

Costa Rica

April 2008

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David Salesin

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30 March 2008, 9:18am, flying in over the Golfo Dulce.

We arrived at Puerto Jimenez on a Nature Air prop, after an afternoon flight to LA, and an overnight flight from there to San Jose. The landing strip is carved out of the jungle on the edge of the Golfo Dulce. Eleni saw a sea turtle in the water as we were landing. (And so did the passenger behind her, so the sighting was confirmed.)



30 March 2008, 2:01 pm, Lapa Rios.

It's a 45-minute ride over a pitted road to Lapa Rios, the eco-lodge where we spent the following days. The main building has a great spiral staircase leading to an observation deck up above. Eleni lost no time in scampering up it. (The railings are obviously not built to code, but she did fine.)



30 March 2008, 3:48pm.

Back at the cabina, Eleni tries out the hammock.



30 March 2008, 4:19pm.

From Lapa Rios, it's about a 20-minute walk to the beach, mostly along a dirt road. The beach is situated along the gulf, but very close to the tip of the Osa Peninsula. Most of the waves were deceptively gentle, with an occasional giant wave that soaked your pants.



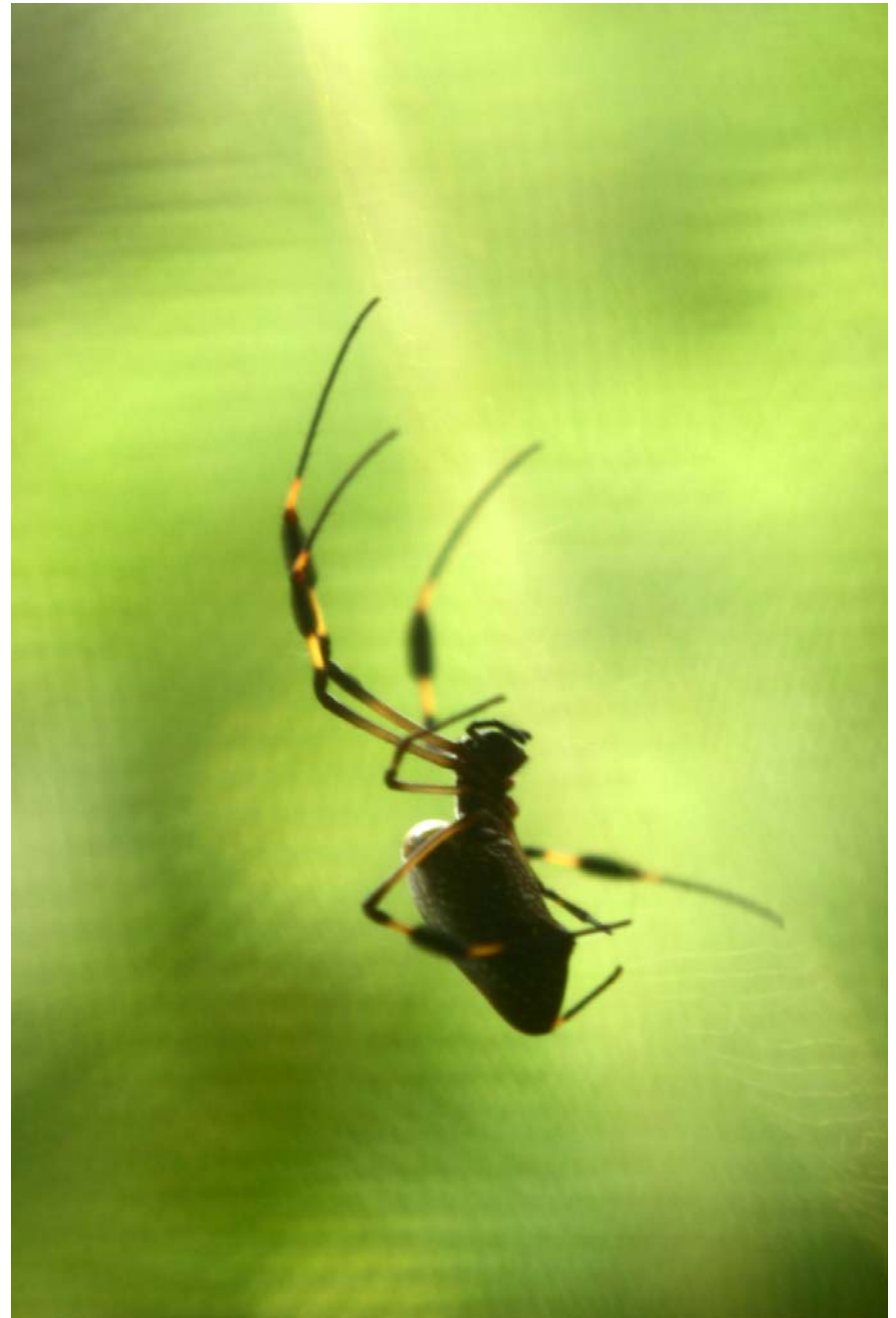
30 March 2008, 4:55pm.

A dried leaf outside our cabana.



