

Costa Rica Trip 2007

Here is a story of the 'trip of a lifetime':

I woke extremely early at 6.00a.m. and whilst still half asleep, packed a few last minute objects and scrambled into the front seat of the car. I turned the radio up in an attempt to wake me up a bit more. I waved goodbye to my family and set off to collect Kirsty and Emily. They were both ready to rock and roll, in a drowsy sort of way. We were the first to arrive at 7.00a.m and when we were joined by the others, we checked in. We decided that it was time to have our first group photo and just when we had arranged ourselves perfectly to please picky photographer Mr Lobo, we were interrupted by a grumpy woman who wouldn't allow us to take the photo at check-in. Anyway, we continued through security without any problems. We sat around in Duty Free in a sleepy daze and finally approached the plane to board. Whilst in the waiting lounge Mr Lobo spotted the Wimbledon winner, Boris Becker. He signed a few autographs and we took some sneaky photos of him.

On the plane, I was next to David who had never been on a flight before! We took off and I watched the children's film, 'Flushed Away', which I enjoyed. I also enjoyed the meal of penne bolognese. Emily and Aneka were unwell on the journey because of the severe turbulence. We didn't do much else except watch snippets of odd films, play Uno and eat sweets.

I noted down some of the facts which were given on board.

Altitude: 3600 feet / 10972 m
Speed: 508 miles per hour / 812 km per hour
Head wind: 96 km per hour
Exterior temperature: -52°C



Throughout the flight the head wind altered and at times the turbulence was pretty rough. I observed that there was a lot of thick cloud cover over the Atlantic Ocean and was worried about what the weather would be like in Costa Rica. However, when we met land in Canada the cloud allowed me to see an amazing view. I witnessed a lot

of snow and a very white landscape with what looked like very few inhabitants and a dispersed population. As we were landing, we flew over Miami. This was interesting because it was visible from the air. The city was very well organised because it had been structured on a grid system like New York. We landed safely and began filtering through the intimidating American immigration system. I had a lovely friendly conversation with the officer allowing me through. He looked like Borat because he had a comical moustache and a dark mop of hair. In Miami, we went outside and marvelled at all the typically American things we could see such as yellow taxis and large hummers. We wandered through the random and uninspiring shops and then sat down for a quick dinner.

In Miami, the airport was a lot smaller and less commercial than Heathrow was. Miami was considerably older as well. I found that the immigration procedures were a lot more thorough in the USA than Britain.



Next we leisurely walked to the security desks in order to get onto our next flight. I went to get my passport and my boarding pass out however; I could not find my boarding pass. Everyone insisted on searching through my whole bag but it irritated me as I knew it wasn't where it was supposed to be and that I didn't have it. Therefore me and Miss Fahmy were left behind and had to quickly get one reprinted for me,

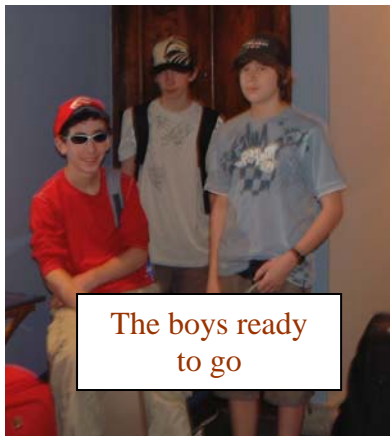
which was easily done. We ran to Gate 52 (of course the one that was furthest away!) and caught up with the others. We then discovered that everyone had to have their tickets reprinted anyway and as a result I didn't need to wait to have mine done because I already had a new one! So, the rest of the group ended up delaying the plane!! How ironic!

By this time, I was absolutely knackered. I spoke to the American girl sitting next to me on the flight and she was the same age as me from New Jersey on holiday with her family. We chatted about various things such as school and popularity (apparently the school are just like 'Mean Girls'), prom and sports. Furthermore, she told me that it had snowed only that day in New Jersey and the whole plane had to be defrosted before they could take off. This also happens often in countries such as Alaska.

We finally arrived in San Jose at midnight local time but 5.00am GT time. We got on the coach and met our guide and driver for the holiday, Olly and Carlos.

When we arrived at the hotel 'Casa Conde', I was very impressed. In my room were Megan, Emily and Robyn. The room we were in was huge and we even had a fully kitted kitchen. However, we didn't spend too much time exploring as we were so tired that we craved sleep. I crawled inside my bed and slept unbelievably well.

