

2011 Costa Rica



June 15, 2011 - Our air flight was uneventful, only three hours from Miami to San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica.

A summary of our visit to this beautiful country:

Capital, San Jose in central

White water rafting in the north east

Pineapple plantation in the northeast

Traditional pottery demonstration

Costa Rican cooking participation and eating

Home visit in north

School visit with traditional dancing

Home hosted lunch with just four of us and a farmer and his wife

Eco-friendly farm

Iguana tree

Rio Frio boat trip and momentary in Nicaragua in the North

Zipline and horseback riding in the northwest

Volcano and mud bath

Boat trip to crocodile area in the northwest coast

Marine/beach park in the southwest coast

Tortuguero National park green turtle refuge in the north east coast

Canoe trip

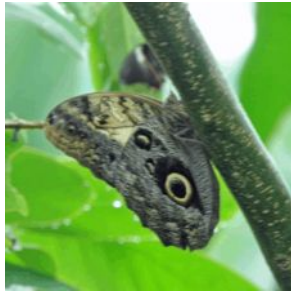
Thus, we traveled to all parts of Costa Rica except the south east. We experienced many different aspects of the wildlife and culture and took part in many of them.



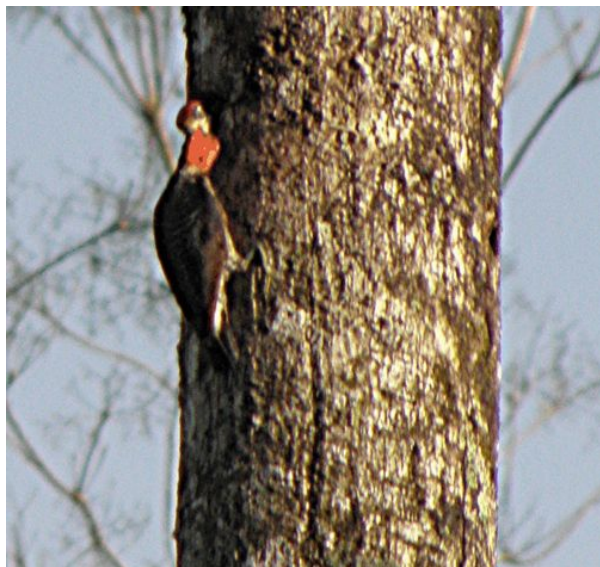
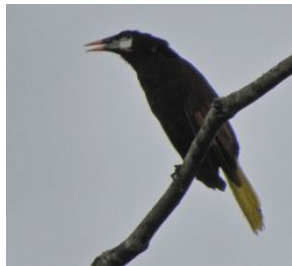
On our first day, we had a brief tour of the city, we saw the National Theater and the Museum of Natural History. It showed the works of the indigenous tribes here before Columbus. This shows a machine, powered by an ox to make sugar.



Christopher Columbus said, when he landed here, Costa Rica, that is, a coast rich with wildlife. Indeed, the flowers and butterfly are beautiful. We went to a butterfly observatory, part of the Museum of Natural History.



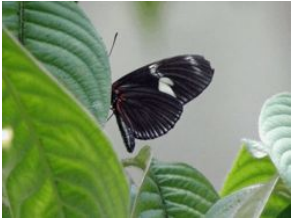
June 16, 2011 - The next morning we had bird watching at 6 a.m., before breakfast. Here is a toucan. The woodpecker is feeding its young which is in the hole of the tree.



<--Young head sticks out above parent. Below vultures dry their wings above woodpecker below.



June 17, 2011 - Jim went white water rafting while Judy went on a nature walk.







highlight of the trip.

That afternoon, we visited a pineapple plantation and saw how they grew, harvested and packed pineapples. Our local guide was quite a clown and was really the



One of the secrets of this organic plant is to use ethylene gas to make the plants grow a fruit before their natural time. With the gas the fruit grows within seven months, without it, it can take three years. We were told that a good pineapple has big eyes, green leaves and a yellow spot where it was harvested. The color, sound, softness and leaves are not relevant. The fruit on the bottom is softer and sweeter than that from the top. Our guide used a butcher knife to cut the outside off, chop off the bottom and make serving slices.





Here the workers are harvesting the pineapples, cutting them and putting them on the conveyor where they are placed in the truck.



Here they are cleaned and sorted before packing.

On the way home we saw monkeys.



That evening we had a traditional pottery demonstration.



A

We experienced traditional cooking



June 19, 2011 - Nature is abundant here, plants, birds and other animals. We went on a nature walk before breakfast. The snake on the right is a poisonous pit viper, don't worry though, it's only a few inches long and would have trouble biting you unless you picked it up.



We went to a home and made empañadas, saw the farm and met the lady and her daughters. Her husband was away.



These photos show the house and back yard where the girls are pressing sugar cane. It makes a lightly sweet liquid, not nearly as sweet as sugar and about the viscosity of lemonade. We made empañadas with cheese inside.

Then we visited a school sponsored by the Grand Circle Foundation. We saw the computer lab that the foundation provided. The children enjoyed dancing and sang the Costa Rican national anthem for us. We then sang The Star-spangled Banner for them. Before we left we served them with ice cream that we had bought at the store on the way.





