

## Costa Rica Journal

Day 1: Tuesday, April 7, 2009

I woke up early to finish packing. Mike was at church making final arrangements for upcoming services. It took every available minute to get everything ready. The trunk was packed like a puzzle, but we successfully got it all in. We met Jordan at Henry Ford Hospital, and I had to park in the underground lot since the clinic garage was full. I hope my car doesn't get towed.

Everybody was hungry, so we pulled into KFC. There was a car parked in the drive-through lane with the trunk open. Jordan asked two different people whether they were open. Both said yes, but nobody greeted us or tried to take our order. We backed out and went to McDonald's.

We got to the airport early. Security lines were short, and we had plenty of time. The flight to Dallas was uneventful. The kids enjoyed the pop served to them. In Dallas, we ate a snack and charged our electronics. The flight to San Jose was long, and Four Christmases played. The kids were expecting Madagascar 2, and were disappointed.



Clarence & Argentina met us at the airport and hired a taxi-van to take us to their house. Everybody was tired. Their back yard is newly covered with a nice patio and hammocks. Nice, relaxing atmosphere. Clarence inflated an air mattress for David and showed the rest of us to our beds. Buenos noches.

Day 2: Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Everybody except David and I got up early and went to the fruit market. They came back with a bunch of fruit. We make fruit salads for breakfast and helped with juicing.

We went to el Museo de los Niños. Even though everything was in Spanish, we really enjoyed the exhibits and had a lot of fun. Before going in, the kids had their faces painted. Madelyne was a tiger, Emma was a white tiger, and David was a clown. The paint jobs were very elaborate and beautiful.



We went through all the exhibits, and ate lunch in the cafeteria. The kids enjoyed nachos, which resembled the kind sold in theaters and ballparks back home. The rest of us ate a typical meal of rice, beans, and chicken.

Day 3: Thursday, April 9, 2009.

Today's plan was to drive to La Fortuna for an overnight stay with some friends. Argentina was concerned with the seven of us riding in one car. It's illegal in Costa Rica to ride with more than 5 in a car, and the fine would be expensive. We checked on having a couple of us take the bus, but since it is Holy Week, we didn't find one. We decided to pick up our rental car early and drive separately. After picking up the car (and being charged an extra \$250 for insurance—surprise!), I mentioned that I thought it would be more sensible to delay our trip to La Fortuna for a day and then go directly to Flamingo from there. This would save us about 7 hours driving time.

We changed our plans and decided to climb the mountain to the crosses. The kids were not at all happy about the plan, but we insisted. Clarence found a place to park in front of a house and made arrangements for the homeowner to keep an eye on our cars.

Oh, the whining! The hike was a good workout. Partway up, some hikers



said the path was blocked by a wasp nest. We decided to try to sneak by. We had each of the kids stay next to an adult so they wouldn't get into trouble alone. Emma was with Mike, David was with Grandpa, and Maddy was with me. A few seconds later, Mike shouted, 'They're all over me! Get out of here!' Everybody except Clarence ran away. Clarence said Mike's shirt was covered with hundreds of wasps. Apparently, once they landed on his shirt, they got stuck on it. Swatting wasn't working, so Mike tried rolling on the ground. Finally he got his shirt off, but had already been stung over 30 times. The



rest of us escaped any injury. We saw people returning by the same path, and they said they did not encounter any wasps. Mike must have killed the whole swarm. We were thinking about heading back up, but one of the groups coming down warned us that there were drug addicts at the top with marijuana and alcohol. We were

still going to go, but were warned that they might attack us for our cameras or our kids. We headed down, and plan to try again when we get back from Flamingo.

We went to Subway for a late lunch. Mike wasn't feeling well. I found some Benadryl, and we bought some cortisone cream. That seemed to help.

When we got back to the house, I washed our dirty clothes and hung them out to dry overnight.

#### Day 4: Friday, April 10, 2009

Today we picked up the GPS from the car rental and headed to La Fortuna. We're staying with a family Clarence knows. Several times along the way, Clarence stopped to ask for directions. We made a detour to a town, Zarcero, with a big sculpted garden in front of a church. Very interesting bushes.



Once we arrived in La Fortuna, we found Alexis' house. The kids made friends with their dog while we waited for him to get home. He led us to a private resort with a pool fed by the thermal waters of Volcán Arenal.

