into the jungle. Yesterday, I learned that I needn't go very far to find a good place to wait for monkeys. After about 15 minutes of walking up a steep trail, it would be slippery if it were raining, I come to the trunk of a huge tree where the day before we saw some monkey activity.

I check for ants or any other crawly things on the ground and then sit down next to the big tree. From here it's easy for me to look up and watch for monkeys. After a

few minutes I see movement up near the top, probably 75 feet or higher. The branches are moving. A monkey must be waking up. The sun is just starting to hit the tops of the trees. Now I see the monkey. Not real clear but I see an arm stretch out. There he is. He's swinging out from his night perch and starting to explore the tree tops. He picks up momentum as he goes from branch to branch and tree to tree. Oh, my gosh. He just jumped at least 20 feet through the air to another tree.

I lose sight of him and begin looking down into the ravine that is at the side of the trail. There, still not in sunlight but in the shadows of the forest, is a great iridescent blue butterfly. He's like one that I saw at the butterfly farm in Monteverde. Only completely in the wild here it looks much more beautiful. It must be at least as big as my hand. I'm reminded of a stealth fighter as the butterfly glides silently through the jungle.

Again I look at the tree tops and see that a whole family of monkeys is now starting to venture out. I watch them for awhile and then head back to camp. I'll wake up Pat and then we'll have breakfast. Once again the food is superb. By the way, still no biting insects. Puerto Viejo is the only place, so far, where we were nibbled on.

Our guide, Gilberto, is ready to take us on our jungle hike when we finish eating. A German couple joins us. As we walk up the beach Gilberto tells us that he grew up on the Osa Peninsula. His family lived in a small farming community on the coast. They raised almost all of their food. The exception being sugar, salt, and coffee that a ship brought to them on its monthly stop at the village. We notice that Gilberto is barefoot.

About a 1/2 mile up the beach we come to the park headquarters for Corcovado National Park. We have to sign in at the ranger station. Our fees were included with the price of the guided hike. If you hadn't already gotten your park pass this is where you'd get it and pay the fee of \$25 a day if you're not a Costa Rican. They pay considerably less.

From the ranger station we begin walking on the elevated bench above the beach. The trees are not very tall here and the vegetation is dense. Gilberto leads us along what appears to be nothing more than a small game trail. Occasionally he stops to point something out to us.

Then we begin to head inland and to climb. In a few hundred yards we're in the primary rainforest. The area has never been logged. The trees are much taller here, the vegetation is more diverse and considerably less dense. I'm the last one in the group. It is hot and humid. Pat's shirt is soaked with sweat.

Up and up we climb. We go over fallen trees and scramble up rocky steep slopes holding onto vines and roots for balance. The variations of greens highlighted by the filtered sun are beautiful. Finally we're not going up anymore. Now we're going down a ravine. There's no appearance of a trail. We just follow Gilberto as we work our way down and around rocks and logs.

This time of day is not good for viewing wildlife and we don't see any. No birds, no monkeys. At the bottom of the ravine is a rock sided stream. It's about 5 to 10 feet wide and 4 to 10 feet deep. Gilberto tells us we can swim here. This is welcome relief. We'd worn our bathing suits underneath just for this.

Where we've come into the stream on our side is a rock ledge and the other side a cliff rising up maybe 20 feet above the stream. The water is clear. Gilberto jumps in first. Then we each follow. The water is relatively cold. It doesn't take my breath away but it does feel wonderful after the hot hike.

After swimming for a while Gilberto gets out of the water and begins scooping a hole in the sand at the stream edge. Then he directs some water into and out of the hole. In a few seconds he's showing gold flakes. Nothing of value but it shows us why miners had flocked to this region and why they didn't like being kicked out when the area became a park.

When we're all out and dressed we resume our hike. Now we're going downstream and the canyon is widening out. Tall trees and ferns cover the steep sides. I can't take in enough of it. I just stop and stare at the grandeur of it. In about an hour we're at the ocean. Walking in the canyon had been cool. Now it feels hot again.