We then broke into groups of four and had lunch with a Costa Rican family. He too was a farmer and farmed part of his father's farm with his four other brothers. He was very proud that he was his own boss and that with God's grace was able to provide for his family's welfare and happiness. He showed us the bull who had recently mounted the cows and promised that we would have calves soon. He showed us his home-garden and his house.

June 20, 2011 - On the way to our next destination, we stop at Don Juan's ecological farm, a two-acre tract where virtually everything is used organically and where almost all waste becomes compost. Even the cow manure becomes methane gas used for cooking.



The above photos show some of the fruits and vegetables we harvested for our lunch.



Don Juan with fruit and Judy and Reina collecting spinach for salad. They even grow cotton here.





We saw this bird's nest next to the restaurant.

Upon arrival we had a good view of Costa Rica's most active volcano, just north of our hotel.

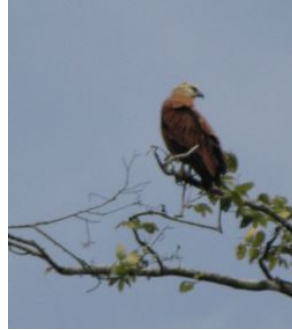


June 21, 2011 - We went on a boat ride on the Rio Frio. This river runs north to Nicaragua and is abundant with wildlife. On the way we saw this tree with iguanas on it.



We saw bats nesting on trees.





We crossed the border to Nicaragua briefly. The security measures consist of a boundary marker, a triple barbed wire fence and a welcome sign. On the right a three-toed sloth. Not a common sight. Here you can see him hanging upside down with his long claws outstretched and his face at the bottom.



June 22, 2011 - One of the highlights of today's adventure was a German bakery. Our friend, Josie, was from Munich and she was beside herself with glee as she spoke German with the proprietor. He gave her a pretzel which she kept for lunch. He even buttered it, just as they do in Germany, she was so happy.



Toucans are fairly common, they eat fruit. Nevertheless, they often are in the top of the tree and often the light is behind them giving just a silhouette. This was a great day.

June 23, 2011 - Today was the greatest day, we rode the zip line. Here we are together.







We rode horses to the volcano mud baths then we got covered before a shower and hot springs bath.

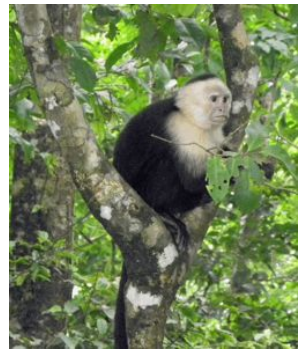
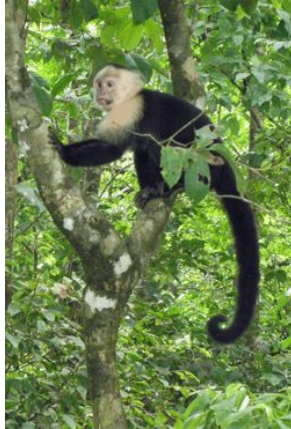
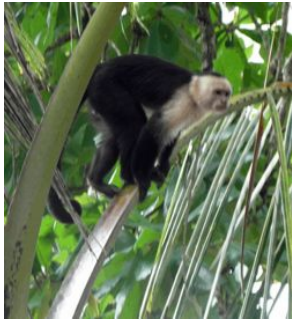
June 24, 2011 - As we travel to the Pacific Coast, we stopped at a crocodile safari boat and saw the huge reptiles that inhabit the river that runs into the sea. We saw the four different kinds of mangroves, white, black, red and pineapple. We also saw this little tiger faced crab and various birds.





June 25, 2011 - We go to the beach. An anole, a frog and a two-toed sloth. (You can see the claws as he hangs upside down from the tree.)



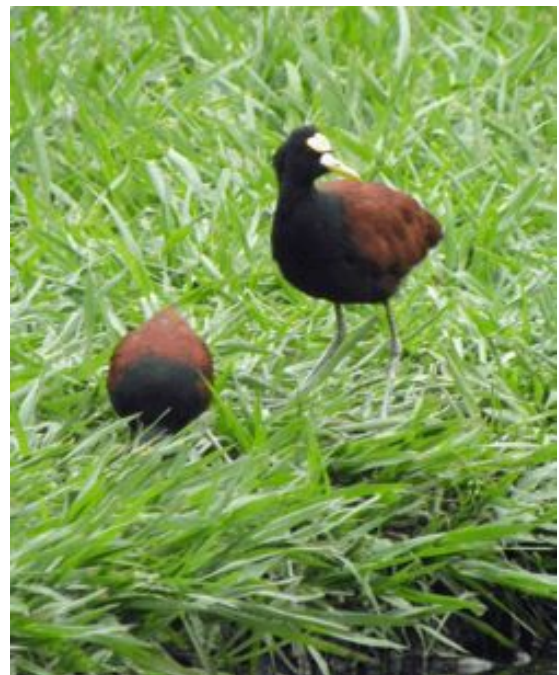
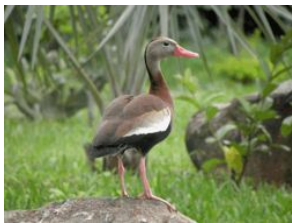
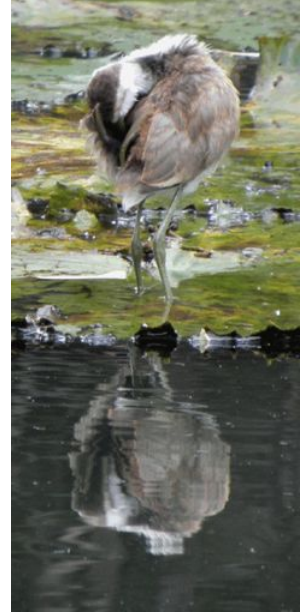
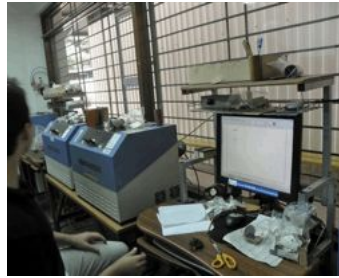


