



Jeff & Diane Brown to Venezuela with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention

"Seeing the Country"

Costa Rica is a beautiful place. We have been out and about five times so far. The first time was to Playa Conchal, on the northern Pacific coast, right after Christmas for five days. Playa means beach, and conchal comes from the conch shells, small pieces of which make up some sections of the beach, instead of sand. We stayed at a hotel in the forest next to the beach, and saw lots of birds and howler monkeys swinging through the trees. Diane and Alyssa went horseback riding, and all but Alyssa went jet skiing. But mostly we played in the sand and the water.

Our next excursion was the Highlights Tour. It was an all day loop around central and northern Costa Rica. We visited a coffee farm in the morning, and then the inactive Poas volcano. We took a short hike through a section of rainforest with a guide who showed us poisonous frogs, toucans, etc. The main event was a slow river trip up and down the Rio Sarapiquí, a wonderful time of taking in plants, birds, monkeys, sloths, iguanas, and more plants.

In February we went to Playa Jaco, on the central Pacific coast, to swim in the ocean and play in the sand. It is a very gradually sloping coast, and Daniel, Diane, and Jeff had hours of fun wave jumping out in the shallow ocean. We got a kick out of our guide when he was asked if the large alligators we had stopped to watch at a river ever go out into the ocean. He said, "Don't worry about the crocodiles in the ocean. If they get that far the sharks will get them." Now that's comforting, isn't it gang?!

Some Costa Rican friends down the street invited us to go to the Puntarenas area with them one Saturday. It is a very well known beach area on the Bay of Nicaragua. It was good to get to spend the day with them. Jeff was asked to drive on the way back, so his first driving experience here was at night, in the rain, on the Interamerican Highway, in somebody else's car. Whew! There aren't usually lines on the highways separating traffic in different directions, and there are large potholes everywhere, and everybody drives fast, and there are no rules. Hello!!! Our most recent trip was to the active Arenal volcano. We went to a place where there are hot swimming pools and rivers fed by water heated by Arenal. It was quite an experience to see bright red lava flowing down the sides of the volcano at night, and hear the low rumbles and burps coming from it, while relaxing or playing in nice, hot swimming pools of mountain water. Well, there is our travelog. More next time.



Eight things that Diane likes about Costa Rica:

- ☞ The smell of roasting coffee beans. Remember in cartoons, when Tweety and Sylvester would smell something, you could "see" the scent? It seems like that here, with the smell of "cooking" coffee. I don't know how they do it, but I'm sure I'll miss this smell when we leave for Venezuela in December.
- ☞ The people are much more concerned about relationships than they are about time, or things. Within ten minutes of meeting someone, you often know quite a bit about their personal life.
- ☞ Most of the time, all the windows are open, and there is a nice breeze blowing through classrooms, homes and churches. This also means that there's not much of a barrier for the noise from outside either, but it's still nice.
- ☞ Gallo Pinto. This is the number one typical food found in most Costa Rican homes ... rice and beans. Right behind it in popularity is Arroz con Pollo ... Chicken and Rice.
- ☞ Families are muy importante. It is very common for people to live with their parents well into their thirties, or until they get married. At that time, they usually live next door or within two or three blocks of the rest of the family!
- ☞ The poinsettia bushes as big as trees and the eucalyptus tree in another neighbor's front yard. There are so many gorgeous flowering trees, always bright and beautiful. My personal favorite is the bush with both lavender and white blooms. A close second are the fuschia trees next to the orange ones.
- ☞ Spanish. I can think of no better place to learn spanish than being immersed in Costa Rican spanish. We each have wonderfully patient Christian teachers at the Instituto de Lengua Española. Daniel and Alyssa only have one hour of spanish a day in Sojourn Academy (their school on the grounds of the Institute), and they enjoy practicing it around the house -- never in public of course!!
- ☞ Getting cards and letters! This has got to be one of the highlights ... receiving your encouraging notes and sometimes sweet surprises! It means SO MUCH to be reminded of your support and care for us! We are MOST GRATEFUL!