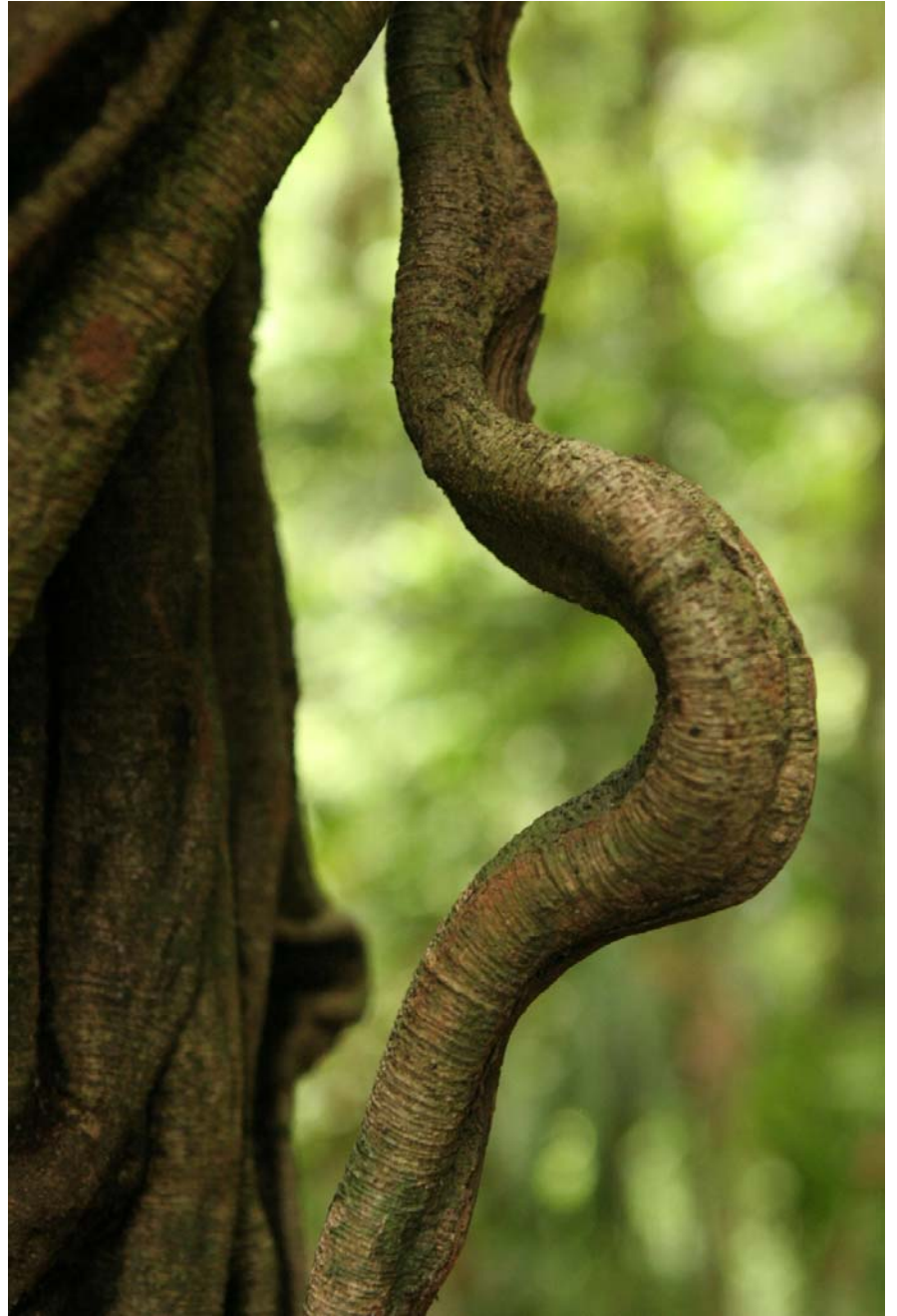
31 March 2008, 7:31am.

When we woke up the next morning, we could see this Golden-Legged Orb Weaver just outside our window screen. Her body is about an inch long (not counting her legs). These spiders weave webs that are three-dimensional rather than the usual two. The male of the species is a tiny thing that doesn't do much. It just hangs out in the web waiting for leftovers.



31 March 2008, 9:33am.

We took a walk on the Osa Trail, through primary and secondary rainforest. The tree trunks are covered with old vines like this one.



31 March 2008, 10:40am, on the Osa Trail.

Isaiah beside an old-growth tree.



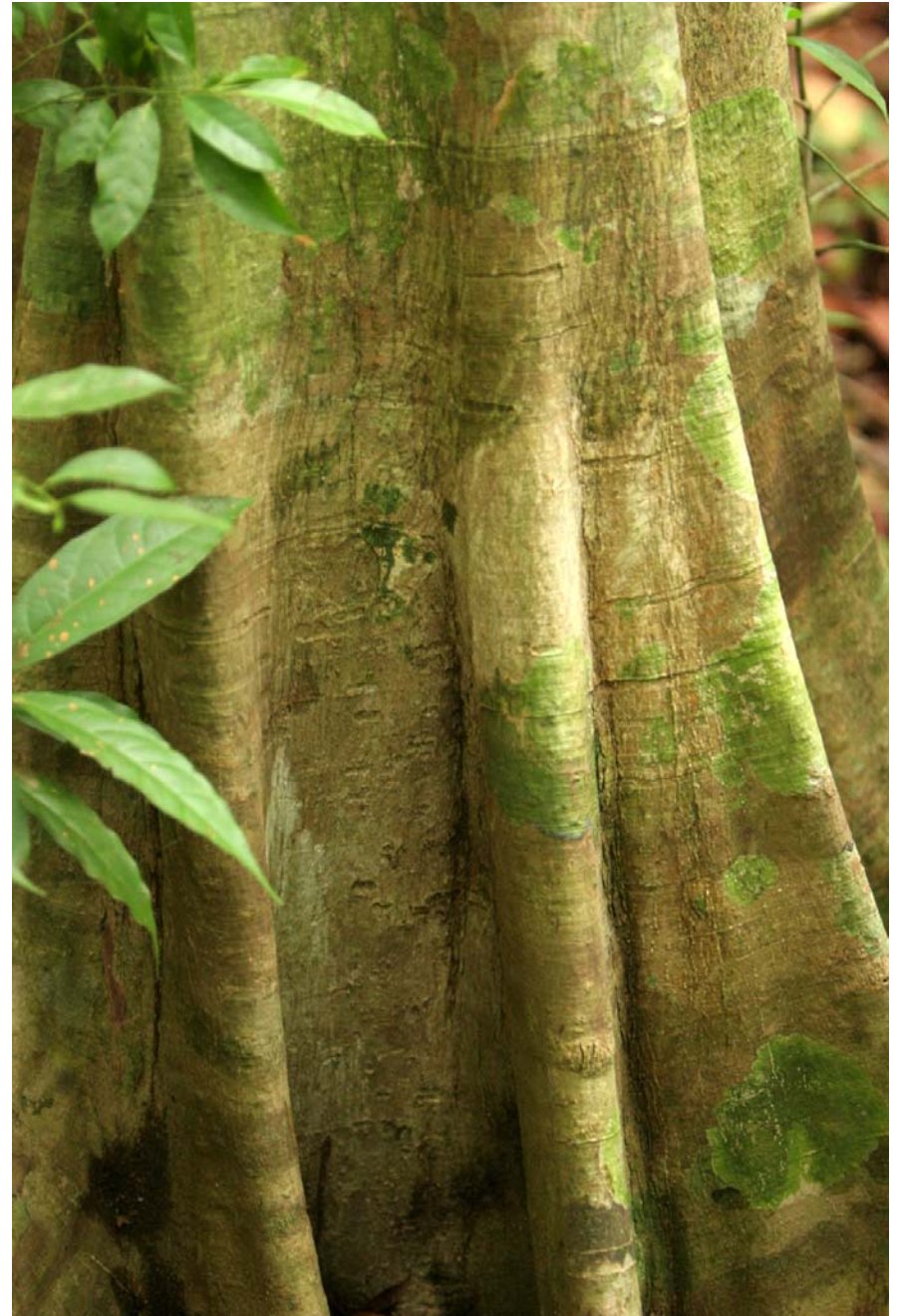
31 March 2008, 10:59am, on the Osa Trail.