The tourist hot springs charge about \$40 per person to swim; this was only \$5, and well worth it. The family was there to celebrate their daughter's birthday. We ate lunch with Clarence's friends (Alexis, Amparo, Susana, & Jimmy). The kids ate chips and apples. We swam in the thermal waters for a long time. Very fun, very relaxing.

In the evening, we ate at an outdoor restaurant, El Valle de La Tilapia. They serve tilapia, and almost nothing else. The fruit drinks we ordered turned out to be smoothies. On the way there, our car got separated from the group by cross traffic, and it took about 20 minutes for Alexis & Clarence to come back for us. We would never have found our way to the place. It turned out to be a great cultural experience.

The house where we're staying is very small. It's open to outdoors, and the kids worry about the bugs. I did see a huge bug of some sort in the shower while we were getting ready for bed. I couldn't bring myself to swat it, and by the time I had gotten some help, it had disappeared. They all thought I saw a gecko and didn't know what it was. I don't think so. I put my shampoo bottle over the drain hole—just in case. The night of sleep was an experience in nature. Insects buzzed, and dogs barked. We all got a lot of mosquito bites. In the morning, Mike saw a bunch of little ants (or something) where his pillow had been. Maddy found similar insects crawling on the dining room table. One more night...



Day 5: Saturday, April 11, 2009

I decided to brave the shower. I hoped for no bugs. Alexis made gallo pinto (beans & rice) for breakfast. The kids ate cereal. After breakfast, we headed out for our canopy ride. We walked to the sign-in office, and caught a bus to the stables. We were given helmets and



assigned to horses. Argentina was going to ride a horse with us, but hers got frisky right away and she got off in favor of the tractor ride. Madelyne got the same horse. We rode our horses to the canopy base. Most everybody enjoyed the ride, but Madelyne was very nervous, so didn't like it as much as we'd hoped. After the horses, we got our canopy gear and hiked further up the mountain to the first platform. It was a strenuous hike, and the kids didn't like it. David tripped once because of the weight of his harness.

The canopy ride was incredible! There were 10 lines, and it was a great experience to fly from tree to tree.

Twice I didn't make it all the way across and had to pull myself by hand. The guide instructed me to pull my legs in further. It worked. I enjoy the trip on the lines, but I don't much like the wait on the platforms. Too much time to think about how high I am. The tractor ride back to the stables was very rough—worse than the horse.



When we got back to the house, Amparo had made lunch—rice (arroz), spaghetti (pasta), white sauce & mushrooms (salsa blanca con ungos), and a plantain casserole (pastel de los platinos), served with avocado (aguacate). What hospitality. We walked downtown and bought a few souvenirs, and relaxed until dinner.

Alexis and Clarence gilled hamburgers on a small charcoal grill. Costa Rican hamburgers resemble meatloaf patties, with egg and bread crumbs. It was very strange to



them to make a hamburger with only meat. They didn't believe it would stick together. It did. Alexis had the grill on top of some wood, which caught fire. After he got rid of the wood, he put the grill on the sidewalk, which worked better.

During the meal, a cuarteto showed up to sing for Susana's birthday. They ate with the family and sang lots of songs. The kids were falling asleep, even with all the noise.

The house has a great view of the volcano. At the opposite end of the road is a bungee outfit. All day, and into the evening, we heard, 'Cinco! Quatro! Tres! Dos! Uno! Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!'



#### Day 6: Sunday, April 12, 2009

We all got up early and packed to leave La Fortuna. Clarence and Argentina headed home; we headed to Flamingo. Along the way, some of us needed to use the restroom, so we stopped at a gas station. There was no toilet paper. We stopped a couple of minutes later at a supermarket which had nice restrooms and got some snacks. I had some information about a rafting activity in Cañas. We found the place and took the trip. It was great—we saw lots of animals! Our guide pointed out iguanas, crocodiles, and a variety of birds and lizards. The best part was when we pulled



up under a tree and our guide started making a very loud, weird sound. He was answered by some howler monkeys in the tree. We sat there for a while and looked at the monkeys. When we pulled away, one of them dropped some gunk on Emma. It was funny. Our guide fed us pineapple and drinks from his cooler. It was a lot of fun.

In Liberia, we found a Burger King and had lunch. The kids were happy to have something familiar to eat.

We drove the rest of the way to Flamingo, and checked in to the hotel. We got the same room we had when we were here in 2003. I was happy, because it is a nice corner suite with a good ocean view, and balconies on two sides.