Day 2



The boys ready to go

I got up early because of loud bird noises outside and I was still a bit confused by the time difference. I had an appreciated shower and felt fresh and ready for the day ahead. I drenched myself in sun cream and insect repellent. Breakfast was amazing! I had the most delicious fruit and a really tasty omelette to follow. I liked this hotel!

Olly, our tour guide, is really sweet and I really admire his honesty and love for his country even though he can admit its imperfections. Firstly, we

drove through the periphery area of the town (suburbs) and it wasn't great living conditions, even though it was middle class. Next we drove past the lowest point of the Andes range, and we saw some gorgeous orange trees called Poro trees. Continuing, we went to 'Es Cazu' (right), the richer part of San Jose and you could see the improved quality of life with different cars such as Chevrolets and Jaguars. Eventually, we reached the very poorest part we would visit. The housing was pretty awful and the poverty was clear to see. School children were on the streets and they were obviously unhappy by our touristry presence because they were making rude sign language at us and throwing objects such as stones at our bus. In the end, Carlos decided that it was too dangerous to continue. I felt really bad about the whole experience. I was intruding in their lives and some other students were taking photos. I was intensely embarrassed. We were not there to help them we were there to gawp and be nosy, for example, if a bunch of millionaires drove past me in my home, village and life taking photos I would be deeply offended and used.



Whilst driving we were given a lot of information about the country. It has a population of 4.5 million in 51000 square kilometres. In San Jose, the capital city, the population is 1.5 million. Panama is on the south border, the Pacific Ocean on the west coast, Caribbean Sea on the East Coast and Nicaragua on the north border. It is found near the equator which is a tropical belt wrapped around the area of the world with the largest diameter. There is an 85-95% humidity rate in Costa Rica. The country is run by a Free Democratic Republic and this consists of the police, president and congress. The current president of Costa Rica is Oscar Arias Sanchez. Education is considered extremely important in Costa Rica. It is compulsory between the ages 12 and 17 and in the country there are

approximately 70 private universities. Olly admits the system is not perfect as many escape it, however, I believe we should applaud this poor country for educating the young instead of sending them out to work for money. There is also a state medical care system in the country. This runs on 9% of the workers' salary. The national sport is soccer and there are many loyal fans (later on in the trip, Costa Rica played Panama and won 2-0!). 67-70% of the population is catholic and this was evident with the amount of churches we passed. There are shanty towns in Costa Rica of which I have already explained. These come about for the following reasons. Many see Costa Rica as a place with many work opportunities; therefore travel there illegally to earn money that can be sent off to their family in their home country. Furthermore, shanty towns provide schools, water and electricity and this is seen by some a luxury. Earthquakes have been known to occur here. The last big one was in 1991 which measure 7.2 on the Richter scale.



As we drove to our next destination we passed 3 interesting things worth mentioning. Firstly, was an Ox cart. These were used over more than 100 years ago to transport coffee to support trade. Next was the president's house (left). This was extremely fascinating because there was very little security and it was on a public road unlike Tony Blair's home on Downing Street. I think this highlights the trust in the country. Finally, the Pope's house, he does not

live here all the time but stays there when he visits the country.

The following location was the market which had been there since 1880. I did not like being here any more than driving through their streets. If anything this was worse. I felt uncomfortable because I was in the way of many and felt we were invading their private lives once again. The fact that I was a tourist made irritated me because I felt so out of place. We were the minority and it was incredibly claustrophobic and maze-like. I felt intimidated by the immense number of Cost Ricans and I felt awkward and embarrassed. However, when we split into our 4 groups to complete some mini-tasks, it helped because there weren't so many of us and it was more manageable. The mini tasks were given to us by the teachers and these were them:

1. To get a photo with best looking Costa Rican monument.
2. Bring back something that reminds you of a geography lesson.
3. To get a photo with 'Blanco Lobo'.
4. Buy something that reminds you of another member of staff.
5. Collect as many different Costa Rican coins as possible.
6. Find a cheesy Costa Rica postcard for Mr.Houghton.
7. Buy the most exotic tropical fruit you could find.

8. Collect as many names of multinational businesses or companies in CBD.
9. Get a photo with an intriguing Costa Rican person.
10. Note 5 differences and 5 similarities between San Jose and London.

