

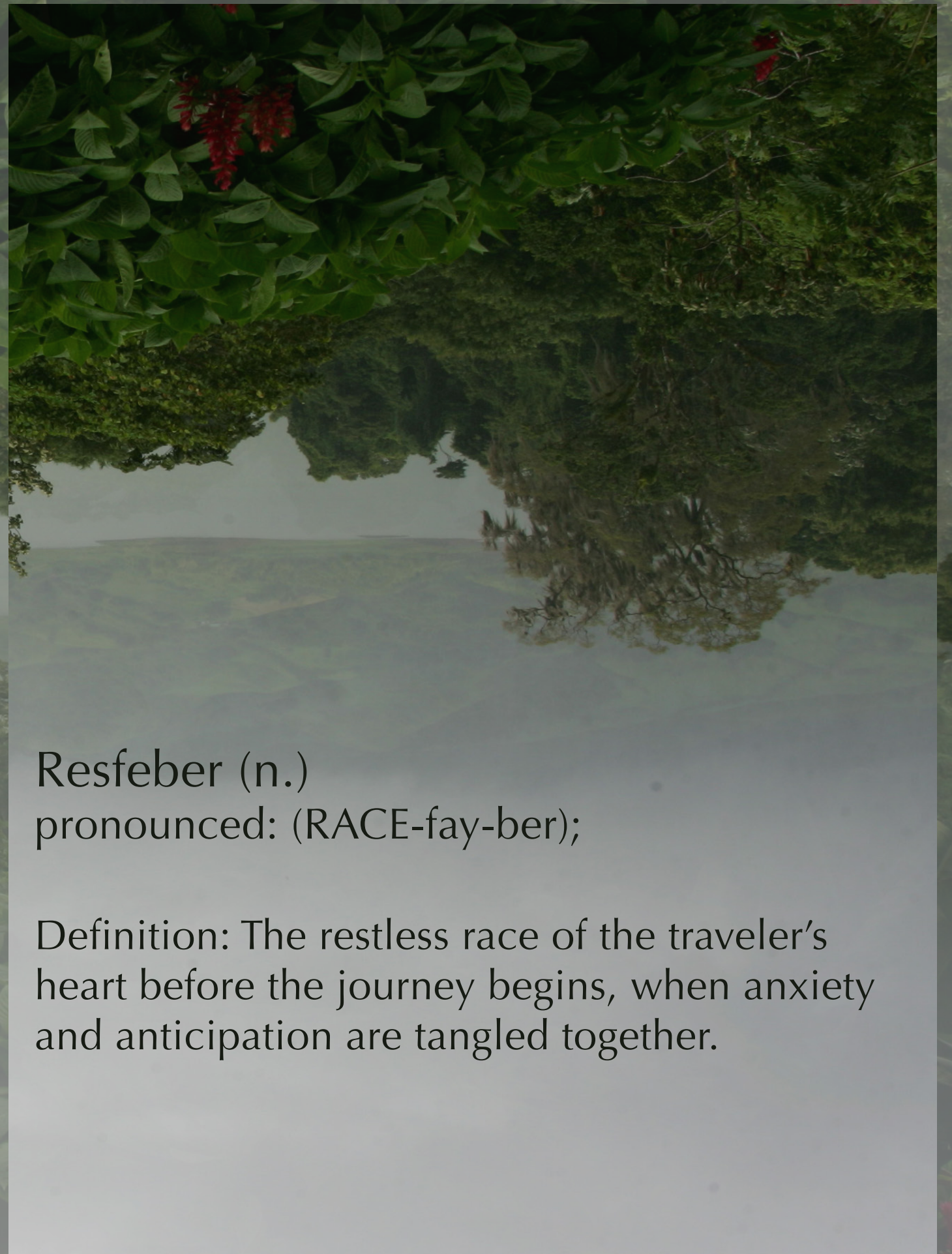


# RESFEBER

COSTA RICA EDITION

stories & photography  
from Costa Rica





Resfeber (n.)  
pronounced: (RACE-fay-ber);

Definition: The restless race of the traveler's heart before the journey begins, when anxiety and anticipation are tangled together.





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MONTEVERDE





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# MONTEVERDE

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We had learned that most Ticos rise with the sun at about 5a and begin work-ing. The wisdom of that is readily apparent when you begin to realize that the rain starts about midafternoon, but most mornings are beautiful. I got up for an early morning bathroom break and waved at the cowboy riding by in the pasture outside our bathroom window [while I was seated, doing my business]. The bathroom has plate glass windows and no blinds or curtains - as with every other room in house. So, we decided to get up early [6:15a] and hit the road to take advantage of the sunshine and nice weather while we could. The road across the mountain from Lake Arenal to Monteverde is considered one of the worst in the country - and that's saying something. The road appeared to be constructed of rip-rap - large fist sized rocks - imbedded in the mud. The road was about a lane and a half wide with numerous hairpin turns and limited visibility. Potholes were numerous. At any moment of the two-hour drive, I expected the car to dissolve into a pile of nuts and bolts. My body wished it would just dissolve [my neck and back still haven't recovered].

