

January 17, 2007

Esterillos Costa Rica

Meet Jorge. He's a good-looking Tico surfer dude. He and his knockout girlfriend, Gianina, manage **La Felicidad**, a seven-room hotel in **Esterillos Centro**. It's a community of perhaps 20 houses located on absolutely undeveloped Pacific Ocean beachfront.

Son Rowan and nephew Finn McCool are renting a three-bedroom house just around the corner. It's good -sized with a kitchen that is half the size of the house. It's a big kitchen. We all convoyed over the mountains from Heredia. "We" consisted of Anne and myself, Rowan, Finn and Lisbeth. Lisbeth is brother Kevin's widow and Finn's stepmother. She flew from Denmark, where she lives, the night before. Finn and Rowan are partners in a real estate venture along with Schuyler. They are developing land located on the side of a hill which overlooks the ocean, about a half-mile distant.

Anyway, we arrive at the house. We meet the landlady, Dona Isabella -- a cute, warm woman standing about four feet tall. Finn and Rowan bought a whole rib case from a pig she had just slaughtered "to celebrate the arrival of their family".

The first thing we do is don our bathing suits and go out to the beach. It's low tide, so low in fact, that a bus ride would be nice out to the waterline. O.K., it's about a ¼ mile to where the waves break. Picture in your mind the ideal beach: perfect surfing waves curling in on a wide, clean, sandy beach edged with palm trees. Looking in either direction along this vast stretch you see maybe four people and a dog. Lines of big pelicans soar overhead. The largest building peaking through the greenery is the two-story aforementioned hotel. Remnants of beach picnic fires pockmark the beach edge. The wet sand is hard enough to tempt the occasional motorcycle or ATV. Finn claims that the undeveloped beach stretches for 30 miles. Since the beach lays on an east-west axis, we can view both sunset and sunrise from it.

The boys treated us royally! Finn cooked up a killer stir fry that first night. We went to bed during a power outage. Without a fan the difference in temp from our home in the highlands caused us to lie in a pool of sweat. Eventually the power came back, and with it the fan. I still couldn't get comfortable, and spent virtually a sleepless night.

The next day we checked out La Felicidad. We were shown a nice-sized room directly overlooking the beach. It was air-conditioned! It had a small fridge, a porch with table and chairs, a swimming pool. Price: \$60 per night for one night. Finn talked Jorge into \$50 per night for two nights. We went to sleep to the sound of booming surf. Also, you'll find lots of local flora and fauna. Jorge

showed us a sloth sleeping in a tree next to our balcony. Check it out at www.lafelicidad.com.

There are three Esterillos: Este, Ouate and Centro. We ate and drank at the **Lowtide Lounge**, in Ouate. A laid-back open-air shack thatched with palm fronds, overlooking a surfing beach, it's managed by Tony from Detroit. The clientele look like over-the-hill Hell's Angels. We quickly nicknamed it the "Lowlife Lounge". But the fish tacos are stupendous!

Our second night we went to **Jaco Beach** for dinner. The main drag has a Wildwood tourist feel to it: lots of bars, tourist junk shops, restaurants. The hotels do a big business in package tours from the U.S. and Canada. We met Patricia, a friend of Finn and Rowan, aka The Boys. Patricia cooks in a little restaurant in Jaco serving "cocina tipica", or Costa Rican cuisine. One of their plans is to set up Patricia in a restaurant on their property. Patricia is interested because she and her husband reside on the Caribbean coast, and must travel four hours to Jaco to work. She wants to move permanently to the Pacific Coast, but her current job won't support it.

Ate at the **Colonial**. Excellent food, but watch out for the bill. They present you with a lump sum bill, with no details. We asked for a detailed bill. After waiting twenty minutes we finally gave up, paid, and left. We missed one spot that Rowan insisted was a "don't miss" – a lounge called Beetle's. It sports a large round bar. Every seat is taken by a beautiful Tica lady, he says. "Boy are they friendly!"

On our last night The Boys cooked up Dona Isabella's pork on a barbeque at La Felicidad. Jorge and Gianina joined us with some nice side dishes. After a delicious dinner we gathered at the bar to watch Tico soccer.

On our last morning we got up in time to view the sunrise on the beach with Lisbeth, and take a final swim. We breakfasted at the hotel and went over to The Boys house. From there we followed Schuyler over to The Property. We parked our car near the entrance road, and rode in Schuyler's 4 X 4 up the hill to the main property. Just as well, too. The rainy season had wreaked havoc on the road. Schuyler toured us around the property – over hill and dale. We came away with a much better sense of the real estate and the task ahead. The Boys expect to have the first building – the long house – up within the next month.

Crocodiles

At either end of the Boys' beach lies an estuary that drains a mangrove-edged river. At low tide people can easily drive across the estuary. People ford the estuaries even at high tide with their 4 x 4's. I wouldn't chance getting stuck there. That's where the crocodiles hang out.

Dogs are the most popular victims. They go running down the beach to the estuary. When they spot a croc, their first impulse is to investigate. The croc remains still as a rock, until the dog confronts him head-on. Dogs don't know that crocs can travel at 30 mph in a straight line, until it's too late.

On our way down to the beach from Heredia our convoy stopped at the Tarcoles River bridge. Underneath the bridge live a large number of crocs, all looking well-fed. A number of them exceed 12 feet in length. It's amazing to see schools of good-sized fish maneuver around these reptiles. Looks like the crocs could just reach out and snag one of these as if they were at a smorgasbord.

Finn tells the story of a motorcyclist who, when driving at night during the rainy season, drove over a washed-out bridge. The subsequent fall either killed him instantly or else crippled him to the point that he couldn't move. In either case, the crocs got him. His best friend knew this when he went looking for him and found only his motorcycle, no body. His friend, knowledgeable about the ways of the crocs, knew that they wouldn't devour him immediately. They would carry him to their nest to let him "ripen" a bit. Friend wanted to recover the body for his sake and that of the family. So he searched the river banks until he found the nest. He then risked his life to enter the nest and extract the body, which he did successfully.

Now, Momma, if it was you and I had the choice of rescuing your corpse – Would I do it? Of course not. No way!

Chuck & Anne