Once we had got out of the market, my feelings improved slightly. We were walking through a pedestrianised area called Central Avenue and it was clear that there were a lot of needy people in this city.

We reached the central town square and admired the theatre (right) which was one of the main attractions of San Jose. It was incredible and was built around 1890. Olly was so proud and I felt honoured to be there.

We followed onto the fort, and we took in the story of how Oscar Sanchez scrapped the army and invested money in other things, such as education, after the Civil War. The fort has been transformed into a museum for the benefit of tourists and local people in search of jobs.



Olly took us next to a monument which I thought was similar to Stonehenge because it was a sort of mystery how it occurred. They were perfectly formed balls of granite made by the native people, before the Spanish (Christopher Columbus) found it. When the Spanish discovered it, they believed gold was stored in the middle and therefore, cut them open, only to find nothing. It is a mystery because they were perfectly formed spheres made without tools.

Our next destination was the Mall. We had a McDonald's lunch. I realised that the market we visited and the shopping mall were provided for two very different audiences or classes. Also the shopping hierarchy was different because in the market you were able to haggle, however the mall was very similar to the shopping centres in Britain. I bought a pair of boxer shorts and some earrings. Here, because it was so similar to home, I was extremely comfortable and felt no embarrassment.

Olly once again proudly took us for a quick tour of the University. I was impressed by the extent of it, education seems very important and I believe this is very good.

We headed back to the Hotel and did the presentation of our completed tasks. This is what my group did for each one:

1. Picture with the magnificent theatre
2. A football with various flags on
3. Didn't get it but got a photo with 'El Lobo' which means wolf.
4. A sheep for welsh Miss Kendall

5. 7 coins
6. No postcard so made one
7. Chacharua
8. Honda, Volvo, Microsoft, Jaguar, Citroen, Ferrari, Universal Studios, MacDonald's etc. This shows many multinational companies have invested here and have congregated in the CBD.
9. Security guards
10. The table displays what we wrote:

Differences	Similarities
Drive on different sides	Town Square
More open space	Theatres
CR is an LEDC	Compulsory Education
Quality of life	Pigeons
Language	Street performers
Plug sockets	Street markets

We haven't heard who has won yet, however I believe we will!

We had dinner, at which I ate a chicken Caesar salad. We had a most interesting conversation with our waiter Jersom who thought Emily was German! We returned to our room to pack our suitcases which did not take long. In a last minute decision, I went swimming with Robyn, Anna and the boys. It was well funny in the big pool; we had a handstand competition and then went into the Jacuzzi which burnt me almost literally. Anna dropped the key for her room between the slots of the decking and she had to get a new one! We weren't in there long before we were needed in our room. Got into bed and slept really, really well!!!!

Day 3

We had another ridiculously early morning at 5.40. However traffic could be heard outside already. I had a tasty breakfast, sat in the sun for a while and then set off. First off, the idea that we would win the presentation competition was badly inaccurate, we came last! Olly has been talking about the development of his country and explains that it has developed over a very short amount of time. There was an uncontrolled expansion of industry and economy. However, there is a current attempt to change the capital by introducing more pedestrian areas etc. He has also discussed the attempts to protect the country, 34% protected, e.g. National Parks. I also observed that we were stopped at a toll station, where we had to pay to continue on the Pan-American Highway. This is a method to collect money and hopefully reduce the amount of vehicles (sustainable). We passed through City of Mangoes.



We stopped off at a coffee plantation and picked our own coffee. It looked like red berries to start with, however, when squeezed two of beans came out. There are two beans in each berry. Olly told us a lot about coffee and the effect that it has had on the country.



Coffee originated in Ethiopia and has been used by humans for approximately 1000 years. By the 14th century, it had become hugely popular and it was smuggled to further places such as India. By the 17th century, the first ever coffee houses were opened after the Pope approved drinking it. A French Naval Officer introduced it to the Caribbean in 1750. Then, in 1790 Tomas Guerrilla, the leader of Costa Rica at the time, brought it to the country to try and improve its economy. Almost half the population began farming coffee as an alternative to tobacco because special awards such as land were given to those that switched. In the centuries that followed, coffee has strongly supported the country's economy. It has been so successful there because of the perfect conditions for growing the coffee. Conditions that are needed are rainfall, acidic soils, equatorial temperature and a specific soil composition. Costa Rica has all these, thanks to the volcanicity of the island, and has developed a very good reputation for rich and first class quality coffee. There are two types of coffee and these are *Arabic* and *Robusta*. Costa Ricans grow *Arabic* and uniquely pick their coffee by hand. After being picked the beans are fermented for 36 hours, then sun dried and finally



stored. The flavouring comes from the roasting of the beans which occurs before being stored.