Our guide took a picture of the three of us atop the giant roots of an old-growth tree.



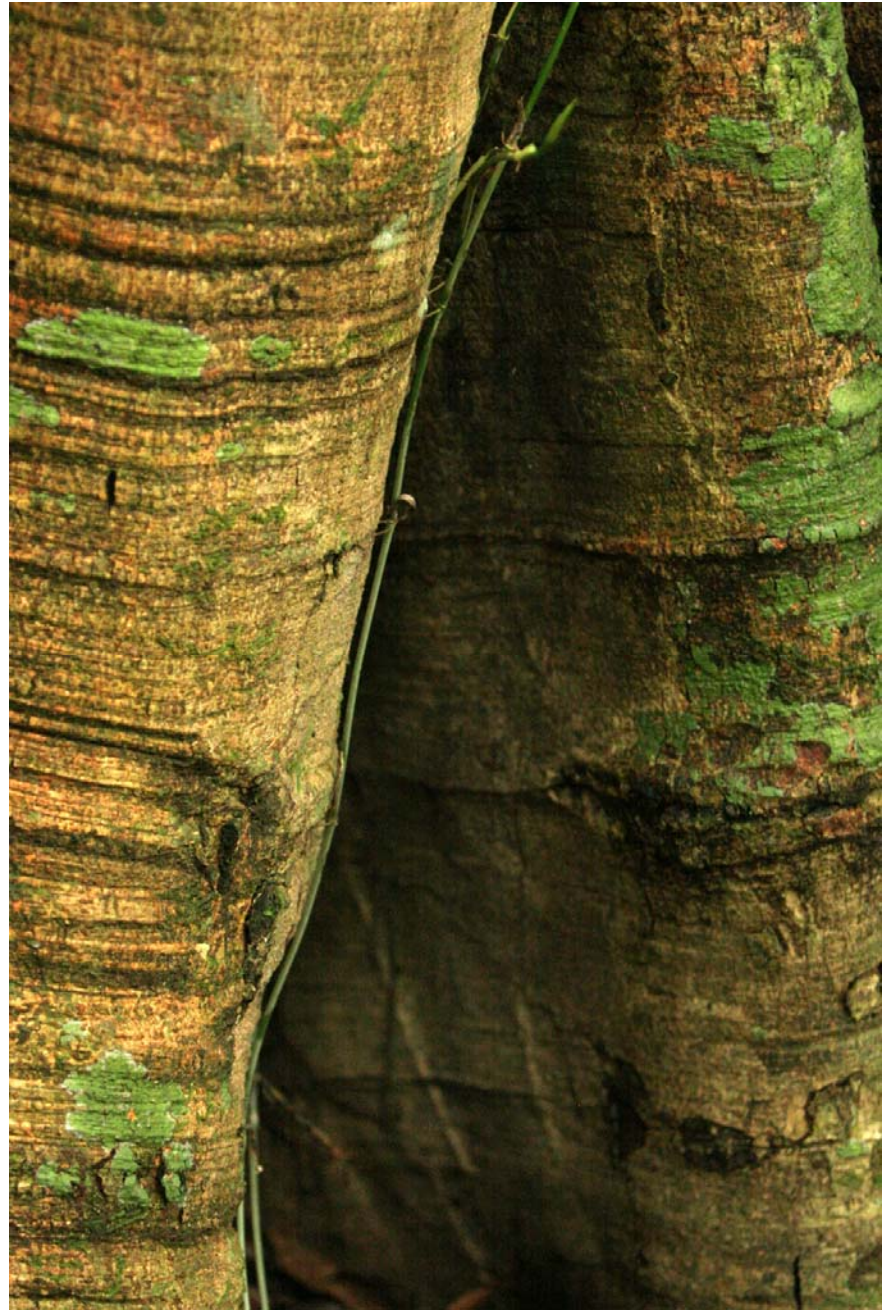
31 March 2008, 11:35am, on the Osa Trail.

Many of the trees develop these buttress-like roots in order to better support the tree and also trap nutrients as soil is pushed around by heavy rains.



31 March 2008, 11:50am, on the Osa Trail.

Detail of a massive, lichen-covered tree trunk.



31 March 2008, 12:49pm, on the Osa Trail.

At the very end of our hike, just as we reached the cabanas and were saying goodbye to our guide, we spotted this scarlet macaw high on a treetop.



1 April 2008, 7:39am.

Eleni, peering out of her mosquito netting. Not a bad face to wake up to!