Although Monteverde's cloud forest is world-renowned and a symbol of Costa Rica, the local people oppose significant development of the area. Therefore, improvement of the roads into the area is a point of conflict. Both of the roads into Monteverde have a reputation almost as well-known as Monteverde itself. After having experienced it, there is a definitely a significant deter-rent to return-ing. Although this is one of the major tourist areas in a country that focuses its resources on tourism, the town of Monteverde appears typi-cally Costa Rican - soccer field, sodas, small markets, and deeply rutted, pot-holed dirt roads. Definitely not Gatlinburg. We stopped at Selvatura, a rainfor-est reserve in Santa Elena [Monteverde's twin city]. This reserve is at a slightly lower elevation than Monteverde's cloud forest itself and has slightly different vegetation and wildlife [although wildlife is seldom seen in the rainforest areas that are developed for tourists].





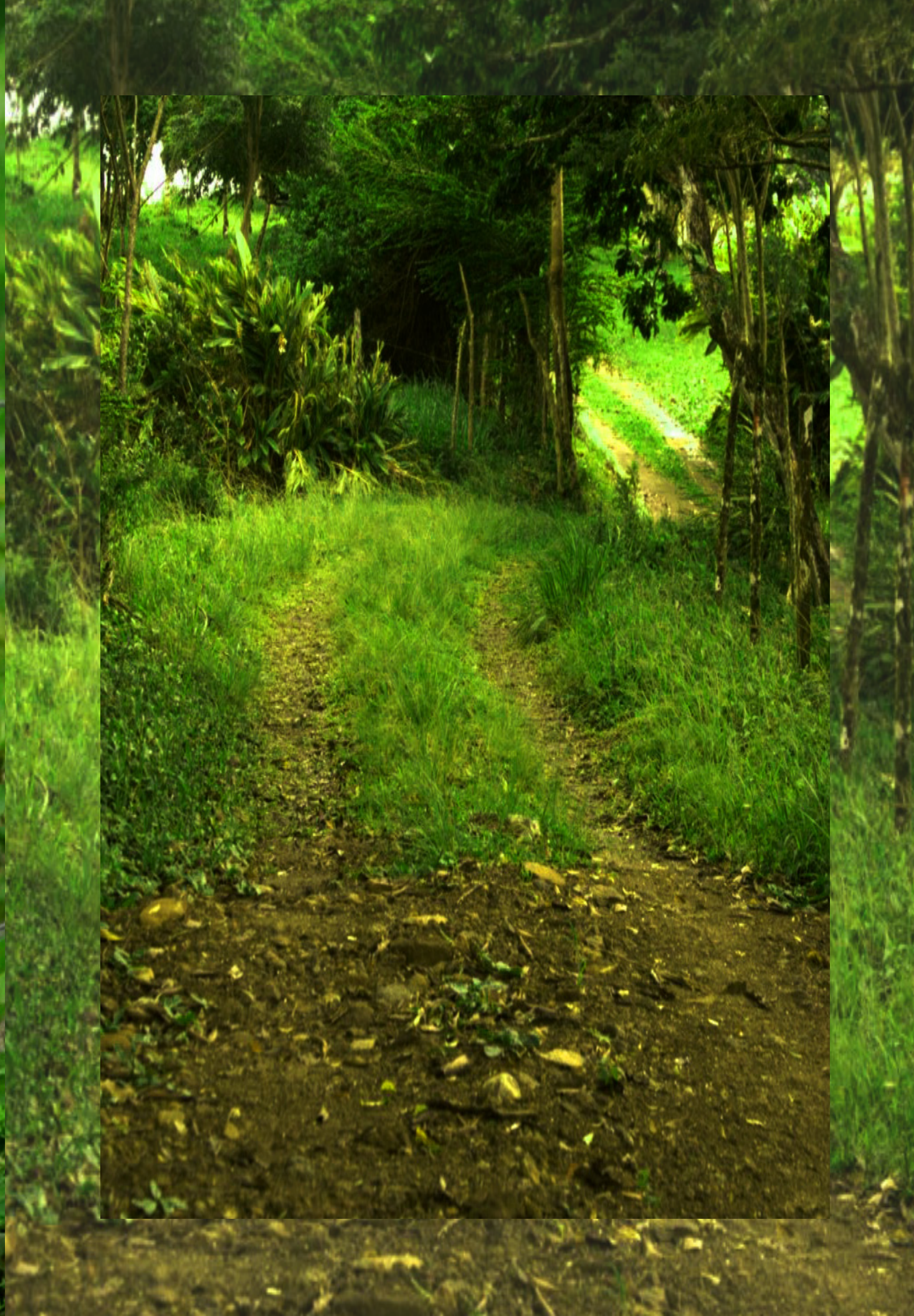


Selvatura has a zipline canopy tour, suspended bridges in the forest canopy, a butterfly farm, and a hummingbird garden. We first did the zipline tour. This consists of steel cables strung through the rainforest canopy - either into the taller trees or on steel towers. You are first outfitted with a body harness equipped with a pulley and a secondary support line. The guides hook your pulley and your secondary line to the cable, give you a shove, and you are off through [and above] the canopy to the next platform, where another guide unhooks you from the first cable, hooks you up to the next and sends you on your way. There were a total of 15 cables covering a couple of kilometers. The kids were “taxied” by.