Everyone bought plenty of coffee and we got back on the bus to continue. An interesting fact that Olly informed us is that bananas are the biggest herb (or 'erb') in the world! We drove past some poverty ridden areas which include features such as favalas. We were now on our way to Poas volcano. Costa Rica is in the 'Ring of Fire' around the Pacific Ocean. There are 112 volcanic mountains in 2000 square miles of the country. 9 of which are very well-known, these are:

- Orosi
- Ricon de la Veja
- Tenorio
- Miravyas
- Arenal
- Poas
- Irazu
- Valva
- Torialvan

A volcano is simply an opening in the earth's surface through which pyroclastic material is emitted. Poas is a strato volcano, this means it has been built upwards by layers and layers of volcanic ash forming a cone shaped mountain. Poas is also a compound volcano and this means that there is more than one crater. It still only works with magnetic chamber. Magma is different from lava because it is inside of the earth. As this volcano is not caused by a collision of plates gases are what causes eruptions, this is called friatic eruptions. Poas has been active for 11,000 years and has the most acidic lake in the world in the caldera with a pH 0. It is the most studied volcano in the world. It last erupted in 1953 but the last big eruption was in 1910, when there was a 15km tower of smoke and 600 tonnes of ash. It receives 300,000 visitors a year.



When we got out of the bus, a smell hit us immediately. It was the smell of sulphur which is slightly similar to the smell of egg. It was highly concentrated because we were near the caldera and this is where sulphur is emitted. There was a quick toilet break and then began walking towards the volcanic lagoon. Mr Lobo was telling us how amazing it would be but I did not expect it to have a huge impact on me. We walked through what looked like dense jungle, which we later on found out was called a 'cloud forest'. I looked down at the floor before looking up but when I did it was stunning, almost unreal. There was a grey lagoon in the centre of the caldera which was surrounded by the cloud forest. We were at an altitude of 2574m and the sulphur was visible because of yellow stains on the rocks. In the far distance Arenal was visibly erupting. We were slightly higher than the clouds and the surrounding tree just added to the picture. It was an unforgettable sight; however, lots of photos were taken just in case.

On the walk back to the tourist centre, we stopped several times to observe the vegetation. For example, a goneria is a really big leaf that has been around since the times of the dinosaurs. It was nicknamed a poor man's umbrella, because it is a natural umbrella. We also witnessed a plant that was used to be written on. It was thick and we used it as a fan. Olly also explained about romelia, a flower that monkeys eat as a type of fast food and is in the same family as pineapples. He informed us that the only orchid (national flower) that can be eaten originated in Costa Rica and is vanilla. Furthermore, we were shown an epiphitus which is a flower that fill with water and monkeys use them as fresh water sources.





We arrived at the Peace Lodge very hungry but first we visited the butterfly house.

There were many intriguing and intricate designs not only of the wings but the cocoons. I was particularly impressed by the blue ones and Emily was really pleased that one landed on her. Next stop was the humming birds. They were absolutely tiny and incredibly fast. Lunch was thoroughly enjoyed and we took pictures by a mini waterfall. We had a quick look at some snakes and a typical Costa Rican home before heading towards the waterfalls.

The waterfalls got us all wet with spray when we arrived. The first one was 26m high. When we climbed further down the geographical effects of the waterfall could be seen. A plunge pool had formed and erosion had created a gorge. They were very impressive and extremely large.



Surrounding us was the rainforest and to illustrate the feature and structure of a rainforest I drew the following diagram.

We got back onto the coach again to the next location, the hotel. Olly spotted a toucan and got everyone extremely hyped up and excited especially Mrs Fahmy! Also, we passed a few examples of slash and burn.



This is when locals cut down the forest and burn it. It is a technique of deforestation. We stopped quickly at a pineapple plantation and I learnt that they grow underground!