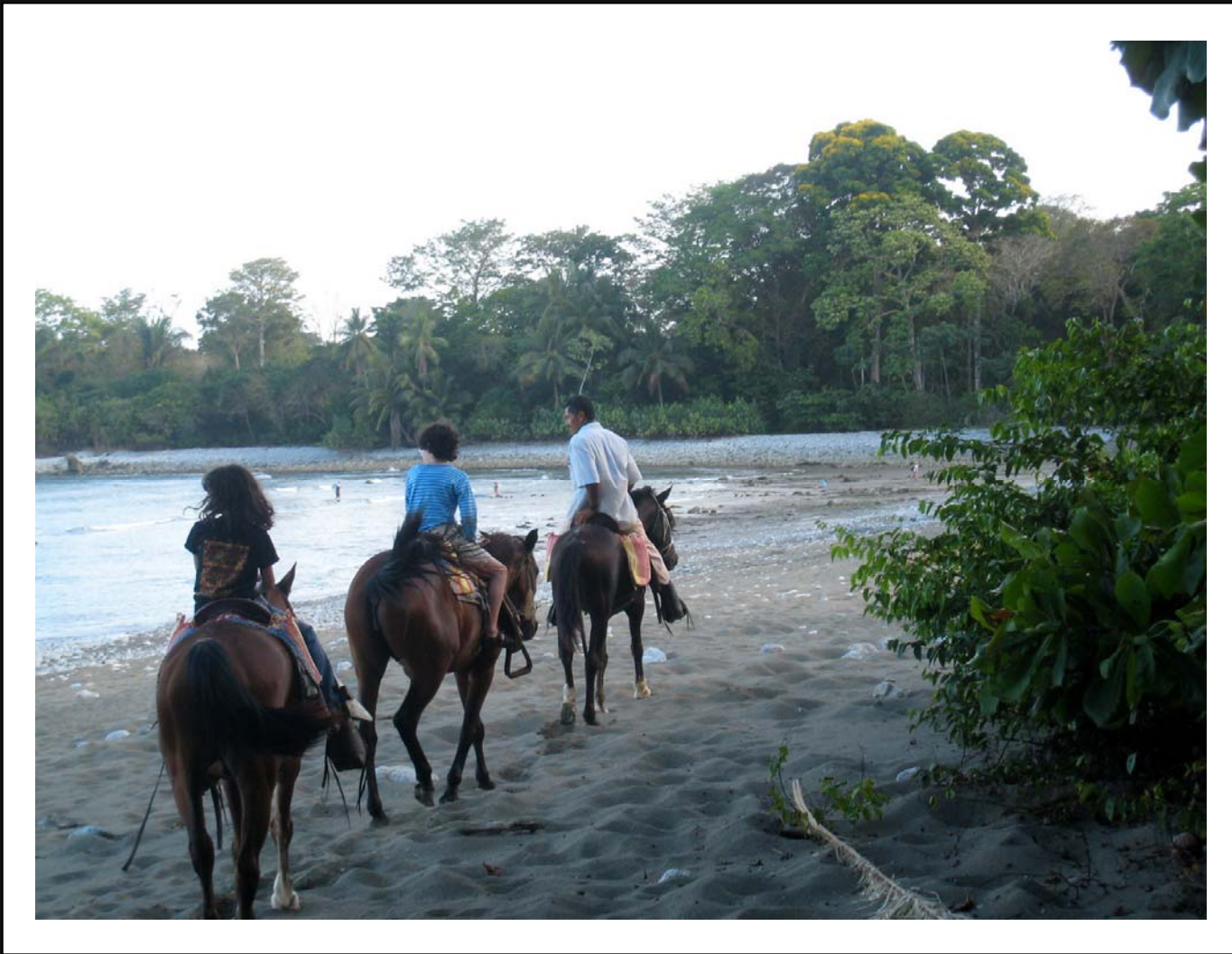
1 April 2008, 9:36am, in the main lodge.

This moth, sitting on the underside of one of the steps of the spiral staircase in the main lodge, was easily six inches across, from wingtip to wingtip.



1 April 2008, 3:56pm.

That afternoon, we went horseback riding along Matapalo Beach nearby. It was Isaiah's first time on a horse, and Eleni's second. Estrella, Isaiah's horse, kept stopping to eat banana leaves.



1 April 2008, 4:39pm.

A view of Matapalo Beach, from my horse.



2 April 2008, 9:09am.

This meter-long iguana likes to hang out at Lapa Rios so much he has been nicknamed Eduardo. Iguanas are easy to photograph; they sit motionless for long periods of time.



2 April 2008, 9:44am.

Later that morning we trudged through the river and visited two waterfalls. This “monkey vine” was on the way.



2 April 2008, 9:57am.

Eleni at the first waterfall.



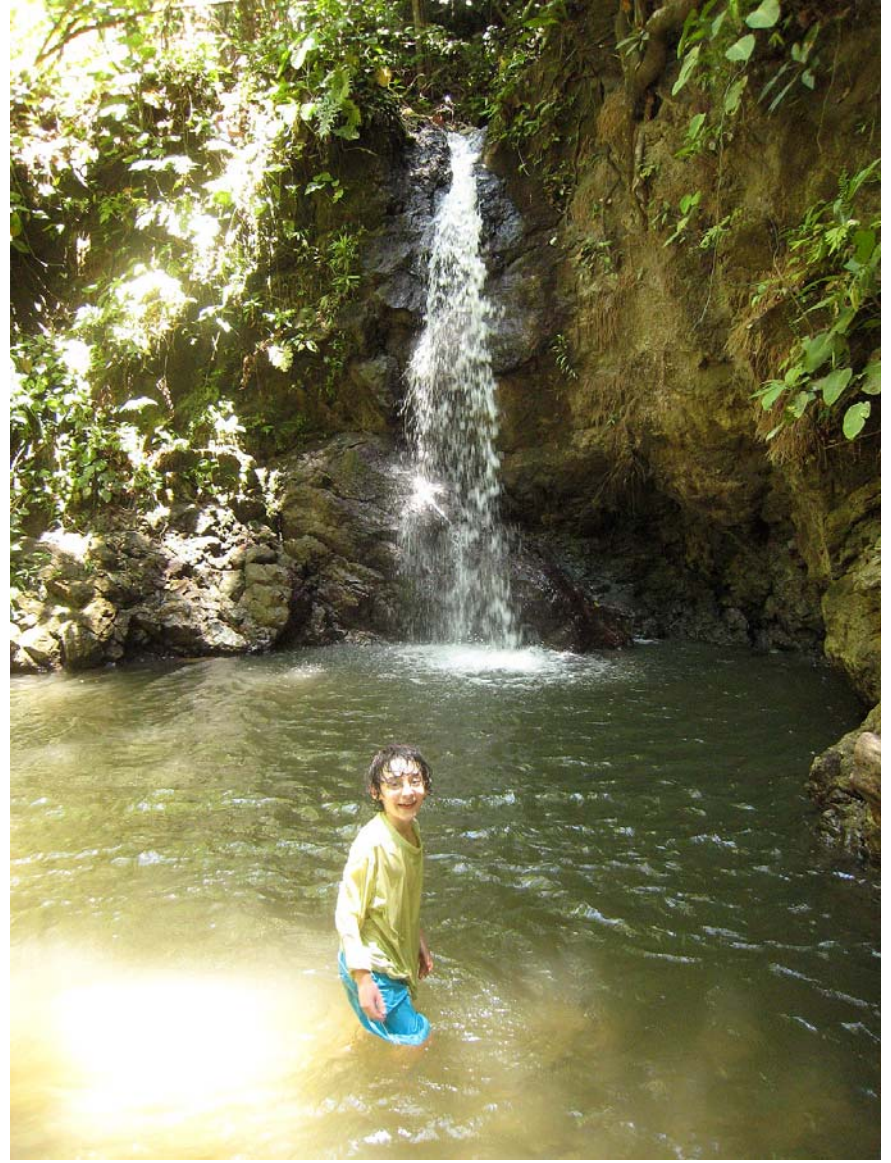
2 April 2008, 10:31am.