The kids wanted to go to the pool, but we made them go to the ocean first. None of them liked it very much. The water was a little rough. I got dunked by a wave and immediately lost my goggles. Five minutes later, Emma lost hers. Even though the eye doctor has recommended Mike & I use goggles when we swim, it doesn't work well with the ocean waves. We went to the pool for a while afterward.

We ate in the hotel restaurant, Arenas. They had a buffet, and it was pretty good—though not great. The kids found almost nothing they liked; the staff noticed and didn't charge us for them. That was nice. One of the desserts had looked especially good, but it was actually pretty yucky.

The kids swam in the pool some more, then we all went to bed.

#### Day 7, Monday, April 13, 2009

Mike & I got up early to try to find some breakfast food we could eat in the room. We have only a refrigerator and a microwave. The big supermarket we saw on the way wasn't open so early, so we drove around looking for another. We found a small one with a bakery next door. Nobody spoke English, so it was another cultural experience. I tried to ask the girl at the counter about the pastries and what they were filled with. It turned out that all of them were filled with piña (pineapple). Every last one of them. I picked out a couple, but the girl couldn't make change for our 10,000 colones bill. We shopped next door at the super and then returned for the pastries.

On the way back, we saw that the big super was open, so we stopped and got some more food. We made one more stop at a hardware store for an extension cord for the laptop.

We ate breakfast in the room, and then headed out to swim. Madelyne and Emma like the ocean better this time, but David still only wants the pool.



Late morning we went to Tamarindo to check out snorkeling trips. We stopped at several places, but nothing seemed to measure up to the one I found online. We made our reservation for Tuesday afternoon. The guy there recommended a lunch place: La laguna de los Cocodrilos. It was a great lunch. Mike had river lobster, Madelyne & I had paninis, David had sausages (hot dogs), and Emma had a cheeseburger. We got a sample of brownies at the end. All of this with a great view of the beach. Very nice!

We were on the hunt for goggles, and visited

several supermarkets looking for them. We bought one pair and headed back to Flamingo.

We swam again in the ocean and the pool, and watched the sunset over the ocean. We ate dinner in the room—nachos & tacos.



#### Day 8, Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Madelyne, David & I ate breakfast while Mike & Emma got a boogie board and went to the ocean. They had a lot of fun, but Emma got stung by a jellyfish. We put some of the cortisone cream on it, and it cooled off after a while. After Mike & Emma ate, we all went back to the ocean and tried out the boogie board. David mostly played DS on the beach with a towel over his head, but I made him try the board. He didn't like it. I took



him over to the pool to wait for the rest. None of us had any sunblock on, and we all ended up very sunburned.

Mid-morning we headed back to Tamarindo to shop a little and get some lunch. Lunch took up all our time, and it ended up being very expensive. We ate at the Golden Shrimp which someone had told me about. We ordered an appetizer at our waiter's recommendation, which turned out to be about \$30. It was good food, but the bill was a surprise. Lesson learned: don't order something from your waiter that's not on the menu. During lunch, a kid came by selling carved pots as souvenirs. Mike bought one after bargaining with the kid for a couple of minutes. At the end of the meal, they brought us little condensed napkins that expanded with water, and flowers for the girls to put in their hair.



From lunch we headed directly to the sail/snorkel meeting spot. Mike tried to get us some underwater cameras, but the store had no power. We got on the catamaran around 2pm, and headed out to the snorkeling spot. We had pineapple, watermelon, and drinks. The snorkeling was a let-down. Mike was the only one who saw anything, and it wasn't much. We thought we were going to an island, but we were just on the shore near a beach and some rocks. The water was not clear, and we couldn't see anything. David barely made it off the boat, and then got right back on. Madelyne wanted to get back on but I pushed her to the shore and back. I was tired. Emma made it to the shore, but couldn't get back out, because the waves kept pushing her back in. She had already nearly lost her snorkel equipment to the waves on the shore several times. Our guide, Katie, picked her up in a kayak and took her back. I was disappointed that the snorkeling was so bad. On the way back, we had a nice buffet style meal of chicken, tuna salad, chips, cheetos, guacamole, salsa, and drinks. Emma climbed up to the top of the boat and curled up in her towel. The sun set just before we reached the shore. The excursion turned into a pricey sunset dinner cruise. We had fun on the boat, but learned another lesson: get a recommendation from someone who has been on the trip.