We got to the hotel and explored our rooms. Our one was the biggest because we had 4 beds in our room. It was great! We had our journals checked and then had a typical Costa Rican meal of pork and rice. In our free time, we went swimming in the dark as the lights were broken. We played various games and had loads of fun, especially piggy backing)! After getting chilly, we

congregated in the central area on the top floor and chillaxed. We were also given an unwanted strip tease from some of the locals! When they walked off we were able to sit out on the balcony and chat. It was nice to have the whole group together. A security guard told us we had to go to our rooms and we obeyed, immediately going to bed. I had a weird and wonderful dream.

Day 4

I woke up at 6.30 and had a shower before leaving the room for the day. It was Jimmy's birthday and at breakfast we threw a small surprise sing-along with plenty of balloons. After completion, the day began with yet another stint in the coach. We passed Turribiba which is the final mountain in the Central American range. This highlights the east, Caribbean and west, Pacific divide.

When we arrived at Hacienda Pozo Azul we put on harnesses even though horse riding was the first activity we were going to take part in. I climbed on board my horse which was called Elle. I was pretty scared but



when I look back it was stupid. We rode our horses along a rough road and then into the tropical rainforest. This was a magical moment because it finally clicked for me that I was in the *actual* rainforest and the immensity of it. Emily's horse went a bit psycho and ran

off out of control. She later described it as the scariest moment of her life! In the forest the elements were present, for example, lianas and emergents. It is exactly how I imagined it to be, however, more vegetation grew below the canopy than I expected because of the darkness caused by the canopy. When we came out of the rainforest, my horse sped up and it was really good fun. Overall I had a really great time and considering the amount of horse riding experience I had in the past I did well.

Next we went very deep into the jungle in order to zip wire. This was excellent! We were connected to cables and we went whizzing through the canopies. Megan was quite petrified by the thought of this but managed to complete all of them. This activity once again highlighted the many layers of the rainforest. We were high in the thick canopy and the emergents were evident. I saw many vines and lianas this day and was amazed by the

thickness of them; it reminded me of 'Tarzan'. The topography of the rainforest is interesting as it all grows on hills and I didn't see many flat areas of rainforest which may also explain the small population of rainforest areas. The final one that we did was about 1000 feet long and went directly over the large river. The view was breathtakingly incredible. This activity was fantastic and I thoroughly enjoyed it!

We were all hot and bothered by this point, so we happily went rafting in the cold water. It began with a brief safety procedures talk and then we divided into boat groups. In my boat was Megan, Emily, Matt, Kirsty and an American girl from Tennessee called Kelly and our instructor was called Ronny. The rapids that we went down were only scale 1 and 2 but we still got wet all the same. At certain points, we were allowed out to swim and once this included down rapids but only Kelly and I did this. We played a game that when Ronny said 'SWITCH', we had to switch places with someone else on the raft. This was funny because the raft wobbled so much and a few of us nearly lost our balance. Then, when we were in another calm bit of water we asked if we could go swimming but Ronny said we all had to stand around the edge and when we tried, he pushed us all in, it was great! Getting back into the boat was also funny! He had to yank us up head first into the boat. I had a wonderful time but also noticed some geographical features of the river. Firstly, the fastest flow of water was on the outside of the bends. This is because the water has to travel further than water travelling round the inside of the bend, like a running track. The instructors used this to their advantage by using the current to bump into rocks, on some occasions knocking people out!

Furthermore, erosion and deposition was visible. On the outer bend there were beach like areas where sediment had been deposited because of a slow flow of water. On the outside of the bend, where the most intense erosion takes place that is a cliff like appearance and the banks were slightly undercut. In addition, the water was very shallow throughout because of the arid conditions and rapid evaporation rates. There were a few confluences along the river. This is when two rivers join. Unfortunately, that was the end of our adventures and we said goodbye to Ronny.

Thankfully, we had lunch next and it was lovely. I reflected back on the day and thought that today; I had been offered a greater taste of the country's bio-diversity. I saw:

- Toucan – in a tree outside at breakfast
- Ant – an extensive trail, all carrying large pieces of leaf
- Howler Monkeys – I heard them howl (can be heard for 2km)
- Iguana – In and under a tree at lunch
- Elegant black and red bird

After lunch, we were able to preview the DVD of our activities that was available to buy. It was really good and the funniest was Simon. Half of his

harness broke towards the end and his reaction was incredibly funny. We laughed at him for ages! We got the coach back to the hotel and I realised that the sun was setting at about 6.00. This is roughly the same time as the sun rises in the evening. This is because the country is very close to the centre and would therefore, have pretty even days and nights, 12 hours long. This will occur all year round. Dinner followed and then everyone retreated to our room where we watched a highly entertaining television programme. When this finished, there was a little rave in our room. Everyone left at about 10:30 and we went to bed.