We then started out on the 1.5 mile walk through the forest understory and the eight hanging bridges. The bridges are supported by huge metal towers. We made it past two of the bridges before the thunder and lightening convinced us that this was probably not the best place to be in a thunderstorm. So, we watched the rain from the Selvatura restaurant: brick-oven fired pizza, onion soup, and grilled sea bass. We weren’t able to finish the bridge walk because of the rain; so, we visited the local artisans coop and the Café Monteverde coffee plantation store. Although we hadn’t done nearly everything that we would like to do in Monteverde, it was time to head back across the mountain before it got dark. The discussion is still ongoing as to whether or not the sites in Monteverde are worth the drive back...more on that later.

Stopped at a small, open-air restaurant that is on the road to our house, Las Tejonas. Tony had Filet Mignon, which in Costa Rica apparently means breaded steak in a white wine, mushroom sauce. We also had chicken breast in the same sauce, a hamburger, and ham and cheese sandwich. The owner spoke English, but had to leave after he cooked us dinner to go to his pizzeria in town - mass was just letting out and he was expecting a Saturday night crowd. This left us with the young waitress who spoke no English, but wanted desperately to chat. We managed to communicate that the kids were twins and that she had three kids herself. I think she asked about where we were from, but I answered about where we were staying...oh, well. The kids spent the whole meal playing with a calico kitten named “Sassy” [who knows what this means in Spanish].





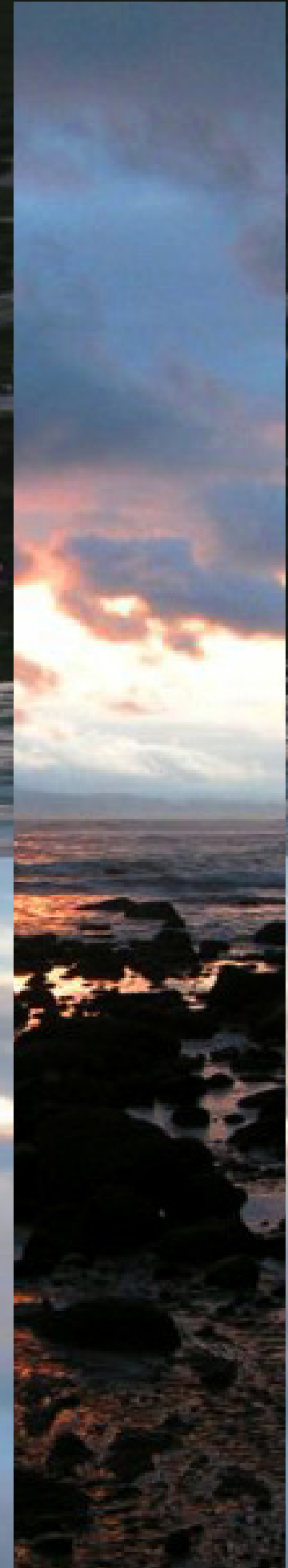
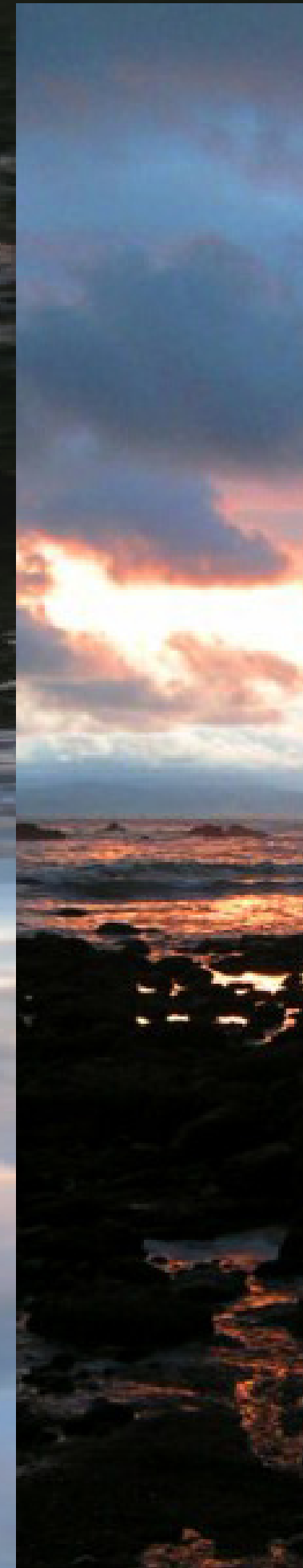
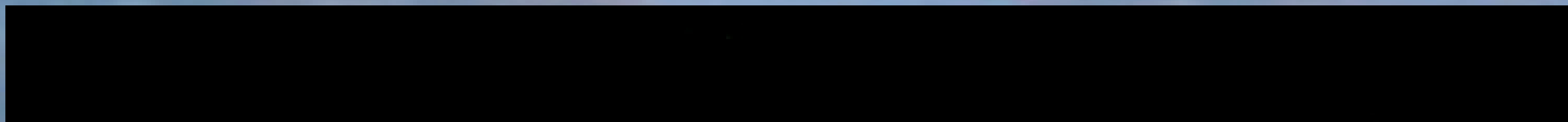