By evening, everybody was hurting from sunburn. We were careful to wear sunblock on our afternoon trip, but it was too late. The morning in the sun did us in, and we were all sore and tired. The kids and I watched 'Frequency' on TV, and then everybody showered and went to bed.

Emma had to sleep with Mike because she couldn't calm down from being in so much pain. She had picked at her shoulder and the aloe stung when we put it on. I slept with Madelyne, and she woke up hurting several times during the night.

#### Day 9: Wednesday, April 15, 2009

Everybody is still very sore, so we took today to rest and spend at the hotel. We ate in the room, and I washed some clothes in the tub. We haven't seen anything like a Laundromat, and the hotel laundry service is very expensive. We brought a lot of clothes, but not nearly enough to make it 10 days without washing. It's a good thing I washed at Clarence's last Thursday.

We saw an iguana on the tree right off our balcony (facing the beach). Mike took the kids to play some pool. I fell asleep for a couple of hours. When I got up, Emma went with Mike & me to walk around across the street from the hotel. We didn't find much except a restaurant that is owned by a guy from St. Clair Shores. We stopped in a little coffee shop for a treat. I was hoping for a frappuccino. It was on the menu, but the girl said they didn't have them. We ended up getting a brownie and sharing it. We also got some Advil from the farmacia. We walked over to the little super and Emma got an ice cream bar (Choco Bigger). Today we saw some iguanas out on the lawn at the hotel. Madelyne got the camera and took some pictures of them.



We hung around the room for a little while, and then took off to find a gas station and get some dinner. The gas station was further down the road than we expected it, but



we found it. Then we headed back to Brasilito to eat at Il Forno. We had remembered the place from our last visit as one of our favorites. We were not disappointed. The meal was great! Mike got veal, Emma & Madelyne shared ravioli, David had pepperoni pizza (he says it was the best in the world), and I

had tortellini with shrimp. We also had garlic focaccia bread. It took a really long time to get our bill, and we don't know if there is something missing in our understanding of restaurant etiquette.

When we got back to the room, we watched Heroes on the slingbox. (Madelyne went to bed—she was too tired to stay up.)

#### Day 10: Thursday, April 16, 2009

Mike had looked up information on National Parks, and found one that several people say is a good choice. After breakfast we loaded up in the car and drove to el Parque Nacional Rincón de la Vieja. On the way we looked in the Spanish dictionary and learned that it means corner or nook of the old lady. Hmm. It was a 2 hour drive. The first hour was paved roads, but after that the condition of the roads went from bad to worse. We had gotten advice that we would need a 4-wheel drive vehicle to make the trip. Hiring a driver from Flamingo was \$200, so we decided to head over and hire somebody closer if necessary. We didn't see many other vehicles like ours, but we made it. There was a toll gate to enter the private road that leads to the park, 700 colones each for Mike & me (less than \$1.50 each). The admission fee for the park was \$10 adults, \$1 children.

We had several choices for hikes: a circular path that would take 2 hours, a hike to a waterfall that would take 2 hours each way, one to a crater that would take 3 hours each way, and a nearby river for swimming. The 'ranger' suggested the circular path with

the kids. We asked if we might see quetzal, and he said no. He pointed out several other animals on a card that we might see.

We packed a backpack with snacks, water, and toilet paper for the hike. It's a good thing we brought the toilet paper. There were modern bathrooms, but no supplies in



them. That was our first stop along the trail.

The trail was slightly challenging, but fairly obvious. We didn't have any trouble staying on it. There were some steep parts that made Emma struggle, but overall we all did well. Not too far down the path was a little swinging bridge over

some little rapids. It was very pretty and we all stuck our hands in the water to see how cold it was. We took a few pictures and crossed the bridge.

Interesting things along the path included boiling mud pots, boiling thermal waters, small waterfalls, and a volancito (a small, steaming crater.) All the boiling and steaming stuff was stinky—a rotten egg, sulfur smell.



There was a kind of tree that had huge root-like projections above the ground. Some of them seemed to be engulfing other smaller trees. We heard some howler monkeys, and Mike and the kids started calling to them. They howled at Emma for a long time. We tried to find a way closer to where we heard them, but couldn't get close enough to see them.

We crossed streams by stepping across on rocks, something I've always wanted to do. During the latter part of the hike, we came out of the forest canopy into a desert-like environment. It was very hot out in the sun compared to the shade of the trees. We stopped for a drink of water, and ate a little fruit. We were getting very tired and hungry.