Gilberto asks us if we're thirsty. By this time we've all finished the water we'd carried with us. We all say yes. He goes over to a coconut tree and begins climbing it. Quickly he's near the top where he can grab some coconuts and throw them down to us. Then he climbs back down and hacks open the coconuts so we can drink the juice. It's delicious.

We're back at camp in time for lunch. Afterwards we walk some more on the beach and lay around in the hammocks. The afternoon goes quickly for us. Dinner is a disappointment. The food is delicious but there's not enough of it. We'll need a powerbar to get us through the evening. After dinner we go up into the jungle to watch the monkeys again. There's still people at the camp who haven't seen any monkeys. We know that you just have to pick the right place and be still.

We're in bed by 9PM again. Both us sleep soundly.

**Day 21 - Both of us are up early this morning. This is our last day here in this magical place and we want to savor it completely. Up the trail again to our monkey post. This time we're greeted by a different breed of monkey. These are white faced. Pat and I watch them stir up in the treetops. Then one spots us and comes down to get a look at us. He comes to within about 10 feet above us, then stops and looks us over. Then he's off towards the tree tops again. The rest of his family is spreading out and we see them jumping from tree to tree.**

**After breakfast we pack up our gear and store it in the dining room. Then we walk back to our favorite hammocks. Suspended between coconut trees at the edge of the small 10 foot bluff just above the beach and overlooking the ocean they offer complete serenity. That's where we spend the morning.**

**After lunch it's time to start walking back down the beach to meet our taxi for the ride to Carate. We have lots of time to cover the mile or so. Along the way we pick up beach stones that are absolutely beautiful. I wonder what they'll look like when they're polished.**

**We haven't seen but a few Scarlet McCaws. This place is famous for them. Then we spot several flying above the trees about a hundred yards from us. We watch them for awhile till they light in a tall solitary tree. A bit further down the beach we see more and follow them to a big tree. There we count 21 Scarlet McCaws. They are yellow and blue and red. Flying they remind me of Chinese kites with long colorful tails.**

**At Carate there are several other people waiting for the taxi. A couple of local guys who run the store and apparently do a little cowboying tease the monkey that hangs out at the store. We have about an hour to wait and get a beer and sit in the shade.**

**When the taxi shows up we discover that it's a stake bed truck. There's eight of us now. Two are Americans and the rest are Costa Ricans who work in the area and are headed back home. Pat decides to ride up front with the driver and I get in the back.**

**It turns out that riding in the open bed of the truck is perfect. Now I have an unobstructed view of everything. As we drive off I look back up at the beach and Carate. It'd been a wonderful visit. We'd not encountered one biting or annoying insect. It's been hot but not unbearable. The jungle had been everything we'd hoped it would be.**

**While we were at Corcovado we met one couple who had just come down from the**

states for a three day weekend. They'd asked a friend in the states where in the world they should go if they just had three days. He'd said the Corcovado Tent Lodge.

From California you can be in San Jose, Costa Rica in about 6 to 7 hours. There you catch an hour flight to Carate. By the end of the day you are at Corcovado and feel like you're a million miles from anywhere. I don't recommend just going to Costa Rica for a three day weekend but Corcovado is the place if that's all the time you have.

It's late afternoon as we head back to Puerto Jimenez. We pass through the same rangeland and jungle that we saw coming here. Now I see it better from the truck. As we slow to cross a stream I hear and then see a Toucan high up in a tree. Along the way we stop to let people off at their farm houses.

It's almost dark when we get back to our motel in Puerto Jimenez. We'd reserved a room before we left for Corcovado. Out over the Golfo Dulce there's a tremendous lightning storm. It's too far away to hear the thunder but the light show is spectacular. We have a fish dinner and then go back to the motel.

The owner is sitting out on his porch enjoying the evening. The manager is there and we strike up a conversation with her. Note that our Spanish is not good and she speaks no English. Nevertheless we're able to convey our thoughts. After about 10 minutes the owner, a man with gray hair that appears to be in his 70's, addresses us in English.