PAVONES











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# PAVONES

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The sun rises shortly after 5a; the bus came through at about 5:30a, a sure indication that the road was now clear. We started our engines and headed on to the end of the road. We parked the cars at a pull-off where the

beach road ends. From here, we consult the directions from the Casa Punta Banco (CPB) homeowner: “Walk onto the beach and continue south. In other words, turn left once on the beach so you pass the neighbor’s house (Rancho Burica). Walk for about 1/4 mile. After you pass second stream (1st stream comes just after neighbor’s house. In the dry season this may not be a stream at all.) You will see our gate and a black and white sign: “Casa Punta Banco” painted on a large rock near the entrance. Walk up the hill to the house.”

There was originally hope that the caretaker would be meeting us at the end of the road with a horse cart to bring the luggage up the house. Given our adventures of the previous evening, we had no expectation that he would be waiting for us the morning after. So, we pack up the kids and the valuables that we didn’t want to leave in the car and head up the beach. Keep in mind the physical and emotional state of the moment: a very small amount of sleep in the car and no food, other than road snacks, since lunch the previous day.

We headed off down the beach. After a block or so, we came to a stream on the beach.

The water was flowing down out of the mountains, across the beach, into the ocean. Honestly, I don’t know what I expected from the directions, “after you pass the second stream.” I don’t think I gave it any thought at all. The stream was about a foot to a foot and a half deep at its widest, with a rocky, sandy bed. I had on a skirt and sandals...again, not sure what I was thinking.





The driveway to the house was marked with a rock painted with a large turtle on it. Given that the owners of the house used to drive on the beach up the house, we expected a more constructed driveway than what we faced now. First, the entire driveway was blocked by a pile of boulders, stones, and driftwood that we were required to clamber over. No car, no matter how tough, was going over this pile. Then, we stood and faced the “driveway.” This was a mud and grass road that went up the mountain..straight up the mountain...way up the mountain. There was no house in view - just the thick growth of the rainforest and the dirt road. Did I mention that the road goes straight up the mountain? I’m wondering what kind of car can drive up this road.

We hiked further and further, wondering if we were in the right place. Surely the house wasn’t this far up the mountain - surely the shack that we passed back near the beach wasn’t the six-bedroom house that we were looking for. Benches are placed strategically along the driveway and the weak among us stop for a breather. The driveway was so steep and my sandals were soaked from the surf, so my feet kept slipping out the back of the shoes. The driveway was too rocky to make it comfortable to walk barefoot. Let’s just say that it taxed my coordination to keep my shoes on and walk at the same time - luckily, I wasn’t trying to chew gum, too. We came around a bend in the driveway to the house itself. The house matched the pictures that we had seen on the internet - so, we assured ourselves that we were in the right place.

The house is completely open air in the main living areas, with just a short railing around the perimeter. The bedrooms had walls and screens to keep out the night creatures. No need to look for a key. We [and anyone else who wanted to] could just walk right in. The rainforest was cleared for about ten feet around the house. So, there was not a lot of “yard,” just a basic pathway around the house and beautiful garden plantings, with the rainforest canopy coming close in to the house on the second story Daylight also lasted only 12 hours - from about 5:30am to 5:30 pm. Walking along the beach for who-knows-how-far, fording the streams, clambering over the driveway’s driftwood pile, and hiking up the drive to the house were not something that you wanted to do in complete darkness, with two small children.