The kids were looking for exit signs, and we saw a sign that said '150 m'. We followed it, but it was not to the exit. It was another boiling mud pit. I'm glad we took the detour. Each one looks different, and it's very strange to see liquid boiling at the surface. We took our picture standing among some big

lava boulders. The kids picked up a few rocks hoping they were lava rocks.

We finally found the exit, and the kids were elated. The circle hike was 3 km, and they were tired. The only animals we saw were a lizard, lots of bugs, and some butterflies. In that regard it was a little disappointing, but the hike was a good adventure and we saw some cool stuff along the way.

We had promised the kids more snacks and drinks. There was a snack bar just below the parking lot. 'Snack bar' is an exaggeration. The guy (a Canadian) sells pop and water from a cooler at about \$1.50 per bottle. We got 3 bottles of 7Up and walked back up toward the car. We made everybody walk to the river swimming hole, which was 0.6 km up another path. We passed some people on their way back down from the waterfall hike. They said it was really far, but very cool. Our swimming spot was a lot closer. We had to walk up quite a ways, then down some very steep wooden stairs. Once we got there, we were perched above a river, but I couldn't see any way to get in it without sliding down some very steep rocks—and then how would we get back up? There was a girl sitting on one of the rocks, and she said she did just that: slid



down and then climbed back up. No way. We found a way over some rocks to a low spot, but I was scared going across. I was worried I might go into the river with the cameras, but we all made it. The water was cold, so the kids all just put their feet in. Mike plunged in, but didn't stay for long.



It was a really nice spot, and we had it to ourselves for about 20 minutes. We ate the rest of our snacks there. After a while, some other people showed up, and we started packing up. The kids thought it was disgraceful that the guys who came after us just took their clothes off and jumped in the water in their underwear.

We explored down the river just a bit. Not too far, though, because if you slipped down any further, there would be no getting back up. We explored up the river, and walked around on the rocks in the river to look at the rapids and falls further up. Emma fell and scraped her thigh on a rock, and then Madelyne fell in the river and got her clothes all wet. It was still a fun experience and everybody enjoyed it.

On the way back from the river, we found a vine hanging from a tree. The kids each took a turn pretending to be a monkey. When Mike did it, he fell on the ground and hurt his hand.

When we got back to the car, we couldn't find the car keys. Mike thought they were in the pocket of his shorts, and they were definitely not there. We were all starting to panic, thinking they might have fallen out somewhere at the river. We dug around some more in the backpack and found them inside the toilet paper roll. Whew!

We decided to head back to Flamingo and get some dinner. We hoped to get most of the way back before dark. Driving on those unpaved mountain roads would be treacherous in the dark. Instead of taking the same road back, we



followed the GPS. It took us down a very narrow, winding road. We didn't get very far, because the road was covered by the river. We turned around and went back the way we came. We stopped once on the way to look at some blue birds that were flying around in the trees.

We couldn't decide where to eat, but finally picked La Laguna de los Cocodrilos. The kids wanted to get paninis again. We went there, but it was a different restaurant for dinner. They had a completely different menu, and the tables all had fancy linens. We didn't stay, but went back to the hotel to eat at Arenas.

Mike got tenderloin and shrimp scampi, Madelyne & Emma got ham & cheese paninis, David got a cheeseburger, and I got mahi mahi with shrimp pomodoro. It was a very good meal. Afterward Emma & David went swimming, and Maddy & I went to the room. After we all got cleaned up, we tried to watch American Idol. When we loaded up Slingbox, we realized Andrea was watching the tuner we wanted, so we watched Burn Notice instead. We were all piled on our bed—Emma on Mike, David on me, and Madelyne in the middle. Very cozy.

#### Day 11: Friday, April 17, 2009

We spent the day relaxing at the hotel. In the morning we went down to the pool. We got some drinks at the pool bar. The kids had been looking forward to get something there since you can swim right up to the bar in the pool. We met Manuel when we swam up to the bar, and he asked Mike if he played tennis. They made an appointment for 2pm. At 11, Manuel held a water aerobics class. Madelyne & Emma joined the group. Madelyne gave up when they got out the resistance dumbbells and Manuel wouldn't let the kids have any. Emma stuck it out all the way to the end. She was tired afterward.

Back in the room, we ate Il Forno leftovers for lunch. We hung out in the room, and then Mike played tennis. We went back to the pool when he was done.