It turns out that he speaks perfect English. He'd been educated in the States. His name is Alfredo and the young motel manager is his wife. Alfredo tells us about his days sailing on the Golfo Dulce and the marvelous things to be found out there. He tells us about growing up here. His brother had been bitten several times by poisonous snakes but his father had a snake remedy which seemed to work. We visited for over an hour. Then we decided that we needed to get to bed. We bid him and his wife farewell and go to what turns out to be our very hot room.

This is not a comfortable night for me. Maybe it's the humidity. Even with the fan blowing right on me I feel like I'm suffocating. Pat doesn't seem to mind the heat though. Without a doubt this is the hottest most uncomfortable night I've had in Costa Rica.

Day 22 - The ferry leaves at 6AM. We're up at 5AM. It's just a 5 minute walk out to the dock but we don't want to miss the ferry to Golfito. So, we pack up our things and head out to the boat ramp. It's raining lightly. Not cold though. It's still warm but not hot. Lots of people, maybe 30, are waiting for the ferry this



morning. We find a place to keep the rain off us and wait. Everyone is hanging out in little groups under trees and eaves trying to stay dry.

The ferry shows up on time and we all board. It's a neat morning to be heading off across the Golfo Dulce. The sky is covered with clouds that droop down to the water. It's misty like in Oregon or Washington along the coast. Except, of course, it's warm.

As we approach the entrance to Golfito the clouds start to break up. There are green covered mountains disappearing into still lingering clouds. In some of the valleys clouds are still hanging low while we can see the ridges that surround the valleys.

We dock at Golfito and walk over to the water taxi stand to get a ride over to Playa Cacao. The taxi takes us right to the dock at our shangri-la bungalows, Las Palmas. Isabel greets us. We get the gear we left with her and she takes us to our bungalow. Pat and I are thrilled to be back here. It's like coming back home. We can only stay one night here because we've booked a flight back to San Jose for tomorrow morning.

Both us now what we want to do. We want to canoe back to our private beach just outside the entrance to Golfito Bay. I pack up some essentials to take with us. Water, sunscreen, flashlight, and power bars go into my pack. Even though we're going to wear our bathing suits while we paddle out, we take hats, long sleeved shirts and trousers. We know the intensity of the sun here and when it's time to cover up.

Jane, the woman we met in Puerto Jimenez at the motel, is staying here with her young daughter. We'd told her how wonderful it was here. So, she came over to check it out. She agrees it's paradise. Our German friends have left.

The dugout canoe is tied up to a buoy about 100 feet offshore. I swim out to get it. The water is clear and refreshing. I untie it and bring it back for Pat. We load up and start paddling. It's an incredible morning. The clouds are all gone now. We're in no hurry. We paddle slowly and absorb the feeling of this place.

It takes us about an hour to get to our beach. We wait for a good wave to come up and then catch it and take it into shore.

We pull the canoe way up off the sand and onto the rocks so that the rising tide won't take it away. The beach is familiar to us this time. We pull off our swimsuits and run naked into the water.

After frolicking for awhile, Pat and I go back to the beach and get our snorkel

equipment. We don't spend much time swimming with our masks and fins. The water is clear but not much marine life here. With no reef the small colorful tropical fish don't hang out here.

Back on the beach both of us are hot for some love making on the sand. We lay out our towels on the sand in the shade of a big tree. Don't want to get sunburned. Pat lays back and beckons me to join her. I'm ready. It's indescribably wonderful. When we're finished we lay there and let the breeze caress our bodies.

Off shore there's another big freighter waiting for the right tide to go into Golfito. It's time for us to head back. As we enter the entrance to the bay I spot something floating in the water. At first it looks like a paper sack but not quite. We back paddle and come alongside the object. It's a big seashell. I take it out of the water. It's about 6 inches long and 5 inches high. There doesn't appear to be anything inside. I empty it out and wonder why it was floating rather than resting on the bottom of the bay.