Since we also wanted to spend our time on the beach during low tide, this was limited, too. We began to pray for the daily rains to come only during high tide and evening hours. For the first time in our lives, we were keenly aware of the high tide and low tide schedule and our schedule and activities were driven almost completely by nature - high tide and low tide, daylight and darkness. The only grocery store of any size was in Pavones, about 30 minutes down the road. It was about the size of a convenience store in the states - without the selection. In Punta Banco, we passed a much smaller store, but it’s selection was even more limited. Hector had promised us that he would meet us with the horse cart to bring the groceries back to the house. [Have I mentioned that Hector speaks no English? Based on my Spanish capability.















# MANUEL ANTONIO













# Manuel Antonio

Storms and rain again blew through the evening hours and continued into the morn-ing. This is our last day at this house and there are two day trips left that we have yet to do in this area. One to Cano Negro National Park is a six-hour round trip; the other, a return to Monteverde, is a four-hour round trip over BAD roads - neither sounds great in bad weather and would be pointless as we wouldn't be able to see any wildlife. We have exhausted all of the short trips and indoor activities in this area - and there is no more shopping to do - even Mason has exhausted every store in Tilaran. So, we decide to leave the area and head out to Manuel Antonio a day early. We're taking a gamble that we can drive on good roads during this bad weather and, hopefully, have nice weather when we get to Manuel Antonio National Park, where there are many things to do in a small area. As we headed down the road away from Lake Arenal, we laid a bet as to how far we would have to get from the Lake before the weather cleared up - every time we have driven out of this immediate area, the weather has been beautiful. We gave it an hour. In fact, it was no more than 30 minutes before we had bright sunshine and blue skies. The fog, rain, and wind were still visible in our rearview mirror. I am con-vinced that this is something the guidebooks don't tell you about the lake weather. It was about a five-hour drive to Manuel Antonio. We drove the PanAm highway for a while, then broke off and headed for the Pacific coast.

The last two hours of the drive were down the Costanera highway, which parallels the coast. This road is gen-eral-ly good, too - at least according to Costa Rican standards - two lane, paved, one-lane bridges, regular potholes. Maximum speed on even these major roads is 60 to 80 kph, which translates to about 35 to 50 mph. The opportunity to go 80 kph is rare. One innkeeper told us that if they ever improved the roads, everyone would realize how small the country really is [about the size of New Hampshire and Vermont combined]. We stopped at a Soda along the road, where we could park the car within view. The Soda had trophy fish heads mounted one wall - not the whole fish, just the head, mounted as we would a deer trophy.