Day 5

Woke up 7.00 to the Ordinary Boys - good sleep!! I packed and had breakfast, then got on the coach to boat. When I climbed on board and observed the surroundings - they were magnificent. The variety of vegetation was apparent. Also, on the banks of the river you could see the different layers of soil.

On the trip we saw:

- Firstly a huge iguana, that took a time to see as it was well camouflaged in the foliage.
- A Green/Black Ibis that is famous in Egypt.
- A bright red wood-pecker.
- Some stunningly beautiful orange butterflies.
- Really random cows, dogs and people dotted along the route.
- This one I was really excited about - Howler monkeys. They were really loud and seeing them in the wild completed one of my hopes for the holiday. Howler is one of only four types of monkey in Costa Rica. The others include spider monkeys and squirrel monkeys.
- Finally, at the furthest point from the hut was a caiman! It was excellently camouflaged and quite small but I was proud to have seen it.

We got off the boat and onto the coach again. We had a little trouble finding the school, but when we got there it was worth it. There were only two very small huts. The plot was very small but included a football pitch. There was a really old and shanty hut where women were cooking, and a new looking building including toilets with running taps and a largish classroom. We discovered that this new block had been paid for by the previous visiting students from Vyners.

We began with our presentation, in which we spoke about school, the timetable, England holidays and a few other things. I was part of this



presentation. Next we presented the teacher with our donation of \$2501. I was the one to hand it over and I felt immensely honoured and proud to fulfil this duty. When the teacher expressed her gratitude, I admit I was holding back my tears and emotion with a huge grin!



Next, came the fun and games. All the clothes were distributed and we began interacting with the children. They were amazingly cute and everyone was using the best Spanish that they could. Speaking Spanish to the children was good fun. I gave out balloons and bubbles, which I believe they enjoyed greatly. I made friends with a lot of them. However I only knew a few of their names, as most of the time I couldn't catch what they said

and just smiled!! There was Celina, who was sooo cute and Evaline who I played football for only a few minutes with. The boy Megan played with was tiny and liked blowing up balloons just to let them go and hear it make a funny noise! We also tried some food which they had cooked; it was really nice, before having to leave.

Our visit to the school was incredibly touching. Whilst there, someone commented on how depressing it was, but I disagree with this. For me, it was probably the most positive and proud moment of my life. I found the happiness and carefree attitudes of the small children, despite their circumstances, were incredibly uplifting and inspiring. This amazing experience has added to my knowledge of different ways of life and cultures. It has also been aspect-changing as I feel privileged and overwhelmingly thankful for everything I have ever had. Furthermore, in the future, I will try not to sacrifice my happiness for material things!



We arrived back to the hotel for the final time to eat lunch. We met an American girl from California, whom was curious about our group. She is studying Spanish and was on an exchange for 5 months. Lindsay was interested in our trip to the school, impressed by the whole charity-giving thing. We also compared accents, with words like “Harry Potter” and “water”, it was good fun.

I once again got in the coach on the way to the next destination. It was a three hour journey!! I was thinking about the rate of deforestation. Although I saw evidence of deforestation, “slash and burn” and logs, I didn’t see any occurring. I do not know whether this is because we were always been in the protected areas. The rate is supposedly very high so I was expecting a lot more to be happening around me. We stopped briefly at Iguana Café and watched some enormous ones! I had some ice cream and a coke!

We had a quick stop at the hotel and our rooms were little huts! They were so cute! Unfortunately it was raining so we could not go on the boat trip around Arenal volcano. So, off we went to the hot springs. On the way, there we stopped in the first town of the country to have let women vote in the election.

Then we reached the hot springs and it was raining really badly. This is because of the tropical water system I showed earlier with a diagram. This also meant that we couldn’t see the volcano erupting, which is slightly disappointing but we were able to feel the heat in the hot springs. They were powered by the geothermal energy provided by the volcano. We started lower down and made our way up the hill jumping in various pools! There was a really boiling one and it was so funny Anna jumped it but it was so hot, it seriously burnt!! We continued running from pool to pool in the rain and simply our swimming costumes. It was wicked. Then we discovered some secret passage ways through the jungle. I was really scared but we didn’t get lost so it was ok. We also all ran up some huge hill only to find there was nothing there.