Back at Las Palmas we get several inflated inner tubes that Isabel keeps around the place and take them out for a float. The incoming tide carries us along towards a sandy beach just past Las Palmas. There we find Jane swimming around. The water is about 4 feet deep here. We wave to her and she comes out to talk to us. I see that she's not wearing a top. Her breasts are bobbing in the water. Not being used to seeing naked women other than Pat, I find it distracting carrying on a conversation with Jane. I want to look at her face but know that my eyes are dropping to her breasts. After we paddle off I mention this to Pat. She says the same thing. It's hard to talk to someone, at least it was for us, when their boobs are bobbing in the water.

Dinner that night is at our favorite little open air restaurant next to Las Palmas. Jane and another woman joins us for beer and fish. Another storm comes up off the Golfo Dulce. Thunder and lightning is firing across the bay. A squall comes by and it rains like mad for a few minutes and then it is quiet again. Playing on the radio is a pop tune we've heard ever since we've been in Costa Rica. The first time we heard it we thought it was annoying. Now the incessant rock and roll beat of the song has won us over. We associate it with Costa Rica and great memories. With the beat still in our ears we walk back by flashlight to our hut and retire for our last night in the paradise of Golfito.

Day 23 - Another early morning for us. We're flying back to San Jose today. The plane doesn't leave till 7AM but the ticket agent said we had to be there by 6AM in case the plane comes early. By the way, it was interesting trying to make our reservation and purchase our tickets with our limited Spanish. The ticket agent spoke no English. However, we got them.

Isabel has coffee and orange juice for us and has her employee ready to take us over to Golfito in the motor boat. She walks us down to the dock. It's like leaving home. We've only been in this part of the country for ten days and four of those at Las Palmas but we are in love with it. The boat starts off and we wave good-bye to Isabel. Art is up on the dock and waving good-bye to us. What wonderful people.

Ashore in Golfito we go up to the main street and wait for the city bus. It's only a few minutes before one comes by. The driver lets us off at the entrance to the airport. Actually there isn't any airport the way we think of it. Out where they used to have the golf course when this was a big banana shipping town they've laid out a runway. There's no control tower, or building, or gates.

We walk across the grass to the runway. Then we cross to the other side. We do this only because we see several people standing on the other side at the edge of the runway. Hopefully they know what they're doing.

We greet them. They turn out to be fisherman who've come down from the states for a three day fishing trip at a resort about an hour south of Golfito, Playa Zancudo. Turns out they don't know what they're doing either. They're on this side of the runway because that's where the taxi let them off.

Soon more people are joining us. All in all there's about 20 of us. The sun still isn't shining on the runway but is lighting up the hills on the other side. Now a Toyota pick up comes driving across the runway to us. It stops and the driver comes over to the group. He motions that we need to move because, I gather from his gestures, that we're standing where the plane will stop. After he's herded us to the right place he begins collecting tickets and exchanging them for boarding passes. The boarding passes are pieces of aluminum about 2 inches wide, 1/4 inch thick and 6 inches long.

I hear the plane's engines. It'll be coming in from the north. I've heard that it's quite an approach. My gaze is towards the jungle and hilltops at the end of the runway. I can see it now. It's low. It looks like it's just skimming the tops of the trees. The sight takes me back to Vietnam. The plane is much like ones that I flew on. It's a twin engine turboprop. These planes were built for making jungle landings at remote airstrips. They have a great record of service. Clearing the last trees it drops down to the runway and then and then taxis up to us.

The door is open and we're instructed to start boarding. The air is wonderfully warm. It's not hot, not too humid. It's the perfect time of day in the jungle. You just feel like you could go naked and it would be comfortable and natural.

Pat had been skeptical of flying on one of these small airplanes. After the long bus ride to Golfito she was willing to consider it. Still, we wouldn't have missed the bus ride because we got to see so much of the country. Now it's time to go back quickly. She's relieved when I've seen the plane and tell her about it's remarkable service record. It's nice inside. The doors are shut and we're off. These planes literally jump into the sky.

