

News from Nan

TRAVEL

COSTA RICA 2016

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Arenal volcano

From October 4-14, 2016, Dick and I traveled to Costa Rica with Road Scholar. The focus areas of the trip were studying the Spanish language, learning about the culture, and enjoying the natural environment. The places we visited were all in the central part of the country: San José, La Fortuna (near the Arenal volcano), and Sarapiquí (a rain forest area).

We arrived in the only major airport in Costa Rica: San José. Our language school, the Costa Rica Language Academy, was right around the corner from our hotel, and we walked there every morning.



Students in the patio of the Costa Rica Language Academy

We were a group of 14: 13 women and one man (Dick). We were divided into three groups according to our skill level in Spanish. Each group had an instructor, who stayed with us for the entire trip, even when we traveled to other parts of the country. Dick was in the elementary group, and I was in the intermediate one. We both learned a lot and enjoyed the experience!

After three days in San José we traveled by bus to La Fortuna to experience the Arenal volcano, which last erupted in 1968. It is the same type of volcano as Mt St Helens, so the explosion and fire killed a number of people and did a lot of damage for miles around. Now the area is a very popular tourist destination (people love volcanos!) and agricultural area.



Our group at the Arenal observatory

One of our excursions in the La Fortuna area was to visit local homes and farms. Four of us had a delicious lunch of *gallo pinto* (rice and beans, which is a local staple eaten any time, even for breakfast) and other delicacies like fresh, locally grown pineapples and a dessert treat made with chocolate and coconut.

Our host family consisted of a mother (the *ama de casa*), her parents, two sisters, and five or six children. Before the meal was served, the men of the family cut us a fresh coconut, and we drank the milk with a straw. After lunch we toured the farm, and one of the daughters performed a traditional dance for our entertainment, while the younger children played games.



Our ama de casa with some of her extended family



Dancer

It rained at least a little every day, and on some days we had hours of downpour. Hurricane Matthew, which passed through the Caribbean and up the East Coast of the United States, was one cause. Another was a storm that came out of the Pacific Ocean.

Our third stop was a rain forest, so we learned what a “rain forest” really is! We stayed in a “village” on stilts on the banks of the Sarapiquí River. The buildings and walkways were built with expensive teak and other tropical wood. It was a lovely place.



Sarrapiquí River with our hotel complex on the right

On one of our days in Sarapiquí we took a boat ride on the river, and saw various interesting animals and birds: two caimans (related to alligators), monkeys, and herons.

Near our hotel were snakes (although we didn't see any), frogs, turtles, monkeys, and iguanas.



Green and black poison-dart frog

We had a wonderful trip and are determined to keep our Spanish studies going!