We got down for dinner on time and it was sooo nice. They had decorated fruit into people, it was great. Everyone left except me, Emily, Megan and Matt so we chatted. Next, we went to the bar and had some smoothies. I had a strawberry, pineapple and bananas, and it was the nicest one I have ever had. Then we mucked around with umbrellas and the seats at the bar, pushing Matt off! We went off to see the others at the end and practised advertising technique - great fun!

That was unfortunately the end of the best day so far. It was still absolutely tipping down when we got back to the hotel so we went straight in and to bed. We each had a double bed and they were sooo comfy!! I

slept well for most of the night but awoke earlier than I should of because I was really cold.

Day 6

As I said it was early morning, I was awake at 4 and struggled to get back to sleep. It was a quick getaway and we got on the coach. Megan's case broke, so we had it next to us on the coach.

We passed Arenal Lake and here are some facts:

- Arenal means Sand Pit
- Lake is 546m above sea level
- Volume = 2146 million m³
- Length = 87.8 km
- Dam constructed 1974 – 1979

Many people had to relocate as a result of this hydro-electric project. However, it now provides a quarter of the population with electricity from the Hydro Electric Power station. Olly also told us about the first eruption in 1770. It killed 87 people and created craters 25m wide by large volcanic bombs.

After a short time, we stopped at La Fortuna. Here, it was clear how the volcano can help the local area. All the shops were for tourists which provides tertiary/secondary jobs; this is one of the benefits of volcanoes. Although an active volcano is potentially dangerous, it attracts a lot of tourist and scientific attention. All of this can be fuelled into a money-maker, improving the economy, an example is the hot springs.

As we were driving, we entered the rain shadow which is on the Pacific side of the island. This is where the weather considerably improves, and therefore, it was hot and sunny. I began to really need the toilet, so we had a very quick toilet break and continued for another half an hour. Here we stopped again and had a speedy lunch.

We stopped yet again to look at some huge crocodiles that reminded me of Peter Pan! Darcoles Bridge (most polluted river) was where we stopped. Just before this we went past Carada National Park which is 4700 hectares.

We finally arrived at our new resort – Jaco Beach. It was incredibly hot and we went to our room immediately, turning on the air conditioning. It wasn't too bad – we had a TV with English channels, and a decent shower.



We all went swimming for a short while, however, it was a bit boring as there was nothing much to do. I got out and went back to the room but the key would not work so after a small panic we found out we were able to get new ones from reception quite easily.

We relaxed for a while and then showered and prepared for dinner, which was really nice. Whilst I tucked into some delicious chicken, Matt had his usual rice rolls!

Afterwards, our little crew (me, Megan, Emily and Matt) sat and relaxed on the beach. We observed and commented on the romantic setting with the soft sound of the waves, the night time heat, the palm tree and the stars. We discussed the stars for a long time. You could see thousands more than the usual in London, because of there is less light pollution in Costa Rica. They were rather hypnotising. We talked about the constellations and how the enormity of the universe hurts our brains. When everyone joined us, we played a huge game of charades which was a good laugh! Next, we went to the games room where Matt thrashed me at pool and connect 4! Next, we two had a ride in the children's electric bus, it was so much fun!

Whilst I was sitting down we started chatting to some guys from Panama. They didn't really like Costa Rica and said that Panama was a lot better, but then again, they would say that! They were funny and one of them but it really reminded Megan of someone annoyed her that she couldn't work it out. I was trying to speak Spanish but it were they broken. When we asked how old they looked thought we were, they said I about 20! Oh dear!

After a while we escaped to bed chatted only for a short time before falling into a deep sleep.



and falling

Day 7

Woke up earlier than some, as me and Megan had decided to take part in the crocodile safari because it was probably the only time we would ever be in Costa Rica! So we went to breakfast where most of us wished Aneka a Happy Birthday. I noticed that Stephen T-shirt was inside out and it made me laugh! We left the hotel on the way to the activity.

Megan and I wanted to go to the toilet so we walked in front of the coach to get there when all of a sudden the bus began moving forward almost hitting Megan! Carlos immediately ran out and was extremely apologetic! It was funny though!

