

On We Way A San Jose

A Costa Rican Caribbean Journal

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“On We Way A San Jose”

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When we got off the plane in San Jose, it was 9 PM. We waited in line at Customs, while young people working in the airport offered us shots of coffee liqueur, chocolate covered espresso beans , and a young woman paraded up and down the aisle for no apparent reason, officially showcasing Tica beauty. After half an hour of trying to figure out the payphone, we got through to our hotel, only to find our reservation had been cancelled and they were full. After several more unsuccessful attempts to find a place, we submitted to the suggestions of a young porter and agreed to stay in an apartment in Alajuela. It turned out fine; he was an aspiring police officer and the woman who owned the apartment had lived in Atlanta and was fluent in English. We watched Tom and Jerry and futbol highlights in Spanish on TV, took a shower, drank tropical juice, and slept on firm beds.



Our first meal in Costa Rica was served on banana leaves in an opened-air, earthy, super soda. We were just getting used to the food when a young guy picked up a 1000 colone bill off the ground and said it was ours. We waved our hands, saying, “non, non es”, all the while our rental car was being searched for nice stuff. Luckily for us, it was all locked in the trunk. The owners shooed the would-be ladrones away. We left on our way though the complicated, crowded, unmarked streets of San Jose, with unease in our minds, gallo pinto and eggs in our stomachs, and a jotted down list of specific directions. It got better as soon as we hit the mountains and the smell of cool, fresh oxygen. We made it to the Caribbean in the afternoon. Bananas, coconut palms, jungle, tin roofed shacks, potholed roads, smoky, salty, tropical air, and people walking everywhere.



The house that we arrived to on the Caribbean was situated in a beautiful, tropical garden, surrounded by thick, Central American rainforest. The entire building had been expertly constructed out of hand-milled Kasha, a native hardwood with a lustrous, maroon color. Jeanie and Dave were exceptional hosts, who put our travel-weary minds at ease, and helped us out with local knowledge. Being on that porch, looking out at the blue sea through the palm fronds, breathing the afternoon breeze while sipping a cold Imperial, it is a very good feeling, very happy.

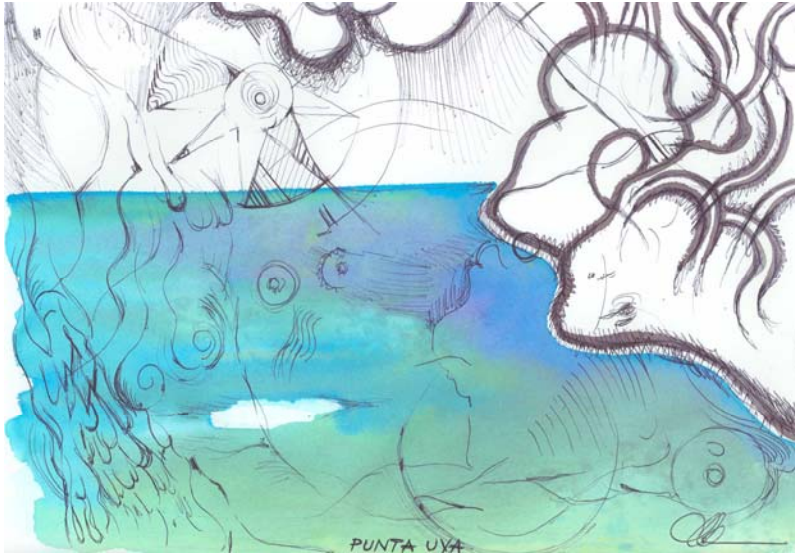


Early one morning, I heard someone making noise at our front steps. I walked out to discover it was the gardener making his rounds with a wheelbarrow full of freshly picked fruit. He spoke no English, so this morning routine of green coconut milk also became a lesson in conversational Spanish. Henry lived in nearby Manzanillo with his esposa and dos hijos. He biked back and forth to work nearly everyday, and spent his time in the jardin, planting, mowing, and swinging his machete. After our time on el Caribe was over, I gave the surfboard I had brought to him.