Mushrooms growing on a fallen tree in the river.



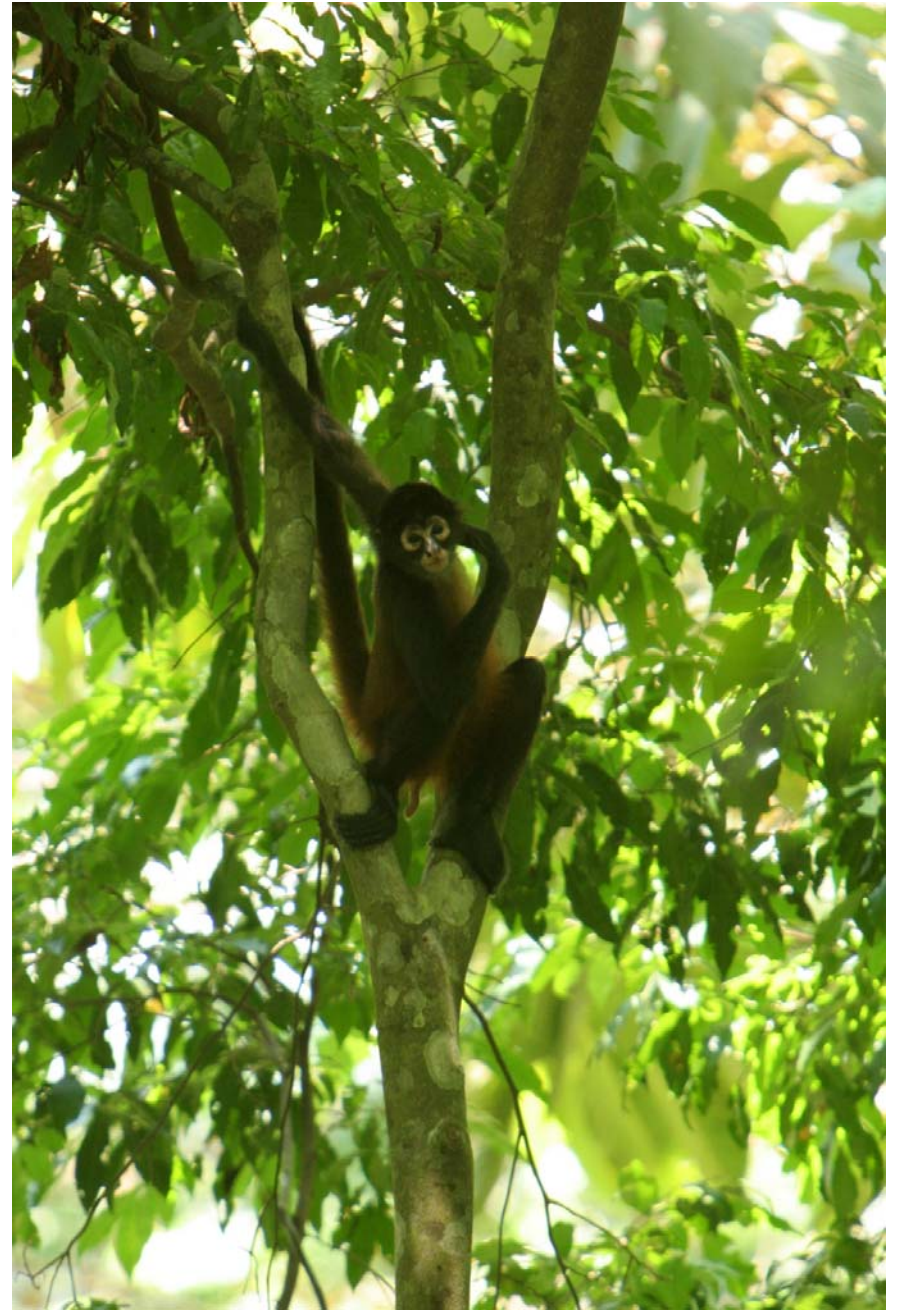
2 April 2008, 11:32am.

Isaiah, at the second waterfall, which also made for a perfect swimming hole.



2 April 2008, 11:55am.

A group of howler monkeys made their presence known in the trees up above as we hiked back.