We fly out over the bay and then make a turn to the right. Las Palmas and Playa Cacao is under our wing tip. We can see the huts, the restaurants, and the boats tied up at the docks. It's sad to leave the great people and wonderful scenery of Golfito. You could spend months here. Even in Puerto Jimenez there's things to see and do. We found out much too late about the guided kayak trips into the Golfo Dulce and other tours to take advantage of them.

We follow the coastline north. There's Domincal way below us. We can see beyond the escarpment to the east of Domincal to the high ridges of the Cordillera de Talamanca. This is a short flight. As the coastline bends to the northwest we move away and towards the central valley of southern Costa Rica. Soon we're over San Isidro and then over the mountains that circle San Jose. Then we're landing.

Off the plane. Now we have to figure out what we're going to do. We have today, tomorrow, the next day, and then we leave the following day. We could've stayed in Golfito a few more days but we did want to see some of the area around San Jose before we came home. However, we have no idea of where we're going to stay.

Pat watches our packs, does this sound familiar? I scout around the terminal to see if I can find some information about a place to stay for a few days. Looking at a bulletin board I see an ad for a Bed and Breakfast. It's just 10 minutes from the airport. They speak English and will send someone to pick us up and bring us back to the airport when we're ready to leave. I call them. Yes, they have a room. They'll be over to get us in ten minutes.

I haven't mentioned the marvelous phones in Costa Rica. Rather than holes to put in nickels, dimes or quarters, the phones have an inclined ramp. You line your coins up there before you make your call. When your call is connected the right amount of coins is allowed to move down the ramp and into the phone. Rather than holding your change in your hand and trying to stick it in when you're connected it just goes in automatically.

I walk back and get Pat. I can't believe how lucky we've been this whole trip to find places to stay. We walk outside with our packs and the driver is there in a van within 5 minutes.

La Casona is just on the other side of the airport in Alajuela. The town is famous for its perfect weather. In the San Jose area the temperature rarely gets above 75 degrees. It's a huge house. My guess is that it was once part of coffee plantation. There are plantations around the house but the sprawl of suburbia is here too. More and more houses are creeping into the countryside just like in the states.

One of the owners, Bill an American, greets us and show us to our bedroom. It's a gorgeous home with the typical beautiful hardwood floors, doors , and paneling. We put our things away and then decide to spend the day in San Jose. Bill, takes us back to he airport where we catch a bus into San Jose. It's only about a 20 minute ride.

Without our packs we're much more comfortable walking around the town. I'm carrying our money and passports in a shoulder pouch inside my shirt. A pickpocket couldn't get it.

The streets are narrow and packed with buses. The sidewalks are like jammed with people. We try a couple a museums but they're closed today. Walking around we see the capitol building and a church or two. Then we go looking for a souvenir place that Arndt, our German friend had told us about. Up till now we hadn't bought any souvenirs. Now it was time to do our duty and buy things for our family and friends.

Turns out we're only a few blocks away. Arndt is right. The place is huge and full of stalls offering not only handicrafts from Costa Rica but all of Central America. I'm not much for shopping but I love this place. While we're looking around the place when an afternoon thunder storm comes up and it pours down rain. Pat and I go to one of the windows and watch the storm. The sidewalk below us is empty of people. Another loud crack of thunder and it rains even harder.

We've been in here for several hours and now it's time to catch a bus back. On the way out I see a tour information center and stop to see what they have to offer. We haven't got anything planned as of yet for tomorrow. Maybe we can go on a day trip to an area we haven't seen.

The bright young lady tells us that she can get us on a bus and boat trip to Tortuguero. This is on the Atlantic coast and there are no roads into the villages. She tells us that everybody gets around by boats on the intercoastal canal. The area is also famous for its sea turtles but this isn't the time of year for them. The bus part of the trip will take us back towards Puerto Limon. Pat and I think that it'll be nice to have a guide tell us about the area that we've passed through twice while we've been in Costa Rica.