We decided to drive to Tamarindo to look for souvenirs. We visited several shops, and made a few purchases. I found a necklace for Jordan, a headband for Andrea, a decorated box for Hillary, a necklace for myself, and some t-shirts. Madelyne and Emma also picked out decorated boxes. Madelyne found a stuffed monkey too. We were

thinking about getting some dinner pretty soon, and saw a sign advertising paninis. We went to check it out, and found our friend from the restaurant a few days earlier! Madelyne's eyes lit up when we realized it was him. He had just turned off some lights, and seemed to be heading out the door. He saw us come through the door and said he would make us paninis. We didn't want to make him stay later for us, but he said to stay. We ordered our food, and he got confused about what Mike wanted on his. He is a Frenchman (Arnaud) who has lived in Costa Rica for 12 years. He still has a strong French accent. While we ate, he left the restaurant and returned a few minutes later with a beer—I guess his day was really over, and he was ready to relax! We ate our paninis and ordered some desserts to take back to the hotel. Madelyne had been looking for tres leches since I bought one at Musmanni in La Fortuna. She got one, I got tiramisu, David got a brownie (which we had sampled the last time), and Mike & Emma got a cheesecake to share. I asked Arnaud if it was his wife that made the desserts, and he said no, it was his mother. ('She looks very young, and I look very old.' Oops.) What a great surprise it was to find him and his paninis!

We got back to the hotel, ate our desserts, and watched some Slingbox. Then it was off to bed.

#### Day 12: Saturday, April 18, 2009

Mike had made a tennis appointment with Manuel for 8am. At about 9, I headed out to see how it was going. They ended the match in a tie, and went for a tie breaker. Even that was tied for some time, but Manuel finally came out on top.

I tried to find another National Park that we could drive to, but found out that the one we were considering charges \$45 per person for the tour of their caves. By the time we decided not to go, it was almost 10:30. The kids wanted to go to the pool and play Bingo at 11. We went down and swam for a while, and then swam up to the bar again to play. We ordered some drinks and played. I got the first Bingo—the prize was a cocktail. The catch—I had to dance for it. They wanted me to get up on the bar to do it, but I wouldn't. I stood on the underwater bar stool and danced, but only for a few seconds. I was too mortified to keep it up. I fell into the water and got my drink.



A little while later, Emma got the 'X' Bingo. The prize was a bottle of Costa Rican liquor, and she also had to dance for it. She got up on the bar and danced. She was also embarrassed, but lasted longer than I did. The bartender gave the bottle to Mike. To finish the game, the goal was to completely fill in the card. Emma and another lady did it at the same time. They had a dance-off. Emma was such a good sport. She did a little break dance along with some other moves, and we all cheered for her. In the end, they gave the bottle of wine to the other lady; mostly so one family didn't win all the prizes. It was a lot of fun, and Emma got to be in the spotlight. We swam for a little longer, then went and ate our leftover paninis in the room and then rested for a while.

Mike checked out a boogie board and took the girls to play in the ocean waves. David played in the sand, and then swam in the pool a bit.

Later, we ate nachos in the room. Mike made an appointment to play tennis with the kids, and we all went to the court together. Each kid took a turn getting a short lesson and returning balls that Mike sent to them. Madelyne went first. She hit a ball over the fence, and some onlookers retrieved it for us. Emma hit a couple over the fence too. One we could not retrieve. One ball got stuck in a tree near the fence, but we were able to get it down. A couple of animals crossed the court on top of the fence and then walked along the front of the hotel. We thought they might be pizote, but they were raccoons. After everyone had a turn at hitting, we went back to the room and watched some Slingbox.

At 10:00, when the kids were in bed, Mike and I went looking for some dessert. We walked across the street and found the restaurant kitchen closed. They could still serve dessert, but Mike didn't want any of the choices on the menu. We decided to keep looking. Every other place we tried was closed. The hotel bar was open, but didn't serve any food. We gave up and went back to the room.

#### Day 13: Sunday, April 19, 2009

Mike and the girls got up early to play some tennis. David & I slept in a little bit. When we were all up, we headed to the ocean. David didn't want to go, but Mike told him he could just play in the sand. Mike still had the boogie board, and we were all taking turns using it. The waves were very mild, so I convinced David to come into the

water for a few minutes. I held on to him and we glided over the little waves before they broke. He said it was his favorite day in the ocean, and even liked some of the waves. We didn't stay in the ocean long because we had to be ready to check out by noon. We stopped by the pool for one final quick swim before cleaning up and packing.