Manzanillo is a small village at the end of the road driving south from Puerto Viejo toward Panama. The dirt road along the beach is lined with coconut palms and rustic, Caribbean dwellings. There is a small store that sells anything from soda, to fresh fruit, to soccer balls, with locals hanging out on the porch speaking Patois and Spanish. There is a popular restaurant and bar looking out at the sea and sand-lot soccer field called Maxi's. You will know you are there when you hear the reggae and see the guys downstairs playing dominoes. If you keep going a hundred meters you will be at a beach park, where you will probably see this old man, who will tell you to lock your car and may belt out a few lines of Calypso.





Punta Uva beach is a long, crescent shaped bay, protected by the point and it's outside reefs. The water is very calm and clear, and the sand soft and warm and gently sloping. It is lined with trees and dense jungle, where birds and monkeys and people reside. Many know about it or have heard about it and long to stroll its shores. It is a family beach and children seem to love it above all. Sometimes, you may see a person on horseback galloping through the sand and you will wonder if you are dreaming.



If you go to Costa Rica, you will see and hear birds, during the morning, all through the afternoon, and especially at night. In fact, you may want to count the different kinds you see, or as we did, draw pictures. You will be quite amazed at the variety of colors and by the sounds they make. You may wish that you are a bird. In Costa Rica, that would seem a very nice thing to want to be.



Ornate Hawk Eagle



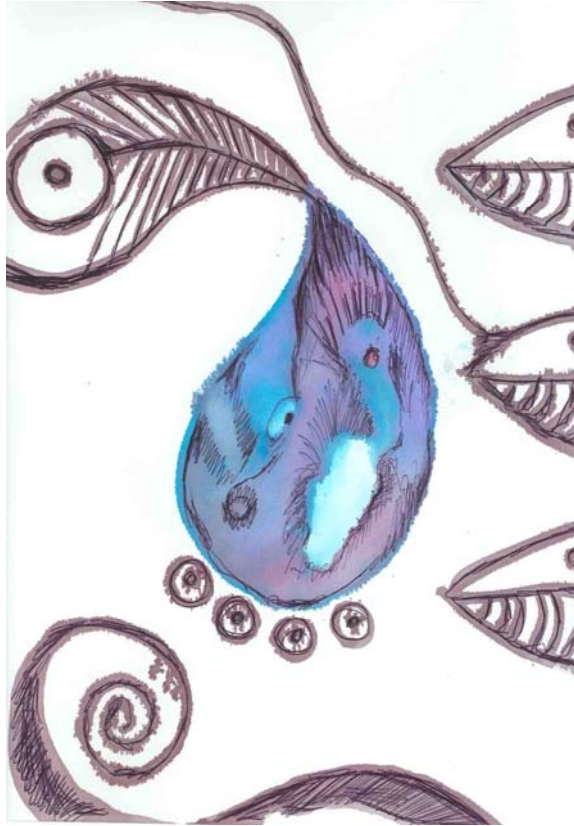
Keel Billed Toucan



Puerto Viejo, Limon is a small fishing town that has a sizable population of foreign tourists and entrepreneurs. It is surrounded by coral reefs, buffeted by afternoon breezes, and tropical heat. All kinds of people walk and bike the gravel streets; dogs meander around looking for scraps and horses wander the beach. If you visit there, at some point you will probably go to the bank, where you will be searched and then need to stand in line for half an hour to cash your travelers' checks. It is very cool and clean inside the building and there is

fresh water to wash down the dust. The clerks are attractive and quite polite. They will hand you crisp, colorful CR colones underneath the bulletproof glass.





A drop of water goes a long way. In fact it may travel all the way from the icebergs of the arctic, in jet stream highways, to finally reach the shores of Central America. When it gets there, it will most likely be warm and friendly, sliding down from leaf to leaf, into a dark lagoon, where it will journey with fish and caimans, to be poured out through the breached channel, after a storm, into the sea.

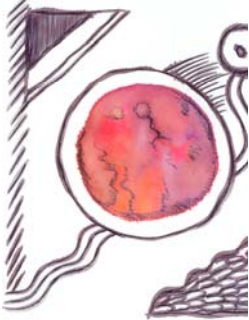


My favorite time of day in the Caribbean is dusk. All the animals and birds and insects in the forest wake up after their siestas and begin moving and talking and looking for something to eat. You will hear the chirp and buzz of frogs and crickets, see the flash of fireflies, and enjoy the smell of cooking food from some nearby cocina.

