

COSTA RICA BY MOTORCYCLE

Riding from Alberta down through the Americas was a thrill, but there's something truly special about Costa Rica

by *Kix Marshall, Red Deer, Alta.*



Costa Rica is on the bucket list of many Canadians and it was on mine, too. Only my list stipulated that I arrive via motorcycle. During the trip, I picked up on the fact that every country across the Americas is impressive in its own unique way. However, after exiting the calamity of less-developed

Nicaragua, the army-free country of tropical Costa Rica felt like another planet. It's the only country in the world to actually meet all five criteria set out in the environmental requirements of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A two-time best-performing country in the Happy Planet Index, in 2009 Costa Rica was



named the greenest country in the world by NEF (New Economics Foundation). In 2012, the country banned recreational hunting and has some ambitious plans to be carbon neutral by 2021. All of this is impressively packed inside a tiny country encompassing some 51,000 square-kilometres, making it slightly smaller than the province of Nova Scotia.

I'd left Canada from my hometown of Red Deer, Alta., some seven months earlier on a 2009 Kawasaki KLR 650 motorcycle and I'd arrived in a country with year-round heat and humidity. Costa Rica's warm, welcoming climate was a stark contrast from the cold, Canadian north where I'd started. Flora and fauna here grow at incredible rates. From the National tree—the Guanacaste, a colossal shade tree—to Blue Morpho butterflies the size of my hand, not to mention boa constrictors as long as my bike, there were wonders at every turn.

I made my first stop in the country's northern section, staying at a camping area operated by a Swiss couple who had started building a farm there some 20 years earlier. Since then, their land has blossomed into 100 acres of orchards, hiking trails and accommodations. It was bordered on one side by a slow wandering river offering good fishing—for the local crocodiles and people like me. On the other side, it was bordered by a small tilapia farm situated next to a horse ranch set in the base of the orchard.

The whole property was a magnet for wildlife, a side-effect of the welcoming tranquility and abundance of mango trees bearing delicious fruit, which were in season during my time there. I would often see monkeys take one bite of a mango, throw it on the ground and then get a fresh one, cheeky little fellas!

I was often beckoned by the gracious hostess first thing in the morning as she tried to recall what language I spoke from



the various options she had in her head. She would find a sloth or two hanging out in the treetops and made sure guests would see them. For such slow-moving creatures they seemed to appear high up in entirely different trees every day.

In the end, however, my most memorable sighting was first seen by a local cat, who seemed oddly out of place under my motorcycle one night after dark. Once I illuminated him with my flashlight, I could see this outmatched-kitty was staring down a six-foot boa constrictor! I'm not too keen on cats; however, this fuzzy feline actually saved me from stepping on the six-foot snake. The cat, my new best friend, continued to hold his ground while the two of us watched the boa slowly slither away. That night, I zippered up my tent right to the top, and continually check it throughout the night.

As a vacation destination, Costa Rica is a beautiful escape from a Canadian winter and is one of the most accessible tourist destinations in Central America. You can comfortably arrive there via plane. Or, if you like motorcycle adventures, you can arrive via the Pan American highway. ■

For more about Kix's adventure travel, visit www.KixMarshall.com.

Clockwise from far left: a Guanacaste tree; a monkey with a mango to go; Kix's trusty motorcycle; a "smiling" croc; Kix and his catch of the day.