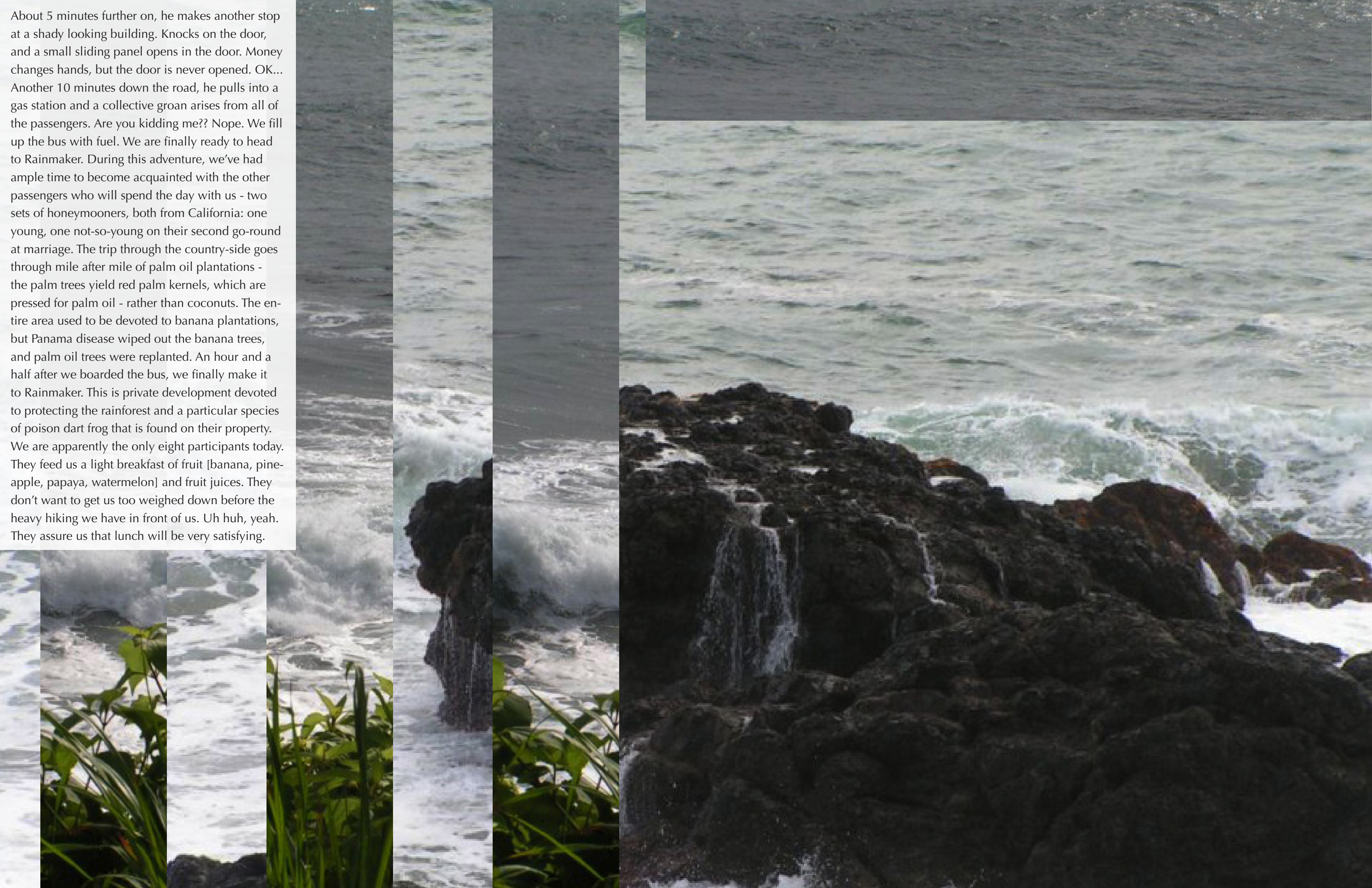


The Hotel Villa Bosque is a beautiful, Costa Rican hotel, built in a motel style with all of the rooms opening outward. The lobby, reservation desk, and restaurant are all open air, and there is a terrace pool on the second level. Everything is built with hardwoods or painted white. The lobby area is tiled, with sofas and hardwood furniture and plants – and it is charming to see such a nice room in an open air setting. We checked in at about 3p and tried to let the kids swim before the afternoon rains started. They got in about 15 minutes before it started to lightning and I made them come in - just enough to whet their appetite. The hotels here are all air-conditioned because the coastal weather is hotter and muggier than most other areas of the country. So, Tony is happy inside. They also have cable TV...in Spanish. The kids are apparently so starved for a cartoon that they are willing to watch Scooby Doo with Spanish overdubs. They become glued to the screen while Tony and I go down to the lobby to make arrangements for tomorrow's activities. We had dinner at the hotel restaurant to avoid having to get in the car again. Good pasta and fish. Although the hotel rooms are air conditioned, nothing else is. So, even a good dinner involves sitting in a lot of sweat. The restaurant had bird feeders around the perimeter, so we watched the birds come and go - even their common small birds are different than ours - no sparrows, wrens, cardinals, or jays. It is fascinating to watch all of the different kind of birds that are so different from ours back home. There are two particular kinds that I enjoy - both dark black. One has a bright red lower abdomen; the other, a bright red mantle. There is also a common bird that is mostly yellow, like a canary. The heat finally got to me about half way through dinner, so I headed to bed. Tony took the kids out for a final swim to cool off.

We made reservations to go to the Rainmaker Conservation Project, which is about a 30- minute drive outside of town. The bus is supposed to pick us up at 7:10a - not our best time of day, but we're trying to adapt to an earlier schedule. The bus is prompt, and it also stopped at two other hotels in the area, which took about 30 minutes. The roads through this highly developed coastal area, go up and down numerous hills. Al-though most are paved, they are only about a lane and a half wide [two cars can squeeze by each other, brushing mirrors], steep, with some serious roadside ditches. I find it amazing that a bus can navigate through here at all, but there are dozens of them. At one point, our bus met a dump truck coming the other way. There is definitely not enough room for both of us to pass abreast on the road. It is a Costa Rican standoff for a few minutes to decide which is going to back down first, before we begin backing down the hillside to a wider spot in the road. After the bus driver had all eight of the passengers on board, he heads out. About 10 minutes down the road, he stops at a Musmanni chain bakery - breakfast for us, maybe [this is included in our tour price]? No, breakfast for the bus driver.



About 5 minutes further on, he makes another stop at a shady looking building. Knocks on the door, and a small sliding panel opens in the door. Money changes hands, but the door is never opened. OK... Another 10 minutes down the road, he pulls into a gas station and a collective groan arises from all of the passengers. Are you kidding me?? Nope. We fill up the bus with fuel. We are finally ready to head to Rainmaker. During this adventure, we've had ample time to become acquainted with the other passengers who will spend the day with us - two sets of honeymooners, both from California: one young, one not-so-young on their second go-round at marriage. The trip through the country-side goes through mile after mile of palm oil plantations - the palm trees yield red palm kernels, which are pressed for palm oil - rather than coconuts. The entire area used to be devoted to banana plantations, but Panama disease wiped out the banana trees, and palm oil trees were replanted. An hour and a half after we boarded the bus, we finally make it to Rainmaker. This is private development devoted to protecting the rainforest and a particular species of poison dart frog that is found on their property. We are apparently the only eight participants today. They feed us a light breakfast of fruit [banana, pineapple, papaya, watermelon] and fruit juices. They don't want to get us too weighed down before the heavy hiking we have in front of us. Uh huh, yeah. They assure us that lunch will be very satisfying.