Costa Rican people on the Caribbean are a very diverse group. There are the recently relocated from Europe, the United States, and Canada. There are the Ticans, who have a distinct



Latin American culture and lifestyle. There are the Caribbean Africans, who settled this area over a hundred years ago and brought with them their song and dance, language, and building style. And there are the indigenous people, who still inhabit and influence the land and its traditions. These are rash generalizations, I know. Please forgive the implied stereotypes.



La Manera
Pura Vida





One of the common sounds to hear in Costa Rica is the distant cry of Howler Monkeys. It sounds like this, "OO OO OO, OO OO OOa, OO OO." If you hang around long enough you will see them hanging around, moving along their tree-limbed path, whole families of monos.

box	cajon
book	libro
body	cuerpo
bottom	fondo
both	ambos
bosom	pecho
brown	moreno
bring	llevar
bright	claro
bridge	puente
burglar	ladron

If you are planning a trip to a Spanish speaking country, I strongly encourage you to learn some Spanish before you go. The mere token of your attempts will be very well received and indicate your desire to join in rather than insisting the other join with you. I am at first somewhat hesitant, and the insecurity always hampers my memory. But after a time, I find a way, and it feels very, very nice. Quiero aprender mucho mas.



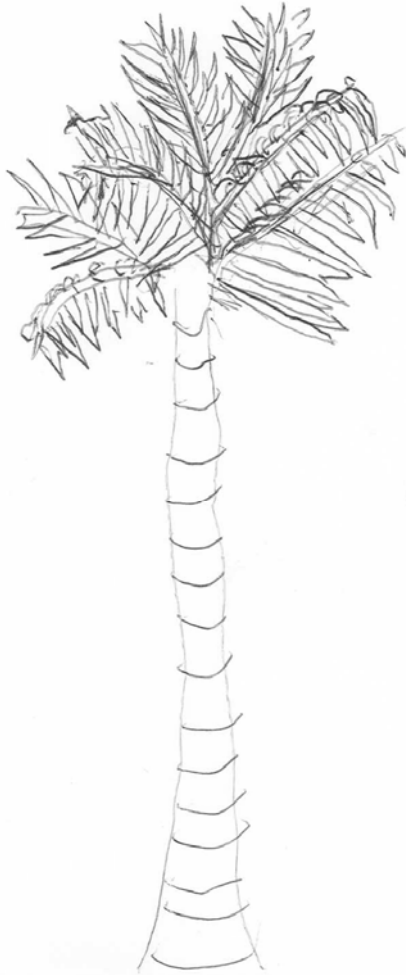
A long time ago, there was a man with long, black hair and auburn skin. He lived up on a hill near the village of Bribri. One day, he was outside cooking a fish, and when he looked up, he saw a large canoe out at sea, by far the largest he had ever seen, with huge blankets hanging from poles. He was curious about this sighting and went to tell the village chief. The village chief saw the boat and exclaimed that it was a great tribe, with great knowledge and riches, and that they would bring great inventions. The man with long hair then went to consult with the village shaman. He looked at the boat with scorn and said they were an evil force that would cut down the trees and kill the animals and enslave the people and bring disease. The man then went to his wife. She said they were people just the same as themselves, both good and bad, and that some day, they would live together and be each others brother and sister. The man looked up and the boat was gone, but he knew in his heart that they would be back.



I was sitting in the shade beneath a coconut tree, watching my family out snorkeling on a warm, clear day. I was playing my old ukulele, singing a few bars of some forgotten tune, when in came a flat bottomed, blue and red fishing boat. It trolled right in to where I was strumming. An old man jumped out, laughed at me, and proceeded to tie his boat to the tree and set his anchor. He then worked with another young man, probably his son, who carried large plastic bags, filled with something heavy and set it next to the tree. After he was done I had a conversation with the old man. He said, in English, that he had come up the coast 32 years ago in his boat, from Panama. He said he had been collecting round rocks from a beach down the way to put on his driveway.



The second week in Costa Rica, it began to feel familiar. The people, the language, the smells, the daily routines had all begun to absorb into our minds and bodies. But on the horizon was the migration back, and the return to our home, our animals, and our family and friends. It was nice to have a small storm blow through, on the last two days, and when we left, the sea was the most beautiful blue and green.



The End