

Tuesday, December 18th 2001

Hi all,

I am now in an internet cafe in a suburb of San Jose(SJ), the not-so-charming capital of the most charming Costa Rica, at the end of my first week here. My trip began with a one day in Miami Beach (cool, deserves some more time but not too much) and then a direct flight to SJ.

I spent the first 3 days with Galya - a friend that I haven't seen since her marriage to Jaime the "tica" (i.e., a Costa Rican) 7 years ago. They live in a beautiful house in a closed high-society neighborhood some 10 kms from SJ. Those are different standards of living, what can I yell you. I had to get used to "Senior Tamir" of their charming maids - not very difficult. Galya and Jaime also took me to parties of their family and friends which I enjoyed tremendously, not to mention the food. During that time I rested, saw SJ, and went to a one day trip in the awesome Tabacon hot water springs that offer views of the Arenal volcano. When I was there, the volcano, as well as we, was totally covered with clouds, so no views, just bathing.

On Saturday, after a one day delay in their flight, Mor and a friend of his, Rachel, landed from the US. Just to remind you - Mor is the one who dragged me into this trip that he and his Stanford friends planned as part of their usual dreamy life style. I picked them up from the airport and the joy was "the jumping up and down" kind of joy. As Mor put it - "You and I together in a third world country - it can't get much better than this".

The first day was dedicated to picking up our cool brand new Toyota RAV 4 van, and driving up north to the Nicaraguan border town of Los Chiles. There, on the next morning, we took a boat tour on the Cano Negro River. We were joined by an Australian lady and rented a boat with a nice Miguel as our guide. The sail up the roaring river was a bit like the journey along the river in "Apocalypse Now", only without the choppers and the shootings. Miguel kept pointing his fingers to amazing birds, huge iguanas up on the trees, monkeys, caimans (a small kind of crocodiles), sloths and what not. A most rewarding tour in a great weather and a great tropical setting. Bravo!

We drove that afternoon back south to the vicinity of a reserve called Salva Verde. The next morning we woke up at 5AM in order to join a bird tour. What a tour it was! Only us and a Dutch guy, with two enthusiastic guides and a giant telescope. The eyes of those guys are phenomenal. They spotted the smallest birds in the most remote locations on the trees. The birds were magical - toucans, humming birds, a hawk, and many other birds that I can't name but were very beautiful and different from each other. With the telescope we could see the birds very clearly and with the bird catalogue that they were holding we could see how they were called and forget immediately afterwards. Another highlight was a sloth ("atzlan") that they detected on a remote tree. That animal always sleeps folded down as a hairy breathing ball. And of-course huge and majestic looking small dinosaurs, the iguanas, that are simply everywhere.

After a good breakfast we took another tour in the rain forest with one of those guides, Alexandro. We were only the 3 of us with him. Apart from what I mentioned so far, we saw a nice display of insects (as well as bitten by some), little poisonous frogs, a walking

tree (a tree that has all its roots above the ground, like a multi-legged giant, that is able to move around 15cm a year by sending new roots and getting rid of older roots; is that amazing or what?). The highlight was a perfectly shaped spider web that Alexandro detected between 2 trees about 30 meters from our location. Looking at it, through the telescope, revealed a form so beautiful and so flawless, that we simply couldn't take our eyes off it. The spider was there lurking. The tour was signed up with a natural bathing experience in the cold river with hundreds of little fish biting on us.

I fast forward to today. We woke up early to drive up the volcano Poas. A huge active volcano that offers great views of its crater, when the weather is nice. It usually isn't. But this morning it was like a postcard. So clear, so beautiful, so accessible. We stood atop the crater that was filled with green water with fume coming up from several places. I don't think I ever saw an active volcano in such an intimate proximity (I was inside a volcano crater in Hawaii but there it was really hard to tell that you are inside a crater. Here it was so clear). Then we drove to La Paz waterfalls - a reserve that boasts a huge butterfly garden (I held a giant butterfly in my hand, and it didn't fly away - it just kept sending its spiral tiny trunk toward my palm, trying to find something to eat), a hummingbird garden where zillion of those energetic little birds buzz around you in a frantic dance that doesn't stop for more than few seconds at a time, and a close access to a series of 5 gigantic waterfalls that defy any description. At the end we had lunch there and I was holding a snake in my hands for the first time. What a smooth slimy creature.

Tonight we pick up from the airport the 4th and last member in our party and tomorrow we are off to the Corcovado jungle for a 4 day trek.

Hasta luego,
Tamir