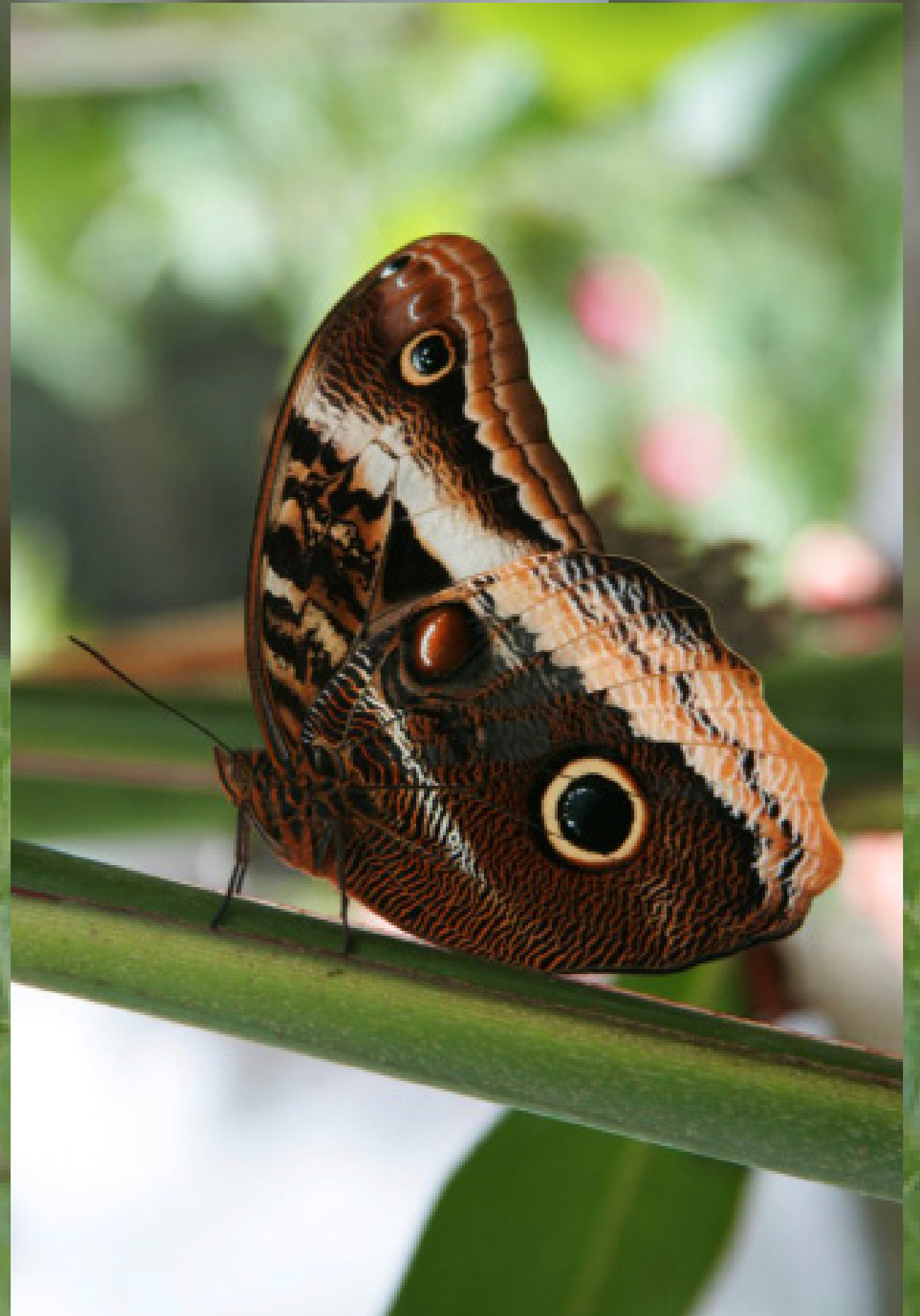




# WILD LIFE



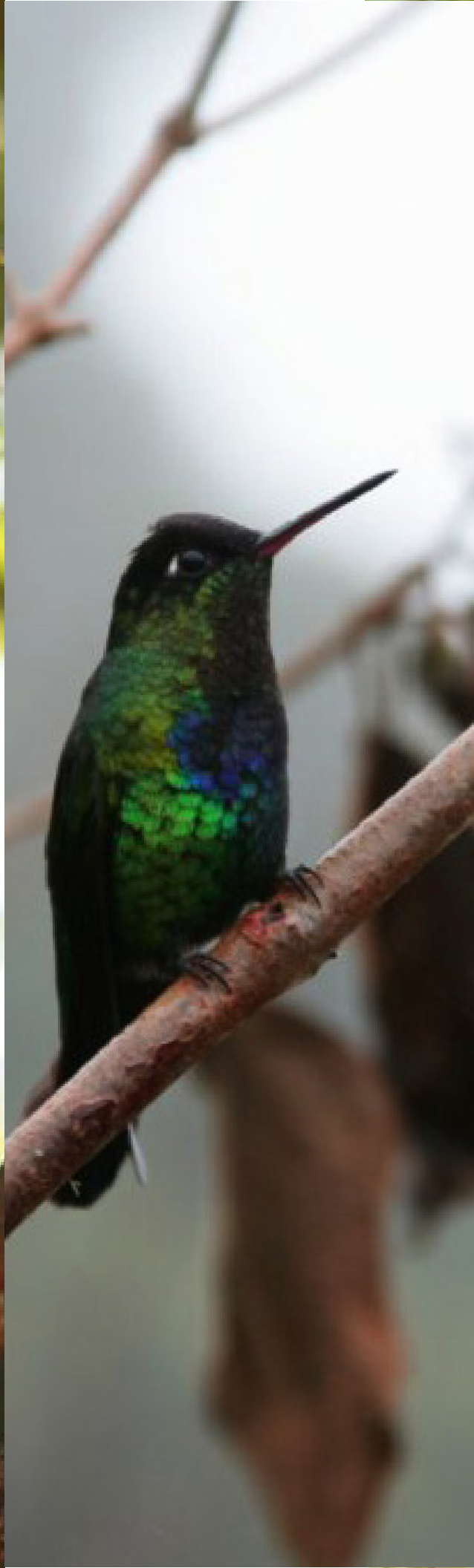




