

Costa Rica



San José, Tortuguero,
Arenal, Monteverde &
Tambor beach
Nov 2008



Costa Rica (November 2008)

A two-week family vacation to Costa Rica in 2008 was quite amazing. On this trip we made an exception and joined a tour. We always make our own plans and use local companies to help organize our journeys, but not this time. We were however able to make nearly all excursions and local daytrips on our own without the rest of the group. This made it bearable as we only had to spend the transporting legs with the whole group. The trip included a couple of days in the capital – San José, where we enjoyed some good food. We continued on to the Caribbean coast and Tortuguero National Park. A couple of nights spent in the tropical forest and the Mawamba Lodge with excursions into the national park. We thereafter headed back out the same way and then turned off towards Arenal and the active volcano up in the north. We did some hiking up to the volcano and also managed to do a run down the river Rio Balsa. From Arenal we continued to Monteverde up in the cloud forest on a much higher altitude. An amazing landscape and view up there. Here we made a couple of hikes including forest walks, sky walks and Canopy. The final stretch was from Monteverde down to the Pacific coast, where we took a ferry out to Tambor beach on a peninsula. Here we finished our two-week vacation with a couple of relaxing days at the beach at the Tambo beach resort.



Costa Rica – a country of 5 million people

Costa Rica is a rugged, rain forested Central American country with coastlines on the Caribbean and Pacific. The country is best known for its eco-tourism, its beaches, volcanoes and biodiversity. Roughly a quarter of its area is made up of protected jungle. The population is ca: 5 million.



Tortuguero National Park

An abundance of butterflies, frogs, birds, turtles etc..



After a long flight from Stockholm with a stopover in NYC we arrive in the afternoon to **San José, the capital of Costa Rica**. We are staying at Hotel Barcelo. We had very good meat at the **restaurant El Chicote**. The following morning already we set-off the one of Costa Ricas' famous **National Park; Tortuguero**. It is possible also to fly up here, but we went overland by bus. This way you also get to stop and see the beautiful landscape. The route goes through the **Braulio Carillo rain forest**. A stop at one of the **banana plantations is also recommended (Chiquita or Del Monte)**. Keep a look out for the two- or three toed Sloth up in the trees along the road.

We eventually arrive at **the river Martina** where all roads end. Here you need to take a boat up the river into the National Park of Tortuguero. This is a very beautiful trip up-river where one can enjoy crocodiles, monkeys, iguanas and various species of birds. We arrive at **our lodge Mawamba** www.grupomawamba.com . another lodge alternative is www.lagunatortuguero.com . Mawamba is our base for a couple of days. From here we make a number of excursions out into the national park



Colourful frogs and butterflies....





The rain forest of Tortuguero N.P.

Endemic species of butterflies, poisonous frogs and more...

One to two days is needed to cover the vast **19000-hectare National Park** with exceptional flora and fauna. There are **more than 4000 species of birds**, with one of my favorites the Toucan being on of them. The number of alternative tracks and excursions are great. Nature walks is also a must as you see so much more of the jungle this way. Various types of orchids can be found, caimans lurking in the shallow waters, poisonous frogs and a variety of monkeys. In connection to our lodge, on walking distance, there is a butterfly and frog center, where they have collected many of the rare and often difficult to find out in the nature, species. Highly recommended and a great place to photograph them as well.

Be prepared to use boots and a poncho as you will encounter rain showers throughout the day. These often pass however. More than 75% of Costa Rica are covered by certified national parks, which have been saved for future generations. The country was also one of the first to certify eco-tourism, which is an excellent way of protecting many of the endangered species.





The active volcano - Arenal

No eruptions, but smoke coming out of the volcano

Leaving Tortuguero National Park the same way we came in – by boat, we continued our journey **towards the volcano – Arenal**. We pass through a green subtropical landscape with agriculture, coffee plantations and many small villages before we eventually arrived at **La Fortuna**. We had three nights here in order to cover the most interesting sights.

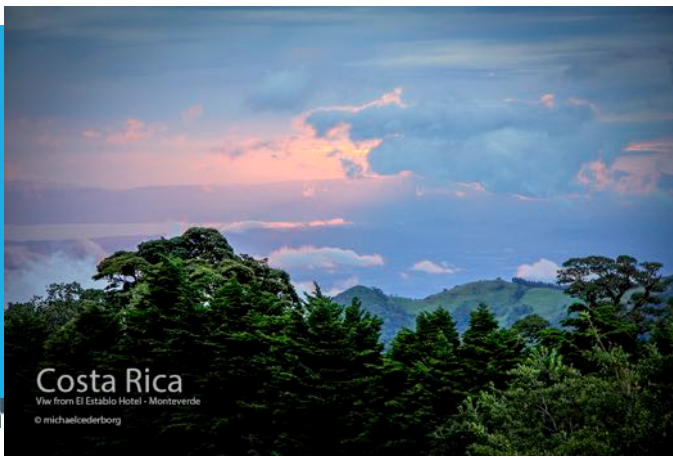
We stay at **the hotel Casa Luna Lodge** in a protected area very close to the volcano. Arenal is the most active of all the volcanos in the country. In the evening one can visit the volcano and watch a magnificent play of red-hot lava coming out of the volcano against the black night as a background. We make daytrips out to **the waterfall – La Fortuna with a fall of over 60 meters**. We also swim in the rather cold, but fresh, water. Near the waterfall there is also a trail with walkways and treetop suspension bridges. In La Fortuna there are a few good restaurants to choose from. Here it is also possible to book daytrips to various sights in the region. **For restaurants I recommend either Dal Rufino (one of the best in the country) or Lava Lounge (also very good value). Guided tours around and up the volcano is a must of course.** Bring ponchos, boots or hiking boots, sunscreen and repellent spray.