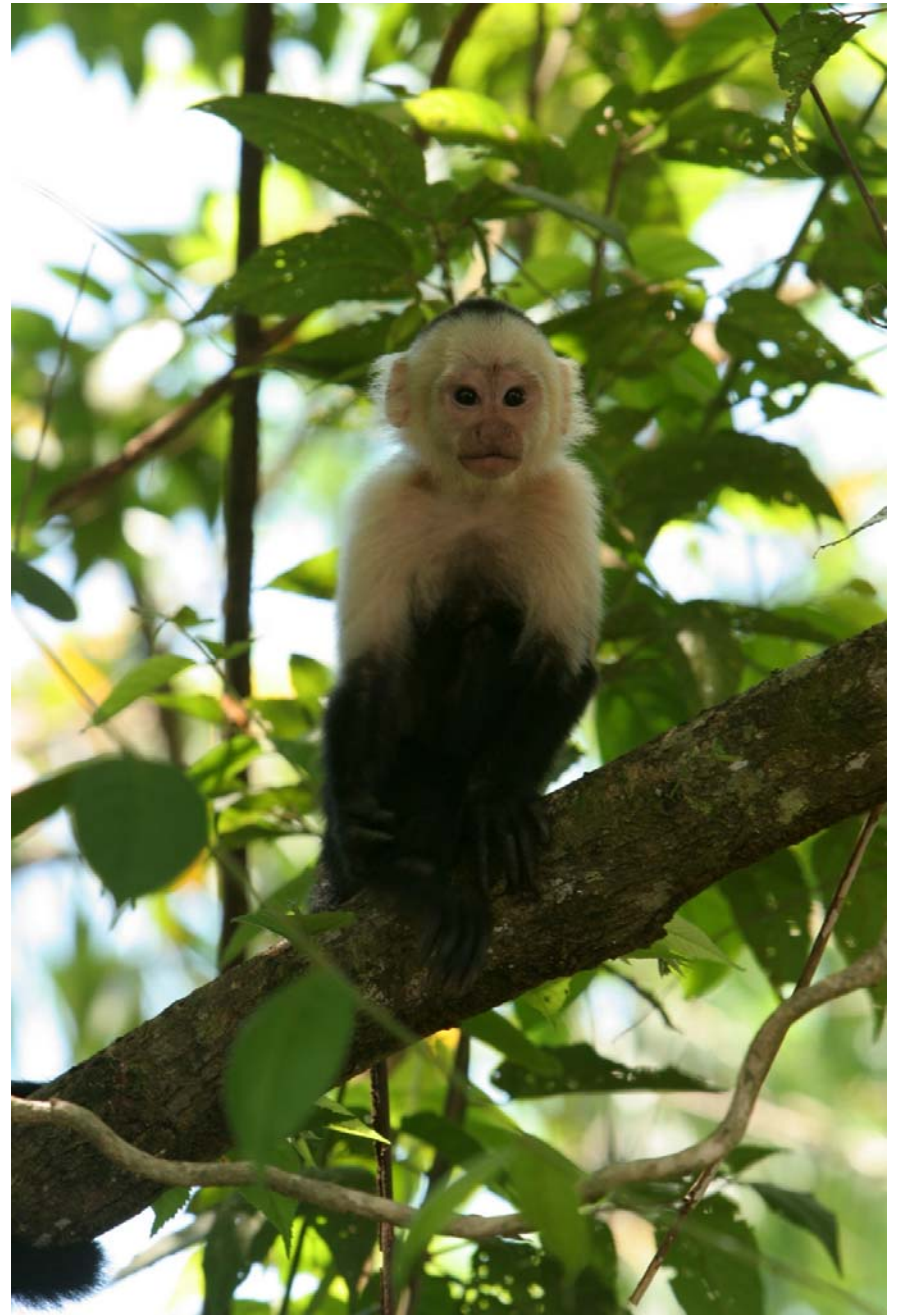
2 April 2008, 12:23pm.

Just outside the front door of our cabana, a whole family of white-faced capuchin monkeys were sauntering by in the trees at eye level, munching on tree fruits and dropping the shells at our feet.



2 April 2008, 12:23pm.

Another view of one of the capuchin monkeys.



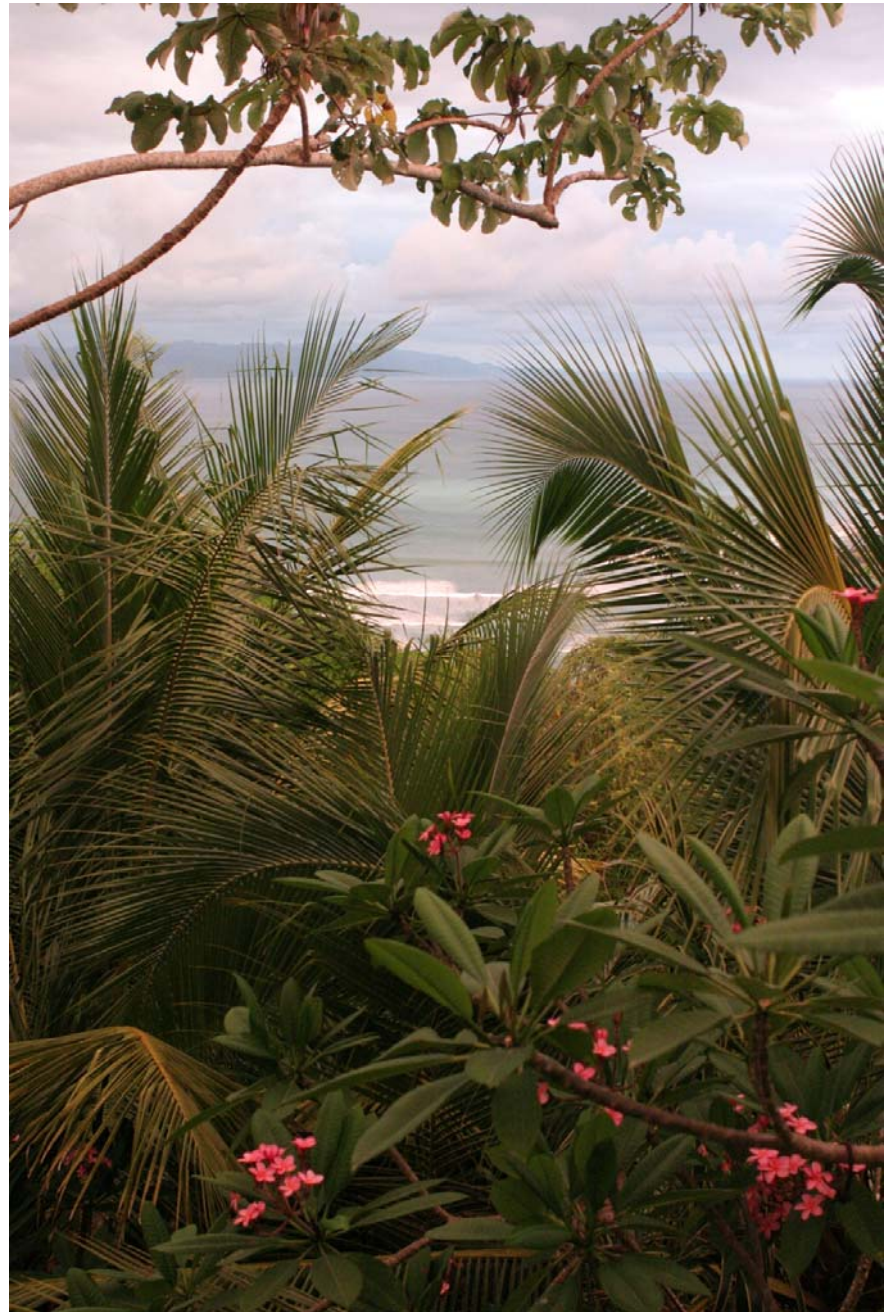
2 April 2008, 5:45pm.