Eight things that Diane wasn't expecting in Costa Rica:

- ☞ To find eggs and cartons of milk not refrigerated, on regular shelves at grocery stores. The milk is "Ultrasteurized" ... whatever that means.
- ☞ Everything (clothes, electricity, peanut butter, etc.) to be so much more expensive
- ☞ To find an iguana (2 ft. long?) on the street in front of our house (Probably a pet that was "set free" because he was too big to sit on a little kid's shoulder anymore)
- ☞ That cars would always, always, always have the right-of-way over pedestrians
- ☞ Ordinary tasks of life would take twice as long (i.e. grocery shopping, laundry, cooking)
- ☞ Cemeteries would have the caskets above the ground
- ☞ That people would park their cars right in front of their front door on a beautiful tile floor that gets swept and mopped everyday
- ☞ To play "Dodge the Dogie Droppings" (from the many dogs living on the streets)

"The Language"

It would take a long time to convey all the excitement, challenge, and frustration of learning the language of heaven (as they call it). We are progressing fairly well. We were evaluated by a Southern Baptist regional linguist recently. We both placed in the second of the four ranges, which is good for how short our time here has been. Diane often functions as Jeff's interpreter, in Sunday school, etc. Jeff doesn't always catch a lot of what people are saying. Diane converses quite a bit in Spanish, which is the very best way to learn. Jeff functions as the grammar guy. He talks slowly (ooh, good thing you were sitting down for that one!), but mostly correctly. And Jeff enjoys playing with the language. He has made up two word-play jokes, five tongue twisters for Phonetics class, and is contemplating a "Who's on First" routine with a classmate. He also talks quite a bit with a guy who sort of lives in an overgrown vacant block across the street from the Institute. They enjoy each other's company, and it is very good practice.

Sometimes we have a hard time unwrapping our brains from English and wrapping them around Spanish. There are good reasons for this. Pronouns are lumped at beginning: "to you them I give". And the "first" syllable of a word is the one we would call the last, the "second" is the next-to-last, etc. And there are so many things to keep track of, because so many things have to agree with each other: "thes glasses are mys favorites dishes". Not only are "the", "my", and "favorite" plural, but "the" and "favorite" must be the masculine forms of those words, because "glasses" and "dishes" happen to be masculine objects. And there are lots of hard words for easy things: "carrot" is "zanahoria"; "we" is "nosotros". And some guesses as to what words might mean are way off: "éxito" means "success", not "exit". But, on the happy side, in Fonetics class we get to practice fun sentences like: "Find out if the stork is bashful".



"Our Life"

Obviously learning Spanish is what takes up the majority of our time and effort. But there is more to life. We are involved with Iglesia Bautista Cinco Esquinas (Five Corners Baptist Church). Jeff plays piano in the band there. We all love the church, and Daniel and Alyssa seem to fit right in. It is small (about 60 people), poor, young, community-minded, warm, visionary -- and they love to sing. We hope to be able to contribute in a variety of ways while in Costa Rica. Also, we have some social life, visiting old (US) and new (tico) friends. Daniel, Jeff, and sometimes Alyssa go down to the vacant area at the end of our block and play soccer with each other, or with neighborhood kids. Daniel likes going to the pulperia (neighborhood market), a block and a half away, by himself to shop for us when we run out of milk or bread or something. And we take some trips. More on some of that later. But one important thing is that we are getting to spend a lot of time together, and enjoying it.

"It Takes a Village..."

Again we highlight the contributions of some of our friends, because it takes a community of people to successfully prepare, move, and support a family going overseas to serve.

_ Jim & Kim Berg of Lincoln, Nebraska, for helping with scaffolding to paint our house before selling it (Jim); and for coordinating Christmas gifts from New Covenant families to Costa Rica (Kim); and son Mike for computer support all along the way.

_ Eric & Linda Bergquist of San Francisco, California, for providing breaks for us parents during seminary last year by having our kids over; and for making our first Christmas abroad more special.

_ Joanne Bronson, certified nurse midwife in Lincoln, Nebraska, for helping Diane through 11th-hour surgery before leaving the US, and all her medical helps along the way.

_ Dad & Mom Brown of Osceola, Iowa, for -- in addition to other less concrete blessings -- storing some of Jeff's memorabilia, providing us a nifty little camera to take with us, and sending various practical and thoughtful US goods to us here in Costa Rica.

_ Sister (biological, not Catholic) Mary Brown of Des Moines, Iowa, for being our tax power-of-attorney and facilitating our tax preparation while we are out of the US.

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"Kid Thoughts"

Recently, Daniel was working on a devotional word puzzle based on Romans 6:23. He was saying the words out loud: "For the consequence of sin is death, but the gift of God is....". He paused there momentarily in his reading, and Alyssa, nearby, finished the sentence with: "not".

Pretty good theology, eh?

While eating at a Pizza Hut (yes, we were surprised to see Pizza Hut here too!) Daniel and Alyssa entertained themselves with the colored pencils that they had been given. Alyssa would hold one up, and Daniel would have to say the color in Spanish before she put it down on the table.

When Tico (Costa Rican) friends ask Alyssa questions in Spanish, she can answer yes or no appropriately, even though she tells us that she doesn't know any Spanish!