White water rafting is available, something we tried of course. There are many operators operators to pick from. A typical set-up is ca. 85 \$ / person for 4-5 hours including lunch, all necessary equipment and guiding. Bring swimming trunks, water proof shoes, sunscreen and a dry set of change. **There are category 2 and 3 rapids (Rio Balsa) alternatively 3 and 4 on the more adventurous river Rio Toro.** Kayak paddling is also an option on the Arenal lake. Did I mention the **hot springs which are located outside La Fortuna**. They have also an open bar here. Really nice in the late afternoon / evening.



White water rafting on the Balsa river



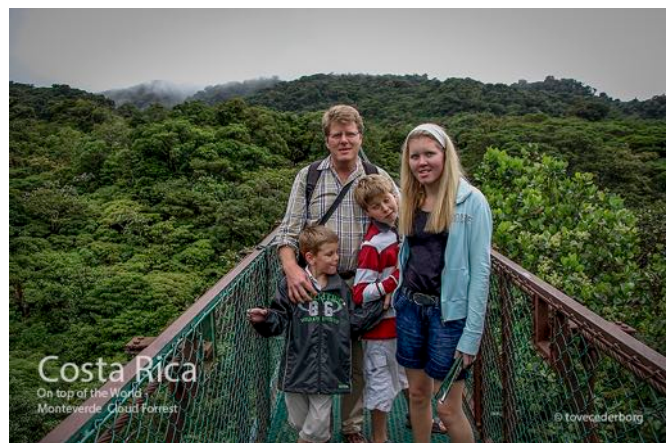


Monteverde (I)

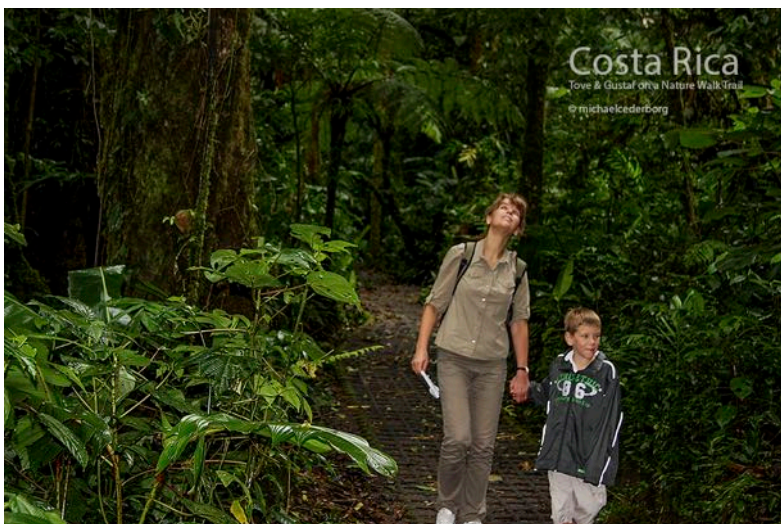
...high up in the cloud forests mountains of Costa Rica

Our journey continued. In order to get from Arenal (La Fortuna) to Monteverde, we had to cross the Arenal lake by boat. Arenal is a manmade lake (dam) constructed to get hydropower electricity for the region. It is a relatively short trip crossing, but none the less very beautiful with the volcano in sight from a distance. We continue on less travelled and developed roads towards Sankta Elena and Monteverde. The scenery going uphill is breathtaking with views overlooking the valleys down below.

The cloud forest is a biosphere very different from our previous stops. The name cloud forest comes from the fact that warm air is raising up from the Pacific Ocean along the hills and meets colder air in the highlands. Condensed air is formed which takes the form of clouds which covers the forest up hill. These forests are also very moist as it rains almost every day – year around.



...Skywalks and more.





Monteverde (II)

Skywalks, butterfly garden, coffee plantation and reptiles.

To get from Arenal (La Fortuna) to Monteverde one has to cross the Arenal lake first. It was to this place – Monteverde – which the Quakers escaped after the second world-war from the USA. They traveled overland cross Mexico and central America all the way to find the place of their dreams – Monteverde. They have here been farming the region ever since and raised cattle, built up dairies with products well known and very appreciated throughout the country.

We stayed at a very nice establishment hotel El Establo www.hotelelestable.com located high up in the mountains above the town overlooking the valleys and landscape below. The restaurant was very good here. There were also quite a few alternative and nice **restaurants in town like; Sophia (tapas) and a range of ice-cream bars with locally produced ice cream.** The national park is over 5000 hectares with over 100 different species of mammals, 30 species of Colibri and over 2500 different plants. Watch out for south Americas most beautiful bird – The resplendent Quetzal.

- El Trapiche → Coffee plantation excursion.
- Salvatura www.salvatura.com → skywalks and Canopy
- Butterfly garden → worth visiting
- Reptile- & frog house → recommended as well





Tambor beach

A week on the Pacific Ocean side

After a few amazing days up in the cloud forest, we traveled down again. This time towards the Pacific coast. In the **Guanacaste province**, which is where **Tambor Beach** is located, the contrasts are big between the highlands and the vast beaches in this peninsula. This part of the country has long been isolated, hence the poor roads and infrastructure still to be developed further.

We sum-up this journey to Costa Rica with four days on the coast at this "all-inclusive" resort www.barcelo.com. Yes, I know, you'll all say; Did you really stay at such a place? Well, we did, and it was probably the best and only option we had here on this less developed beach. Worked well with the kids



The raccons are taking over!

