

Thursday, December 27th 2001

Dear All,

Christmas Eve at the town of Quepos. Primitive fireworks are thrown in the streets by punk kids as part of the celebrations. A greater annoyance I cannot remember. Maybe just the mosquitoes of the Corcovado jungle. And that brings us to the story del dia, the story of the great outdoor experience.

"Indiana Jones would have a ball in Corcovado National Park... He would thoroughly enjoy being bitten by insects, being chased by peccaries and crossing rivers full of crocodiles and sharks! Corcovado National Park is definitely the wild frontier of Costa Rica...". This quote is taken from one of the official web sites of the Corcovado and it is a proper introduction to a visit in that park. We arrived last week to Puerto Jimenez, the larger town in the Osa Peninsula where the Corcovado is located. After thousand and one arrangements (900 of which were made over the phone from Israel and CR), we were ready to go. And so we did.

On Thursday morning, at dawn, we left our car and most of our stuff in the guest house where we stayed and boarded a bus that would take us to the park. A bus is actually a big word for the box on wheels that it was, but take us it did, with many other red-eyed people. The ride took us to Carate, a tiny town near the park, through creeks and rivers and the jungle trees. After 42 kms and 2 hours, we sat down for breakfast of rice and beans, plantains and fried eggs. That is a typical tica (i.e., Costa Rican) breakfast. A typical lunch would be the same without the eggs. And then at 9AM we started to walk with our backpacks.

That day took us along the pacific coast, westbound, towards the ranger post called La Sirena. The trek goes either on the black sandy beach, or inside the jungle that stretches along the beach. The views are remarkable - a dark coarse sand beach, a grey haze hanging over it, a wild jungle bursts into that beach, and within this beautiful picture there is so much life! Small crabs with shells that run on the beach and immediately stop and enter their shell when they sense steps; Macaw parrots with their technicolor dream coats; magnificent pelicans that fly in convoys just few centimeters above the rim of the waves (a sight that makes you "Wow!" with awe); a coatimundi which is a strange looking mammal, something between a beaver and an ant eater, that walked pensively in parallel to us half of the day; spider monkeys and squirrel monkeys that didn't stop their crazy lifestyle even when we watched them from a close distance; a big squirrel called agouti; birds that I can't name, reptiles that I don't care what is their name, insects that I don't want to know their name and all that jazz. That was a jungle all right. The day was long and hard and involved so many river crossings that I simply switched to my sandals in an early stage. We made it to La Sirena post exactly for dinner that was served at 5:30PM. The post is simple, features simple rustic rooms (rustic is a nice word for bare wooden beds and mattresses that saw better times), military like common showers and a rice-and-beans+something else kitchen. We went to sleep early that night.

The next day was dedicated to hikes around that post. Since we slept again in the same place, we didn't need to carry the stuff with us and we could take it easy. In the

morning we went on a hike that took us deep into the jungle and was much more intense than what we expected due to bad directions that we got. What I loved the most during that hike were the roars of the howler monkeys (those bastards are extremely loud) and a huge natural U-shaped swing that was hanging from one giant tree to another. This was a much more incredible sight than it might appear in my lame description, as though one giant reached out and sent a long hand (branch) to the other giant next to it. In the afternoon we went on another hike to a river where crocodiles and sharks have business. We saw them all from our safe location on the bank of the river. And, last but not least, we met that day the toucan of La Sirena. That is a beautiful toucan that decided to live in that post and allows humans to admire its colors from a small distance. It's like a beak that someone attached a bird to it. What a gorgeous creature!

That night it rained. We knew that we were facing a 25-km trek the next day. The thought of the amounts of mud that await us, depressed us. And then our German roommate just had to tell me how 10 years before they didn't complete that trek and had to spend the night in the jungle. Great. The hike next day was so daunting that we began walking at 7:10, and within 70 minutes we already reached the first river, 5.6 kms away! Lunch we had at 12:15, 15 kms from our starting point. The fear of getting stuck in the woods at night worked like a magic. However, despite the rush, we did manage to detect some wildlife. The highlight was a snake. Rachel, who walked first, suddenly jumped and yelled "a snake!". I looked for the usual 40-cms snake. It took my eyes few seconds to detect a huge boa snake, on which I almost stepped. The body in the middle was as thick as a coca cola can! And after we all jumped to a safe distance we could start looking for its end, some 3 meters from its beginning! What a sight to behold! It was so beautiful and terrible at the same time. After few minutes of thinking, it decided to retreat back into the woods. It was then that I sneaked my hand and caressed its smooth body while it was sliding away. It then turned its head back at me. That was when I decided to say goodbye.

Eventually we arrived at the next post, Los Patos, where the lone ranger was swaying on his hammock. Since that post had no beds, we made reservations in a lodge some 5 kms further ahead. As promised, the manager of that lodge came to pick us up from Los Patos. The extra 5 kms after the first 20 kms was really too much. At some point we reached a large river. When the guy from the lodge saw that we start taking off shoes he said that there would be 5 crossings like that one. After we crossed 4 streams of that river (each one quite wide, knee-deep and wet) I asked him whether those counted as 4 or 3, as I wasn't sure about my count. He looked at me and said "No. Una.". That's it - so indifferently, without blinking, smiling or any exclamation marks!!! That Red Sea counts as one crossing! Eventually, even with his conservative way of counting river crossings, we had 8 crossings, most of which were diagonal with a very sharp angle with respect to the stream. In other words, during a great part of the way we waded through water. Cool. Eventually we made it to the rustic lodge that was very very basic, but with a lovely porch, a great hot-bucket shower, good food and beverages and lovely snakes (he warned us not to walk with sandals, and, what do you know, we indeed almost stepped on a most venomous snake on the way to dinner).

The next day we just walked towards the nearest town, with a horse carrying our stuff. The number of river crossings was way into the 20s, if not 30s. The weather changed in seconds from sunny to tropical rain. The soil changed from sand to oily mud. Ups and

downs, wet and dry - eventually we made it to the village of La Palma, from which a drunk driver took us on the back of his car back to Puerto Jimenez.

Adios Corcovado.

Adios Amigos.

Hasta luego,

Tamiro