We left right at noon. We took a more direct route back to San Jose than the one through La Fortuna. We stopped for gas and snacks about an hour after leaving, and then stopped for lunch around 2pm. The place we stopped was a Costa Rican barbeque restaurant called Tres Hermanas (three sisters). At the end of the meal we had Tres Leches (Madelyne's new favorite dessert), and cheesecake. Madelyne got too full and had a stomach ache for a while.

We got to San Jose just after dark, and couldn't reach Clarence on the cell phone. Once we stopped, Mike got the house number and Clarence came to get us. The car was packed, and traffic back to the house was awful. It took us about 45 minutes to get there. We were all tired and hungry. Clarence had ordered Pizza Hut. The kids were thrilled! We ate, and Argentina's sister Lisbeth gave all of us Christmas gifts. Everybody got t-shirts (David got two). Mine has a picture of Lisbeth on it.

#### Day 14: Monday, April 20, 2009

Today was the day the kids were dreading. We had originally planned to climb the mountain from our earlier attempt (with the wasps). But since the kids were so against



the idea, we decided to find other things to do. We didn't want our final day in Costa Rica to be a bad memory for anyone.

We got up and took the bus downtown to the central market. We were looking for some souvenirs and a hammock. We stopped at MusManni for donuts, and then walked to the central market. We shopped there for a while, and then walked a few blocks away to a place where there were more shops. Emma found a new typical Tica dress, since the others we bought on

our last visit are too small for both girls. Madelyne didn't want a new one. Mike and I did find a hammock, and the kids all found souvenirs.

When we were done shopping, we picked Argentina up at the kinder and went to a big mall and ate at the food court. We needed Clarence's help ordering most of the food, because we couldn't understand the menus.

After lunch, we went to Café Britt to buy some coffee. It took us a while to decide what to buy. At the register, the cashier rang everything up. When she ran our credit card, she re-rang the order with an additional discount. We're not sure whether our name showed up as someone who has ordered products online. We felt like preferred customers.

We went back to the house for a little while. Lisbeth was trying to ask me to take a bag with gifts in it back home with me. I misunderstood and thought it had gifts for Mark Eash in it. Later I found out it was the gifts for Hillary, Jordan, Leighton & Andrea she had already showed me. She also brought out a suitcase and another bag that was indeed gifts for Mark. Clarence stepped in and told her we didn't have room to take any more bags with us.

In the evening, we ate dinner at La Princesa. The restaurant serves mostly fish and seafood. Mike and I got big plates of lobster.

Before bed, we all piled on our bed and watched Slingbox. It was crowded but cozy. We enjoyed one last night together before heading home.

#### Day 15, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

We got up pretty early, hoping to have time to visit the kinder before going to the airport. Packing the car was a real challenge. Clarence loaned us a suitcase, since we didn't have room to pack our souvenirs and hammock. We were very crowded in the car, and could not have fit any more in it. Traffic was terrible, and we ended up skipping the visit to the kinder. As it turned out, we probably would have had time. The process of checking in at the airport was quick, and we had plenty of time to spare. A guy helped us with our luggage at the airport, but Mike didn't have enough small bills to tip him well. We should have planned better for that. I had some money in one of my pockets, but had

changed pants at the last minute, and the ones with the money had already gone into the baggage check.

After we got to our departure gate, I walked back to Burger King with the kids. A few breakfast sandwiches and juices came to \$25. We ate, and waited for our flight. I looked at Madelyne's Guinness Book of World Records while we waited.

The flight to Miami was smooth. In Miami, we had to go through customs and pick up our luggage and take it to a connecting flight holding area. We found our gate, and Mike & Emma went looking for someplace to eat. They found a Cuban cafeteria, La Carretta, but it was pretty far away. We had plenty of time, so we all walked together and had a nice, big dinner. We ended up with more food than we needed, though, and realized we could have shared some of the food. The meals were huge.

Finally, we boarded our final flight and returned to Detroit. Jordan met us there and took us back to the hospital to get my car. We pulled both cars around to the back shuttle lot, and transferred the bags. We piled back in my car, and made it home. It was about 1am when we finally made it back. Everybody was tired and glad to be home, glad to sleep in our own beds.

The end.