

## **Tropical Costa Rica** **By Dave Droppa**

PSEA-Retired Bucks County really knows how to arrange adventures to beat the cold of winter!! Twenty four members and friends traveled to tropical Costa Rica in early March, 2020 for a week of sun and exploration in the wonderful warmth of one of our neighboring countries in Central America. The trip was timed to miss the rainy season of this popular destination as well as the crush of tourists during the other months. Perfect weather! (And very few insects too!)

We arrived in the capital, San Jose, for an overnight stay before heading out to the Pacific Coast for several days of relaxation as we toured a fascinating nearby coffee plantation and visited a macaw/toucan/peacock rescue habitat. We enjoyed an afternoon in Samara where Earl and Alice sipped coconut milk through a straw in a hole in the shell, and Courtney had Ceviche from a roadside vendor. Souvenir shops were everywhere and items could easily be purchased in U.S. dollars, Costa Rican colonies, or by regular credit cards.

A hike through the Monteverde Cloud Forest gave us a chance to see howler monkeys resting high above the ground and strangler fig trees enveloping bigger plants as they reached for the sky. Birds chirped and warned of our presence. Elusive quetzal kept their distance.

The next day's trek of two miles gave the group a different perspective of the lush ecosystem as a trail of 8 walking bridges swayed above the landscape with thick greenery far below. With hundreds of people walking the bridges each day, the birds and animals knew to shelter elsewhere. Some members of the tour optioned for an extra experience of zip lining through the trees after the bridge walk. Nick and Mary Ann, among others, will always have that exhilarating memory to relate to friends back home.

The hummingbird garden with hundreds of flitting, colorful creatures was fantastic. If you held your fingers close to the feeders, the hummingbirds would perch and sip nectar before zooming away. The guide at the gigantic nearby indoor butterfly enclosure briefed us on the raising of butterflies as the beautiful insects flew around us and even landed on our clothes and faces. There's nothing like a large spotted owl butterfly kissing your chin!

Our bus took us up the zigzag dirt and paved roads past watermelon and pineapple farms to the mountain regions where we cruised on Lake Arenal searching for egrets, herons, ducks, and other birds. We could see the clouds wrapped around the huge volcano that had erupted in recent decades. Daily ventures into the countryside showed us the red corrugated metal roofs and pink satellite dishes of all the homes, as well as, the brahma cattle on the dry Pacific coast and the Holstein cows on the rainy Caribbean side. Costa Rica has it all!

The Cano Negro guided riverboat trip on another day allowed us to see a large number of native animals and birds. As we motored down the muddy river we encountered howler and capuchin monkeys, sloths, iguanas, turtles, lizards, sleeping bats, caiman, crocodiles, and a multitude of birds. The cameras were clicking as we slowed to capture (photographically) all these amazing creatures.

Short visits to the whimsical topiary gardens of Zacero as well as the highly decorative oxcart factory outside of San Jose brought us back to Costa Rica 's capital for an informative tour of the gorgeous National Theater. Whew!! We had made quite a circle of the highlights of this picturesque country!

Costa Ricans enjoy their rice and beans prepared in a variety ways, and always available for all meals. We also enjoyed beef, chicken, fish, quesadillas, hamburgers, and French fries

galore. The food was delicious with a minimum of spices. Of course, the coffee was top notch since the country is known for this fine product.

As for the cuisine - rice and beans, beans and rice- breakfast, lunch and dinner. Costa Rica is a fierce protector of its' parks, ecosystems, and lush rainforests and their inhabitants. As a symbolic gesture, our group planted a seedling tree to help reforest the landscape for future generations to enjoy.

PSEA-Retired Bucks County has many trips in the planning stages. Come along for the fun and get a commemorative golf shirt or hoodie for your memory closet! We always have a great time!