

Costa Rica



Subject: call me catfish, not Ishmael



the title relates to a strange (ahablike) incident on lake nicaragua, but first more current news. just passed two days insan jose, costa rica and realized that I sort of missed the city life. most of the last five months have been spent in beach towns and villages. strange things happen everywhere, but city-strange-things are different than country-strange-things. for example, was walking on the main pedestrian mall insan jose when an english speaking dude confronted me

for money. he had an impressive pitch, a real spinmeister, so I gave him a few bucks. when walking away I found myself saying aloud "good schtick" meaning that I was impressed. unfortunately, there was a lady right in front of me who immediately turned and glared at me. clearly she thought I was making a lewd remark. she kept looking back, so I drifted into a store to look at things I had no interest in buying. the point is that trouble is always easy to get into, but not so easy to escape from.

one other city incident occurred at the zoo. played hide and seek with a spider monkey for a long time (I kept checking to make sure no humans were watching). but what was sad was that when I wanted to leave the little fella just didn't want me to go: kept climbing up to the highest point on their climbing apparatus and letting out a forlorn wail. the hardest thing about travelling is all the goodbyes that inevitably are part of staying on the move.

I ended up at the zoo because when I went to the supposedly famous jade museum I realized that going there required getting into an elevator. I had not been in an elevator for six or seven months and thought there was no need to break that run.

right now I'm in a place called Puerto viajo on the Caribbean coast of costa rica. in a few days I'll head south into panama perhaps to some islands just off the coast. eventually hope to get down to the canal and perhaps hitch a ride north on a ship. my main quest (since travelling is always better when you have a quest) is to find a hat that says panama on it. thereby I will finally (by definition) have a panama hat.

now, about ahab, his ship the pequod and my involvement in that. I think I last wrote about taking a speed boat from bluefields and indeed it was. starting at six in the morning, equipped with a 200 h.p. yamaha we sped up the rio escondito for two hours watching the jungle flash by. five hours of boneshaking bus then took me to a small city. there I decided to get off the trail (having a guidebook is mostly useful so you can find out where most of the tourists will be going and then avoiding those places). I asked locals if at the town of Puerto diaz there were boats to granada. they said there were, one thing I have (now) learned is that its useless to ask people about what's in the next town, because they have never been there. they are glad to tell you what they think you want to hear, so much for my cross examination skills. I should have asked "there are no boats in Puerto diaz going to granada, are there." then I would have got the right answer. two hours by truck later (15 kilometres) I found only three sailboats and a beat up boat with a marginal motor.

fortunately, one boat was going to sail at 10 p.m. to the island of ometepe. by the way, lake nicaragua is the 10th largest in the world, but more about the waves later, Puerto diaz has no hotel and two bars. at 4 in the afternoon both had drunk fishermen in them. I had 6 hours to kill, or at least get into a fight. my goal was to lie low but the drunks were not inclined to leave the gringo alone, it took a couple of rounds to keep them relatively quiet. however, at about 9 or so, they started fighting amongst themselves--even a dog got into the melee of five or six guys, at that time the captain (call him ahab) stood quietly at the shoreline waiting for his three crewmen to finish fighting. I stood by him and realized this has been written about before--dark night, mysterious voyage and somewhat demonic crewmembers. as we stood there, the rocks started flying, but ahab stood still arms crossed, so I did the same. the fight ended with only two guys

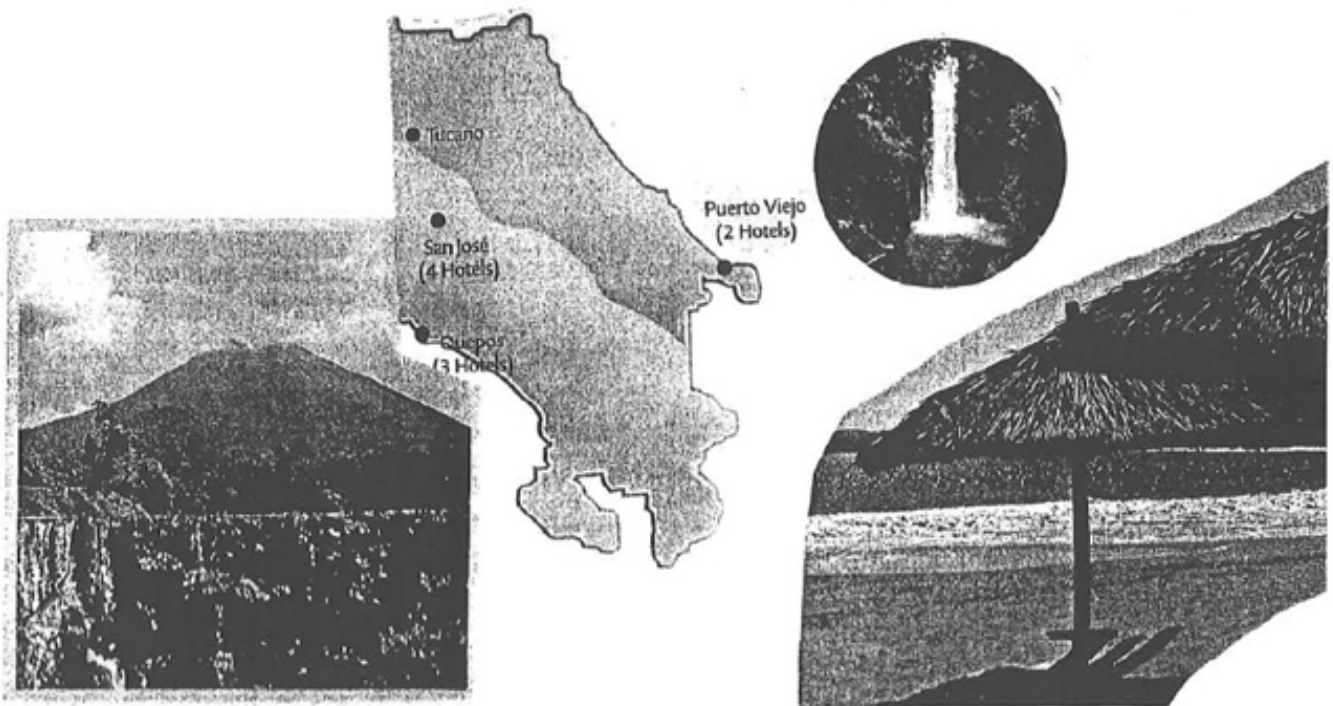
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down--I figure the booze finally caught up with them. we got aboard a small dugout canoe and poled to the sailboat: a wooden ship of about 25 feet called the ave maria (the name at least sounded hopeful). it was the captain, three crew and me. then a group of four more came aboard and lay low in the hold (there was a hold in the middle with an opening of about six feet square). the newcomers all had rocks and were expectantly watching for a boarding party, I figured I might as well play along, so told one of them I played baseball: he handed me a rock. by the way, baseball isnicaragua's most popular sport and poetry its most popular art. we watched a couple of boats out in the darkness, while the captain and crew got the sails ready. no attack came, so as the jib went up the four extras got off. I was glad to get out of that town.