Back at La Casona we meet the other owner of the house. He's a retired surgeon.

When we meet him he has a drink in his hand and, from the conversation, I gather that he always has a drink in his hand. He wants to tell us stories about the brothels in San Jose and some of the prostitutes he's brought back to the house for him and his guests. We're really not interested and go for an evening walk. There's a little restaurant about a 1/2 mile away and we go up there for some chicken.

When we get back the doctor is still drinking. Bill, tells us that he'll try and arrange to take us for a tour of the area the day after we get back from Tortuguero. The van is being repaired but if it is fixed then he'll take us. I ask how much he'll charge. He says he doesn't know. He's only been here a month or so and hasn't seen the countryside yet so it'll be cheap he says. We go to bed. Here we need blankets. A first for us in Costa Rica.

Day 24 - Another early morning. Up at 5:30AM. We have to take a taxi to a hotel where the tour bus will pick us up. The taxi shows up but then has a flat. If we miss the bus we're out the \$100 we paid for the tour. I help him with the tire and finally we get off. We're at the hotel in time. The bus shows up about 10 minutes later. It's a very nice tour bus. Just like the ones in the states. We don't head right out though because we have to pick up other people from other places in the town.

Finally on our way we head up towards the mountain pass that is to the east of San Jose. This is the way we came when we first got here and headed for Puerto Viejo. Now our guide is telling us about the geology of the area and it's history. It's great to learn more about this region and also nice to feel so comfortable with being here. Soon we're out of the valley and into the clouds.

Descending the other side there are waterfalls all over the place because of the rains they've been getting the last few days. It's neat thinking that we've been through here three times on our trip and will be back one more time when we come home today.

The bus stops several places for us to view the jungle, mountains, and canyons. One place is on a high bridge. Below us two rivers come together. One is clear the other is a dark muddy reddish color. The guide explains to us this is because of the different kinds of rocks that the two rivers flow through. Several months later back in the states we see these this same scene in the movie "Congo."

The road twists and turns down towards the coastal plain. The driver is a master. All of the bus drivers in Costa Rica are highly skilled. Out in flat land now the forest has been cleared for ranching and banana plantations. In a while we turn off onto a gravel road. We're headed towards the river where we'll get in boats for

**our journey to Tortuguero National Park.**

**A guide has the driver stop. Here in these bushes alongside the road he generally sees a sloth. Sure enough the sloth is still here. We all pile out of the bus to get a look at this slow moving creature hanging up in the bushy tree. He takes no notice of us. After we've all snapped our pictures we're back in the bus.**

**The next stop is a banana plantation to see how they harvest and pack bananas. There's not much to see but it's interesting. The bananas are cut out in the field and hooked onto a overhead rail. A man pulls the dozens of banana stalks along the rail to a processing shed. There, the bananas are put through a solution that slows the ripening process. Then they're put into boxes and trucked to the waiting ships at Puerto Limon. By days end these bananas will be on a ship and headed to the states. The boxes they're in are the same boxes we see them come out of in our supermarket.**

**It's just a minute or two to where we get on the boats. Each boat holds about 20 people. They have an awning to keep the sun off of us. Now that we've experienced the Pacific Coast and the Atlantic Coast we know that even though it's hot here today, it's not nearly as hot as where we've been. This is really quite comfortable. Probably 85 degree whereas it had been 95 degrees and maybe hotter on the Pacific.**

**The boat driver speaks enough English to point out some things to us. But we're not all Americans. There's a surprising number of locals on this tour also. We're not going all the way to the village of Tortuguero but we'll get to the national park. Our stop is the village of Boca del Rio Parismina. It's about an hour trip on the canal. This is pretty country but not spectacular like the jungle of Corcovado. With the exception of the park this area has been cleared. Trees remain alongside the stream but beyond is grazing cattle. There are lots of birds in the trees, an occasional monkey, and we see one very small alligator.**