June 26, 2011 - We returned to San Jose, the capital. We stopped to watch a football (soccer) game. These are high school students on a Sunday morning.



We also stopped at two workshops on the way. The first was a woodworking factory where they made many of the handicrafts sold as souvenirs around the country.





Then we went to a lady's home where she had set up a leather purse shop. She designed and fabricated the purses out of quality leather, no purse being identical to any other. That evening we said good bye to six of our friends at the farewell dinner. Eight of us will continue to Tortuguero National Park tomorrow.

June 27, 2011 - We traveled across the country to the Atlantic side by bus and by boat to this isolated national park, home to turtles, birds and plants. It is unreachable by highway, everything here arrives by boat or plane.



After lunch and pool, we heard a research scientist talk about sea turtles, particularly the green sea turtle that makes its home in abundance here in Costa Rica.

June 28, 2011 - We went out by boat to see the wildlife here. This looks like a piece of bark on the tree from a distance, but you can clearly see that this is a bat sleeping in the daytime.

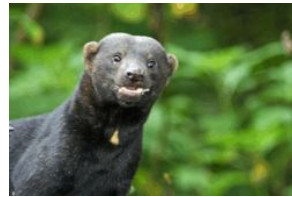


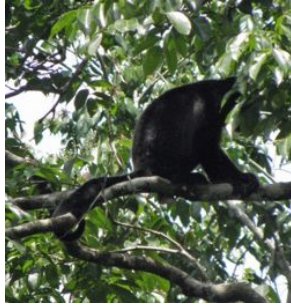
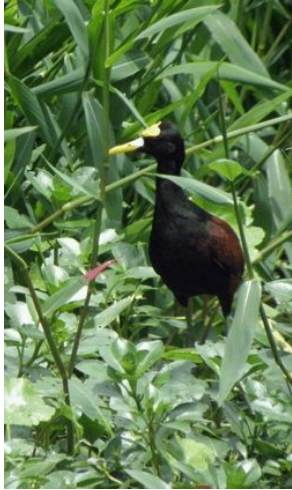


We were fascinated by the cayman (alligator) and the turtle. Caymans often eat turtles but these two seemed like buddies.



This furry guy, moves easily through the trees eating termites. Termites build their nests of mud in the trees here. The ground is too wet.





Our canoe trip was one of the highlights of Tortuguero Turtle Reserve.

That evening, we walked on the beach looking for turtle tracks. The sand on the Caribbean side in Costa Rica is brown.





June 29, 2011 - On our boat ride back to the mainland, we saw a flock of rosey spoonbill birds eating shrimp along the river.



No need for this cow to go to the other side of the fence. Grazing land is good and plentiful, however the beef is a bit tough when cattle eat only grass.

We stopped at a banana packing plant to look inside and see how the fruit is processed. As the bananas are picked, they are attached to a chain in the field and brought into the near by plant on a zip line. They never touch the ground or anything else, minimizing bruising.



The man cuts the bananas from the stem in groups of about six. The ladies then remove the seconds for local sale. The bananas continue in a cleaning bath where they are washed.



We then stopped for lunch at a butterfly greenhouse. The butterflies eat fruit.



These brilliant blue ones, have dull brown on the other side so they are blue when flying and brown when resting. One came to rest on me.



June 30, 2011 - Jim goes white water rafting in class III and IV rapids. Located on Costa Rica's Atlantic slope, the Pacuare River borders the Talamanca mountain range, home to native Cabecar Indians and an incredible variety of wildlife, including parrots, toucans, deer, jaguars, ocelots, monkeys, butterflies, and more. Add in the exciting Class III -IV whitewater rapids and you have a tropical adventure packed with rich experiences that last long after you've returned home. You'll raft from San Martin to Siquirres for 14 miles on exciting Class III-IV white water.



Paddling down the river.

Following are a class IV rapid.



The above photos were taken within seconds of each other and show the volume of water involved in the rapid. It is great fun and quite a rush!