Here is the view from the deck outside our cabana, as daylight faded into dusk.



2 April 2008, 5:45pm.

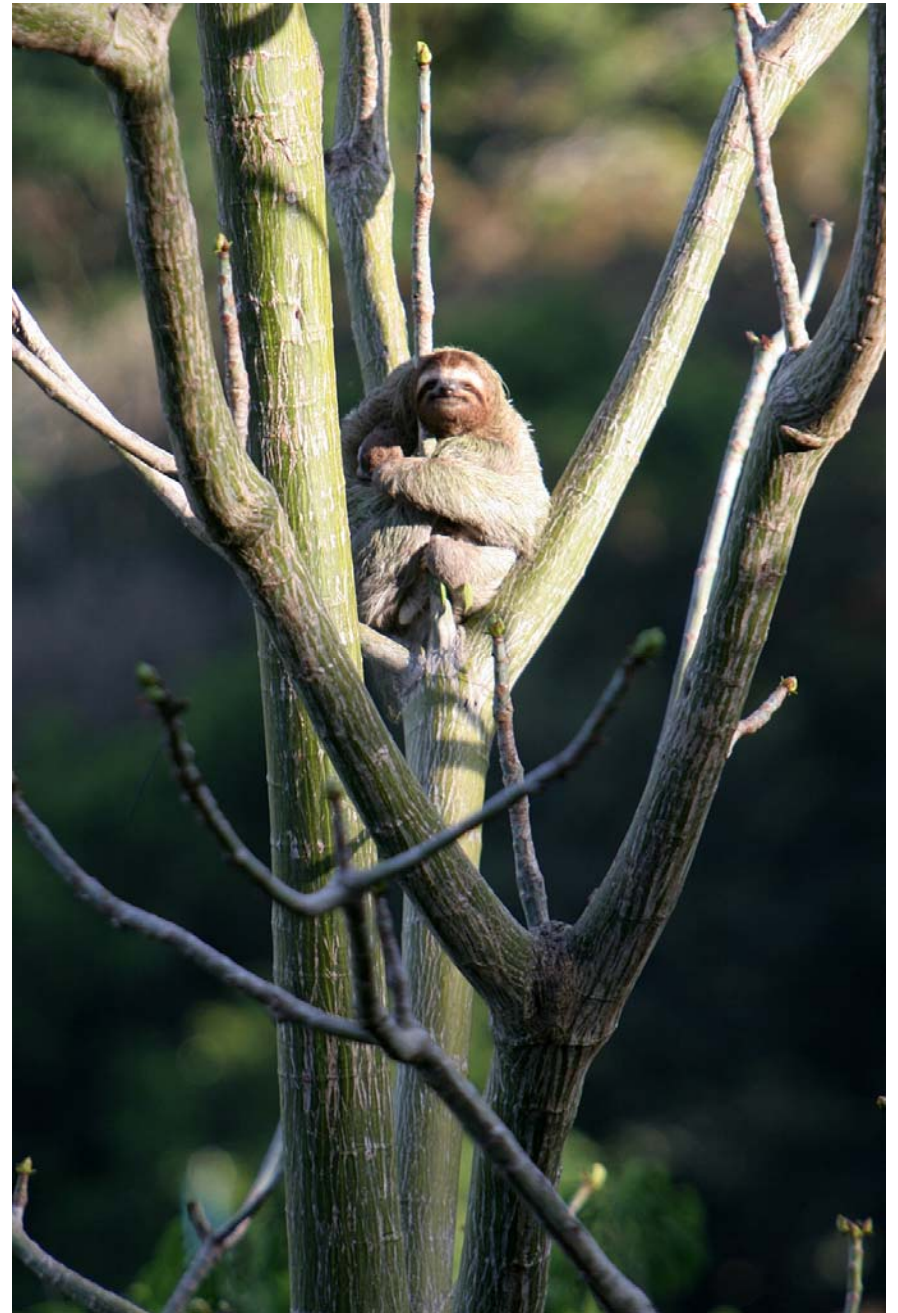
Another view of the sunset from our deck.



3 April 2008, 4:24pm.

The next afternoon at the pool, a young woman named Jenny arrived and mentioned that she could see a sloth from the deck of her cabana. I didn't know what a sloth was, but I was very glad that I went to check it out. The sloth remained nearly motionless, occasionally turning its head from side to forward, and from forward to side.

Later that evening, Jenny mentioned that the sloth had been holding a baby, something she only noticed later, when the baby left its parent's arms and climbed the tree on its own. Actually, you can see the baby in this picture if you look closely.



3 April 2008, 4:25pm.

The view of the beach was even nicer from Jenny's room.