We got on the boat and looked subtly at the driver's leg that had loads of deep scars on and we assumed it came from a crocodile which made us all slightly apprehensive. We spotted plenty of birds (see leaflet). One of which I was really impressed by, but couldn't get a decent photo because my camera didn't have enough zoom. I had seen them in the zoo on various

occasions when I was younger and see the brightly coloured birds flying in the wild was incredible. It was one of those rare 'wow' moments! Actually now I think back though there were numerous 'wow' moments on the trip. Anyway, we obviously were shown some crocodiles – not as big as the ones under the bridge, however still pretty large. In my opinion, the driver was a bit of a psycho because he went slightly into the water with a chicken to goad the crocs towards him! When they reached the little old man he lifted the bait up making the crocodile emerge from the water. It was scary stuff! We were also shown the mangrove trees. These are very important for the balance of the rainforest, because they are the main vegetation that oxygenates the air. Furthermore, they work as a kind of cleanser for the water because the process of respiration help to clean the most polluted river in Costa Rica! We briefly played on the glockenspiel once off the boat and climbed back into the coach.

We were all allowed to have a relaxing afternoon, so I sat in the sun, only to regret it later on! Because it was Aneka's birthday, we congregated in the family room to host a surprise party. A crept up on her, who was on the beach and surprised her with a specially made cake and loads of yellow balloons. We then played some party games on the beach and I managed to cut myself



during one of them because the sand was not that deep. We abandoned the games though because of cases of sunburn and tiredness. Next, we went to our room and applied numerous layers of after sun. It was great! We went to a restaurant for Aneka's birthday and all of us were shattered, you could see people almost falling asleep in their dinner. We were entertained by some musicians who, upon request, played 'Feliz Cumpleanos' (Happy Birthday).

When we returned to the hotel Mr Lobo told us some bad news about Mr Foley back home. He had died of cancer. Although most of us already knew, hearing it from a teacher made it official and we could see how it had affected him and therefore, upset us. He was a great man and had achieved a lot in his life. Not much went on that night because along with this we were all tired so many tears were shed! It was understandably intense and emotional. I admired the way in which Mr Lobo had handled the whole situation and think everyone that went on the trip should be grateful that he suffered in silence on order to maintain our happiness throughout. We just went to sit on the beach in the amazing surroundings with our smoothies, and toasted him! He was amazing and shall never be forgotten.

Day 8

I awoke at 10, and therefore missed breakfast. We strolled down to the games room and played a game of pool. Began talking to some American people, who were really cool may I add, and they taught us some magic trick like 'Snaps' and 'Black Magic'! They were from New York.

We had a quick meeting with Mr Lobo about what we wanted to do this afternoon and we all chose shopping. So off we went with Miss Jones and Mrs Fahmy to the shops. We only went in two and spent the rest of the time in a restaurant for lunch! We did eat a lot on the holiday!

When we returned to the hotel, we had our last geography lesson of the trip! We went to the beach and examined the shape of the coastline. We concluded that we were standing on the bay and at either ends there was headland. This shape came about by process of erosion. The headland was made of more resistant rock and the softer rock of the bay eroded more easily and therefore, quicker. Sand I made up of the dominant rock of the area and the sand there was darker because the rock came from the volcanoes and the volcanic ash.

The deposition of this sediment creates the beach. This is because the waves have greater swash than the backwash. These are called constructive waves. All this means is that the waves are pushing more sediment onto the land than it is taking off of the land, therefore deposition occurs and a beach is formed. Destructive waves, such as a tsunami, are prevented by the headland at either end of the beach.

We then began our journey to San Jose and 'Casa Conde'. Had a quick stop off to look at the amazing view and continued. As soon as we got there we had a quick dinner and went to bed.

Day 9

Early start, however, it was needed in order to catch the flight. Flew to Miami and then stopped off there for a little while but didn't go to South Beach because we had been delayed an hour and forty minutes and there was not enough time. Caught the final flight, and slept most of the way home. When we arrived it was horribly cold but I was glad to see my family again. This really was the most amazing trip of a lifetime and I would like to thank all those involved, especially Mr. Lobo, Miss Jones, Mrs. Fahmy and Mr. Coulter for giving up their time and putting in so much effort in planning an amazing trip.