**The village is at the water entrance to the park. It's a popular fisherman's resort. The accommodations we see look pretty bad compared to what we've stayed in. Some of the people are spending the night here and coming back tomorrow. We're glad we're just here for the day.**

**It's lunch time. We'll eat first and then take a boat ride into the park. Lunch reminds me of chicken dinners at Knotts Berry Farm. Though it's served buffet style there are huge platters of fried chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy. It's delicious and I go back for more.**

**After lunch, our guide asks if any of us want to go on a jungle walk. Several of us**

are eager to go. He cautions us that we must have lots of mosquito repellent, no shorts or sandals, and hopefully a hat. We have it all and start out with him. Well it was dense but not huge like we saw in Corcovado. Don't get me wrong it was pretty and we're glad we went. It's just that we'd been spoiled. The guide did find a couple of small red poisoness frogs and pointed them out to us. He takes this walk everyday and has it down pat as to where all of these wild critters hang out.

On the hike we didn't see one mosquito. I guess we just hit it at the right time of year.

The boat trip into the park reminded me of the everglades. You wouldn't want to go walking in this place. First of all most of it is water or marshy. Second it's so dense you can't see but a short distance in front of you.

Time to head back. We're both tired. Can't say we're thirsty because they have on the boat a big ice chest of cold soda pop. However, we've been up since 5:30AM and being on the water in the sun saps your energy. The bus ride back is uneventful. Back in San Jose the driver maneuvers the huge bus around through narrow streets as we drop off people. He even obliges some people by taking them to their homes.

It's late when we get back to La Casona. Bill asks if we want to go into town to have dinner with them. Our money is getting low and both he and the doctor are looped so I tell them we'll just walk up the road for a bite of, guess what, chicken. While Pat is in our room getting cleaned up to go to dinner, Bill tells me more about their sexual exploits. Prostitution is legal in Costa Rica and I strongly suspect that these two characters are going to turn the Bed and Breakfast into a whore house. Bill tells me about all his American friends that come down to stay with him and the women he sets them up with.

We head off down the dark road to the restaurant. We find it closed so it's another night for power bars.

Day 25 - This morning we can sleep in. It's around 9AM when we finally get up. Breakfast is ready and it's delicious. Hot coffee, scrambled eggs, beans, and toast. Bill tells me that he can't take us on a tour because the doctor wrecked the van last night. He didn't run into anything but drove it into a ditch and apparently broke the axle. I'm relieved that he won't be driving us around.

A taxi takes us over to the bus stop where we catch a bus to Sarchi. We quickly leave the suburbs behind as we climb the hills into the countryside. This is beautiful. We get views of distant mountains as we pass through coffee plantations.



We're in Sarchi in about an hour. The town is strung out along the highway for about a mile with a small town center at one end. This is the town famous for making the colorful ox carts. We hop off the bus in front of one of the factories where they make the carts. Factory don't do it justice. It's more of a very pretty store and out back is where they make the carts in all sizes from little miniatures to big ones that oxen pull.

The store has an amazing number of items on display. Besides touristy things they make furniture here. We fall in love with a beautiful rocking chair and take turns sitting in it and imagining how it would look in our living room. Out in the patio they have orange juice, coffee, rolls and assorted fruit all for free. Under a tree is a man in a campesino costume with a hand-crafted full size painted ox cart and two oxen. He's there to have your picture taken with him.

There's lots to look at in Sarchi so we hold off buying anything just yet. Pat and I head out to the road and begin walking. Every few hundred yards there's another store with ox carts and other souvenirs. None of this is junky imported stuff. It's all quality, hand-crafted items. The road winds up and over a small hill and then twists down through a small ravine. Here there's another store. Then the road takes us up out of the ravine and to the top of another hill. From here we can see the church of Sarchi standing on a small rise just above the town. It's only another 1/4 mile or so and we walk onto into the town.