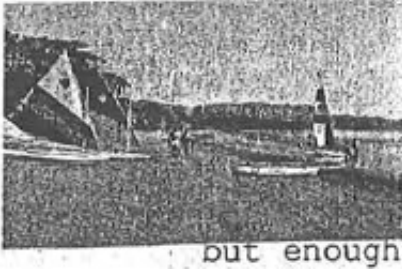
once the moon was up the light showed our destination: two massive volcanoes that make the island of ometepe. it would be a five-hour trip. that mostly went well, except we almost capsized twice. the waves got up to ten or twelve feet and the crew member who was watching the mailsail fell asleep.. when a gust of wind came the guy at the rudder was not able to trim the mailsail (that was the job of the guy asleep) so the wind just about pulled us over, but as Shakespeare says, ails well that ends well. we ended well at three in the morning. ahab et al were going to sleep on the boat, but I was glad to say so long, the port at altagracias (higher grace--ironically) is five kilometres from the town, so I started walking. en route I realized that it was pointless to walk into the town at that time, since no one was awake. but where to sleep until dawn. ometepe is a lush place and that means beasts of unknown type. once again baseball came through. just outside the town was a ball diamond with metal stands. that meant I could sleep off the ground, so I did. 24 hours after getting on the speed boat at bluefields I walked into altagracias, which was not my intended destination at all: I was headed for granada.



But enough of that. I'll leave off with something I wrote about the endless bus rides that are part of the centre experience:

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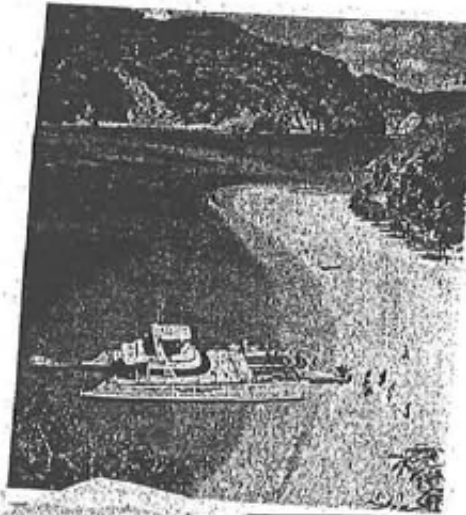
got shot at in Barcelona saw a knife in montego bay nearly drowned in Saskatchewan nbut hell, that was only play. lost my pants in antigua, and a knife between here and there. so when I stop I stare and wonder: am I here or over there? places all seem different and yet they're all the same. baton rouge or moulin rouge but its cuba where reds the game. became an expert in riding buses a pointless task it seems.

but they take you places, teach you patience and give you time to see your dreams. dust is not an option diesel just the same the driver is not the problem its the potholes that are to blame. so no one just goes nowhere and they go there really slow. but their dreams speed by, in the sky in the clouds, in the dust, in their eyes,, someone gets off somewhere but at the same time one gets on. someone's ultimate destiny is the place the other leaves from. but that's the way that life goes round each highway has two ways. this side for those going thisaway while the other, the other way. there's many ways to freedom said a wiser soul than me. yet others say there's only one, or else hell's your destiny.

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those people think they're on the right bus but I'm not so sure about that, with so many roads going somewhere and others coming right back, I took a bus to paquera or at least I thought that way. ended up in puntarenas which is twenty miles across the bay. so maybe that's our destiny. we think we're going somewhere while our dreams, the bus, the driver and road take us to places a long way from there.

well that wraps it up. just don't forget that everybody loves somebody sometime. until the next...
call me catfish