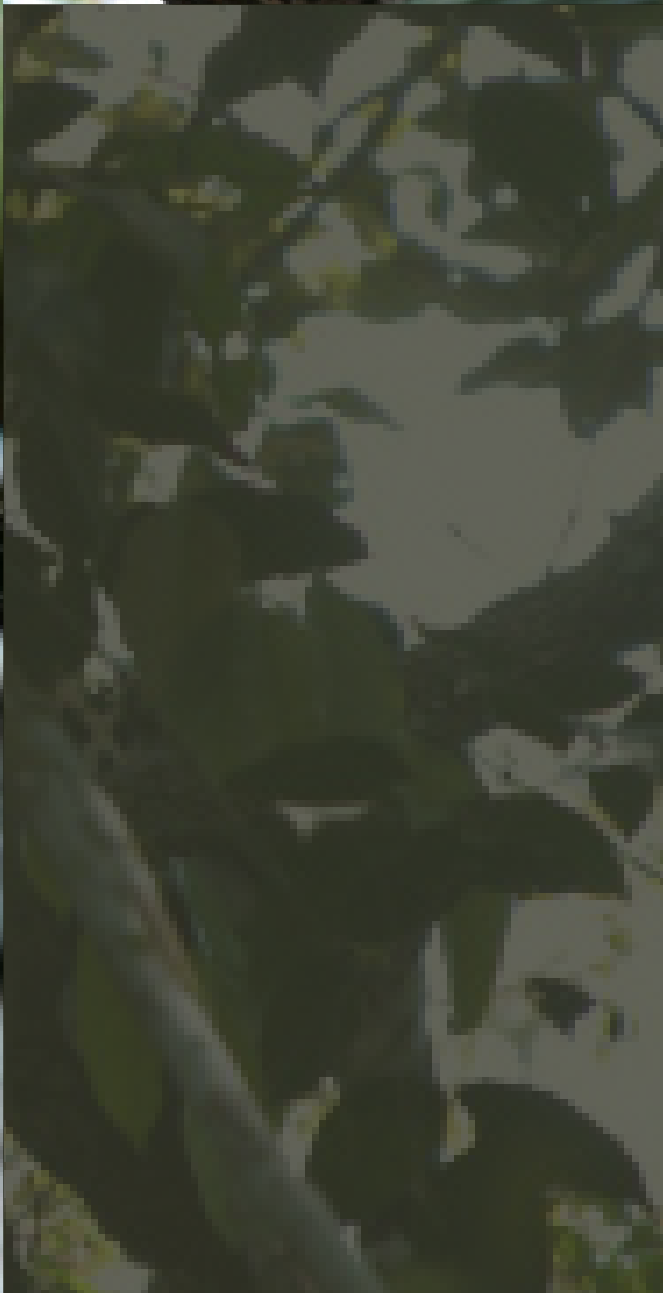
















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