Wonderful aromas are coming out of several bakeries. After checking them out we go back to the one with the best looking and smelling bread. We get roles and orange juice. Then we go up to the church and eat lunch on the front steps.

We've seen all the shops now and we know that we want the rocking chair we saw in the first store. We take our time walking back. I'd recommend spending a night in Sarchi or nearby. The countryside is just so pastoral. At the store we pick out our rocking chair. It only costs \$45. They make them so that they can be easily broken down and packed in a cardboard case. We watch the man disassemble our chair and then pack it. He crafts a handle out of rope so that I can carry it onto the bus and then the plane.

Our bus is on time, as they always are in Costa Rica. This one leaves for Alajuela every 30 minutes. About ten minutes into our ride back the sky has gone from clear to dark ominous clouds. As we wind our way up and over hills and down into valleys lightening flashes first in the distance and then very close. The thunder roars. The rain is coming down in torrents. Everyone is quickly closing their windows on the bus to keep from getting wet. School is just getting out so this bus is carrying lots of kids. We pick them up and drop them off. Each time the door

opens some rain blows in. It's really a refreshing way to end the day and we're glad we're not walking now.

Back at our bed and breakfast we have time to walk to a nearby city park that is famous in the area. It's called Ojo de Agua. Walking to the park we pass coffee plantations on either side of the road. Pat runs across the street to get a few last pictures of coffee plants. While I'm watching her I see a man come walking out of the coffee trees on my side of the road. He looks like Juan Valdez of the coffee commercials on TV. In one hand he has a bag and in the other hand a machete.

I watch him approach and when he's close I say "Hola!" He greets me back but rather than walking past me he stops and, in Spanish, asks me for money. I pretend that I don't understand and say "No entiendo (I don't understand). Habla poco Espanol (I speak little Spanish)" I guess I shouldn't have said that so well because he goes on in Spanish asking for money. Now he tells me that he's Nicaraguan. You need some background here.

The Costa Ricans have told us there's no crime in Costa Rica. When we ask why all the houses have bars on the windows and doors and some even have armed guards we're told "Oh, it's the Nicaraguans that commit the crime. So, this guy wants me to know that he's a bad guy. Now I'm answering in English that I don't understand and drop the Spanish. Pat comes up and says with a big smile "Hola, senior. Buenos Dias." I look at her and with my eyes try to get her to understand that this may be a dangerous situation. She doesn't get the message though. However, this guy never handles his machete in a threatening manner. He asks for money again and I shake my head and raise my palms up as though I don't understand. He turns and walks away mumbling something to us about stupid Americans. He crosses the street and disappears into the coffee plantation.

With him gone, we walk more quickly towards the park. The afternoon rains have chased everyone out. There's not even anyone at the gate to collect our money. We walk on in. There's still a light mist but not enough to make you wet.

The first thing we see is a huge fountain, like a waterfall, that sprays out hundreds of gallons of water a minute. Water rushes down towards the park and forms a stream that meanders past picnic facilities and then flows into a small lake. No one is around. Small row boats are pulled up on the shore. Holding hands we walk around this deserted place. We pass several swimming pools, tennis courts, a soccerfield, and picnic facilities.

Viewed from a distance the place looks magnificent but up close we find that everything is falling apart. Like so much of what we saw in San Jose little if anything is maintained. There must have been money to build this beautiful park

**but now it has holes in the sidewalk, trash all over, and the plaster in the pools is chipped off in big chunks. Still, it's pleasant walking around.**

**We try to imagine what it's like a on a busy sunny Saturday afternoon with hundreds of people swimming and playing. But we have it to ourselves. Music is still coming over the loudspeakers. At a concrete patio overlooking the lake a song comes on that we know.**

**I ask Pat "May I have this dance?"**

**"Of course," she says.**

**And we dance, all buy ourselves, on this concrete patio, with a misty rain falling, overlooking the lake, our last day in Costa Rica, while Barbara Striesand sings Memories.**

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beachwizard@beachesbeaches.com**

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