

Guatemala

Sent: Thursday, January 10, 2002 1:35 PM

Subject: trail of kilo laversec: part the second

The time has come the walrus said to speak of many things: of Guats, and rats, and ceilings fans, of garbage piles and things. still no direct word of the whereabouts of kilo laversec, but the trail gets warmer as I find myself (or at least attempt to do so) in antigua guatamala. this is a colonial city that was once the capital until enough earthquakes and lava convinced those in charge to fold their tents and silently sneak away. what is here is a tourist oasis of beautiful one story buildings (after a few earthquakes people tend to build short,) and wide cobblestone streets. the rest of guatamala is a different story.

To backtrack; took a boat up a river to make the transition from Mexico and might as well have been boating on the styx. the villages in northern Guatemala are stark and barren. the lush jungle around belies the fact that these people have next to nothing. showing my ignorance of this countries history, I said at the outset of my trip that it was my goal to find out why the mayans disappeared. the truth is that they live in great numbers, speak numerous authentic mayan dialects and wear bright (I mean bright) colors. for example, if a mayan man were to walk the streets of Canada in a business suit made in the color abundance they wear here, he would have a houndstooth jacket (red and cobalt blue), pants striped yellow and purple, a shirt in orange with green polka dots, a paisley tie of powder blue and black, cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. this is normal.

I too have been forced into wearing Guatemalan attire, since at my first visit to the laundry mat they lost my pants, the replacements are too tight and too short. welcome to travel. spent four days living way beyond the edge with a crazy american mahogany dealer. from flores in the north we drove jungle back roads at speeds that would have made us competitive in a rally race. old joke: "what's the difference between a rental car and a four-by-four?" a rental car will go anywhere. we had a rental four-by-four. in coban we were stopped at an intersection and received the mandatory obsessive honking from behind. mahogany man put the truck in reverse and rammed the car (I have to admit I have wanted to do that from time to time, but thats the difference between living over and just short of the edge: people such as mahogany man who are over the edge do such things). following standard justice procedures here (no one has insurance on their vehicles) mr. crumpled hood was paid \$300 u.s. at roadside. if the parties can't agree on a price or liability police are called in to settle the dispute and of course they take their cut. we have to remember that this is a country where more than 200,000 people were killed, 1,000s left homeless and untold others disappeared in the civil war that "ended" just two years ago. I get the feeling that its not over yet. however, theres a pretty standard gringo trail through central america with such highlights astikal (mayan ruins set in the jungle) and diving in the reefs off the Caribbean coast of honduras. perhaps i'll get to honduras and those reefs (I know kilo was there). indeed, life is what is happening while I'm busy making other plans. talk to you soon.
john

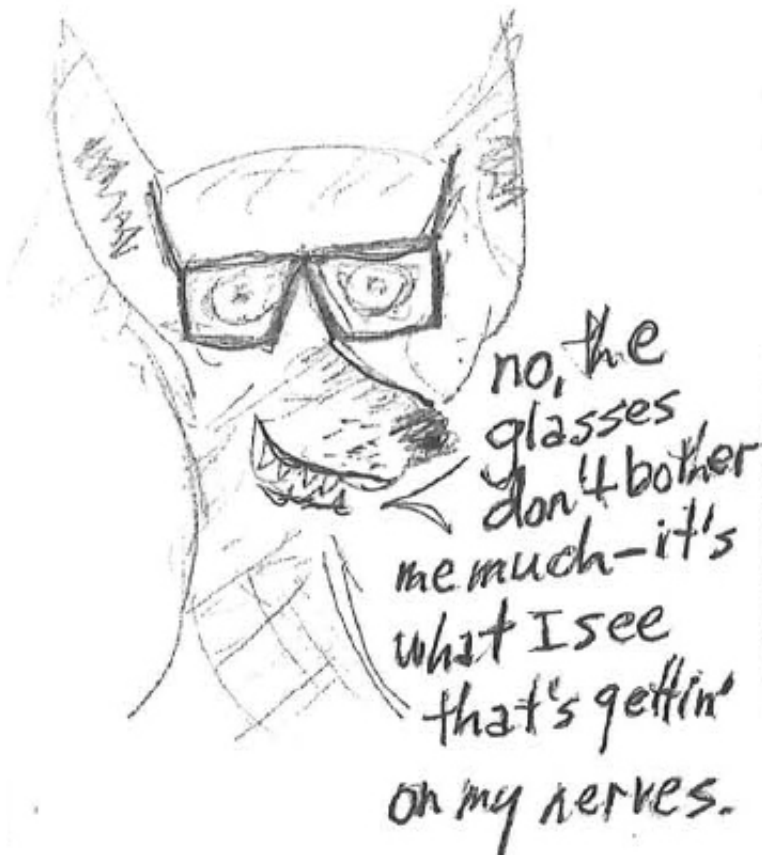
John Says This

About Being Inside the DR Congo

<http://johnsaysthis.com>

Sent: Mon, 21 Jan 2002 12:57:16 -0800

Subject: of turtle eggs and twin otters



Recently picked up a copy of the hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy because it makes the most sense out here. I'm still looking for a place that serves a pangalactic gargleblaster (the best drink in the universe according to that guidebook) and a bus that works on improbability drive. indeed, the chicken buses here in Guatemala are damn close to that: trips are not measured by the distance you cover, but rather by the time it takes to get there. maybe there is something to be learned from that.