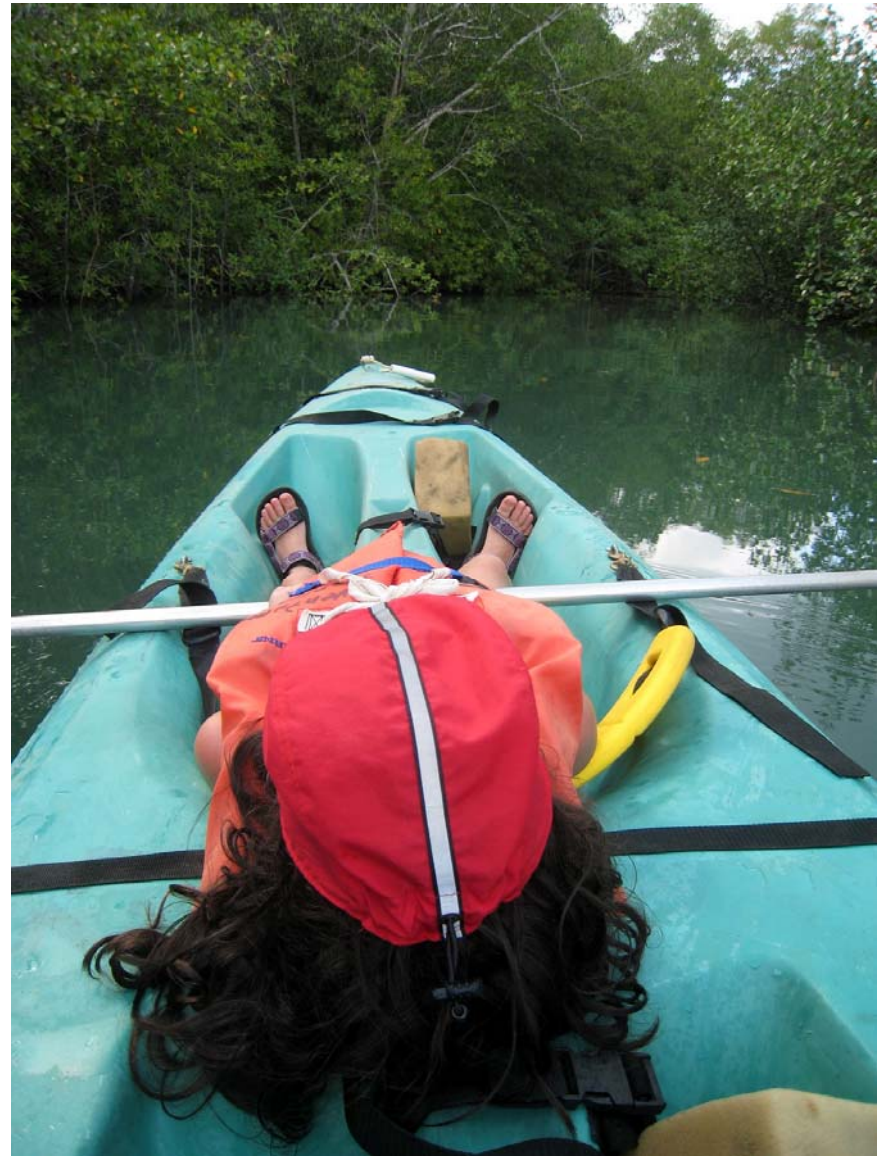
4 April 2008, 9:10am.

Whenever we were in the room, the kids had a few activities to do on their own. Isaiah played with mags. Eleni created a whole line of fashion designs from colored paper.



4 April 2008, 2:22pm.

That afternoon, we went kayaking through the mangrove forests near Puerto Jimenez. Eleni loves to paddle.



4 April 2008, 2:34pm.

We were caught in a brief tropical shower. Each raindrop pushed air into the water, which then bubbled up to the surface and sat there for a few seconds before popping, creating a glimmering sea as each bubble caught the sun.



4 April 2008, 2:39pm.

The mangrove forest. Isaiah was really taken with the seed pods. He brought one back, which we declared at customs. They made us go through a separate line to evaluate its safety. Ultimately, it was taken away and incinerated.



4 April 2008, 3:23pm.

We portaged the canoes over a narrow strip of land to the beach along the Golfo Dulce. There our guides prepared a refreshing snack of fresh wild pineapple and coconuts.



4 April 2008, 3:30pm.

Two fresh pineapples on some driftwood.



4 April 2008, 5:04pm.

We finished our kayaking trip near low tide, dragging the kayaks in toward shore as far we could. The outfitter is pushing out a cart on wheels to retrieve them the rest of the way.



5 April 2008, 6:52am.

Staying at Lapa Rios is actually a pretty creepy-crawly experience. Every evening upon returning to our cabana, I had to clear out about a half-dozen large critters that had snuck in during the day. And every morning there were a half-dozen more. The good news is that you develop a certain degree of comfort about being around them and picking them up.



5 April 2008, 8:31am.

A perfectly camouflaged green lizard. We had seen many, but this is the first that stayed still long enough to be photographed.



5 April 2008, 12:40pm.

Later that morning, we drove back to Puerto Jimenez to catch our flight back to San Jose. The flight was delayed by about an hour, so the driver took us sightseeing at a nearby swamp – quite close to the airport and to where we had been kayaking the day before – to see alligators. They were ever so close, waiting, I suppose, for one false move. I did not let the kids stand very close to the river bank.



5 April 2008, 1:22pm.

On our flight out, we had a perfect view of the river where we went kayaking the day before. The place where we portaged the kayaks to the Golfo Dulce and ate pineapples and coconut is just off frame on the left.



5 April 2008, 1:50pm.

The flight out was more exciting than expected. We flew through some large thunderheads.



5 April 2008, 3:24pm.

We spent our last night at the tranquil Finca Rosa Blanca Country Inn, outside of San Jose. The cool afternoon rain was quite a contrast from the tropical heat we had become accustomed to on the Osa Peninsula. And when the rain finally stopped, there was no sound at all: no cicadas, no howler monkeys, no jungle noises of any kind. I was able to convince the children to stop making noise as well, at least for a moment, so that we could all experience the rarity of silence.