as with Mexico, logic has to be tossed to the wind, but in addition reason and punctuation are gone in Guatemala. this is the first computer I've found with such punctuation as :z' () and--. so I thought I'd better use it. what is important about carrying the hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy goes way beyond the helpful tips it offers (for example how to catch a ride on a passing starship, or what bars don't play vagon poetry--the worst in the galaxy); most importantly, the guidebook has the comforting words "don't panic" written in bold print on the back cover and those are the most helpful words for the traveler. I will provide an example. last week spent four days on the pacific coast engaging my favorite sport down here (body surfing). for those of you who haven't tried it yet it is important to remember that it is a contact sport with no padding and no equipment. once you get by that, the rest is relatively simple: don't panic. there are two points in body surfing where it is important to remember those comforting words. the first is less difficult than the second. the first arises when you catch a big wave (usually bigger than you hoped) and fail to get ahead of it. this sport is about timing and patience: if you realize that you

can't get in front of the wave, then its best to wait until the next (the ocean is remarkably full of the things) . unfortunately, eagerness always- outweighs _patience, so more often than not I find myself jumping aboard late and that means the wave can say "gotcha." what happens then is that there is only a brief moment to panic (that is why this situation is less difficult than the second situation) before the wave slams you onto the sand with a triumphant "kablooie."

the second situation is different. it occurs when you are having a bit too much fun and forget that your body gets tired, suddenly as you swim to shore it is getting further away. That's when the helpful words on the back of the guide really help. by the way, the place where I found the most difficult waves I've ever swum is a place called montericco: black, volcanic sand and a village that is so caught in time that the pigs run free. just an update on my spanish: up until my latest set of lessons I thought I a of turtle eggs and twin otters was being funny when I'd tell people here that "I speak spanish like a child of two years." unfortunately, the pronunciation between "alto" and "ano" is subtle but important. the latter means asshole. so what I was saying was that I spoke spanish like a child with two assholes. fortunately, the problem with my pronunciation was corrected before the new year, when people say "feliz nuevo aio."

I could give you more details on the day to day happenings, but let it suffice to quote jimmy buffet from "he went toparis:" its a summary of a fella's life who went toparisto find answers to questions that bother him still ("some of its magic and some of it's tragic, but its been a good life all the same").

Just so I don't leave you with the impression that all is a cake walk here, I'll mention the girl I met in "the town where pigs roam free" who had just come back from getting a rabies shot. turns out a bat bit her while sleeping and that lots of people in the village had the same problem. makes me wonder if the Transylvanian tourist company is involved somehow. before I tell you about turtle eggs and twin otters, I just want to note that I'm stuck in the film "Casablanca." like the people there, I'm waiting for a "letter of transit" in the form of a bank transfer. what this emphasizes is the way travel highlights the day to day choices we make and their effect on our destiny. while I'm waiting, I'm contemplating a flight toquito, equador instead of continuing on improbability drive buses toHonduras. point is that one decision splays out into a myriad of different experiences; "I took the road less traveled by and that has made all the difference."

Now about those turtle eggs. turns out that there's a turtle hatchery near "the village where pigs run free" sponsored by donations from around the world. problem is that the Guatemalan guys who run it are getting very wealthy while the turtle population is dwindling. further, many of the poor folks who walk the beach to raid the turtle nests refuse to give up more than one dozen of the six or seven dozen eggs in each nest. the rest are sold in markets in the cities as a sex stimulant (I wasn't sure how to spell aphrodisiac). this summarizes the unfortunate day to day living necessitated by abject poverty.

And twin otters? as you may know the twin otter is made in Canada and it turns out that it is not only one of the premier planes for skydiving (climbs fast and carries 23 jumpers). at the private airport where "pigs run free" there are many twin otters landing to refuel and perhaps unload part of their precious cargo from Columbia. not only are the pigs running free in montericco. don't forget to let that old force be with you and run through you. also remember that "everybody

John Says This

About Being Inside the DR Congo

<http://johnsaysthis.com>

loves somebody sometime" and "keep those cards and letters coming in."