

## Nicaragua

**Sent:** Saturday, February 23, 2002 8:25 PM

**Subject:** of pirates and vagabonds



bluefieldsnicaraguais the place you oughta be, so I loaded up the boat and sailed the bluefields sea. sea that is, no movie stars, not even a sewage system, don't step in that gutter, ya hear. after all, this place is named after a dutch pirate by the name of blewfeldt, who took over the place for awhile in the i600s. dutch pirates weren't nearly as good to those they conquered as the romans were, and they weren't very nice either. the spanish track record here is dismal at best. for example, inhondurasthe currency is named after a moskito leader (lempira) who almost successfully lead his people against the spanish in the early 1500s, but was murdered at a so called peace conference by his hosts the spanish. clearly not a byob invitation.

but before I get more into the pirates, at update on your host vagabond (vagabundo in spanish). have spent the last week on the moskito coast, which is off the gringo trail, well, by a lot, a short flight took me to Puerto lempira and I knew right away things were going to be different when the plane landed on the gravel runway, then began cruising down a road with trucks going the other direction. so much for airport security. that's when it all started. the hotel was bleak at best, and included free wake up calls from 4:40 until 7:15 (continuously) by local roosters. sleep deprivation is part of traveling here. by the way, I continue to receive a beating from low doorways, uneven stairways and malformed sidewalks, in response, I've developed the tick of ducking my head through doorways, but hope to get rid of that once back incanada. in addition, noise pollution (beyond roosters) includes extra loud radios, shouting conversations and what I call gratuitous homage (translation: unnecessary honking--especially from cab drivers)but back to the story. getting out of Puerto lempira was a treat, there is no scheduled bus service, only a guy who cruises the streets until he has enough people to make the 5 hour drive to the

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nicaraguan border. first day we cruised for an hour or so, then he gave up. one more day in lempira, day two we had enough, were out of town (the pick up process takes close to two hours, what with the pot holes and all), when one of the guys realizes that he forgot something. at that point an old guy jumps out of the minivan, with the idea we'll pick him up when we get back out of town. into town, we get buddy's socket wrench set and find another passenger. but her luggage (for some reason) is on the other side of town. finally when we get out of town, but we can't find the old guy. after some gratuitous homage he runs out of the bushes, finally the clock starts ticking on the five hour bus ride, the distance is only 120 kilometres, but the pot holes have pot holes and there's detours around the detours.



the border is just three or four houses on stilts (which makes me glad i'ni travelling in the so called dry season). I let the locals who were on the bus negotiate with the canoe driver. no coincidence that border crossings here sometimes involve river crossings, since the rivers are the borders. but we had to go two hours down river to a town called wasbam, what we got was a ship designed by fools and ridden in by idiots. money dictates a lot and here that means people can't afford stable boats. instead they hollow out a tree and float it on the river. If they're lucky they have a motor. that's what we had. I've never been in a more unstable boat. and further, these people kept standing up and moving around. I was fully prepared to have a swim, but somehow we bobbed and weaved our way to wasbam.

the hotel there had no running water, just a bucket. when I tried to use the "shower" it was filled with thick smoke from the floor below. turns out they were cooking and to do that they simply light a fire in the kitchen, which

just happened to be in the middle of the hotel, but this is how the people live. moskitia is a poor place with a stark but beautiful scenery. the rivers are lined with jungle, but most of the country is a spaced pine forest which allows you to see for miles.

next day involved my favourite type of bus ride: the chicken bus special, you line up ahead of time (in this case 6 in the morning) and everyone is polite. when the bus arrives there is a mad dash to the doors and a pushing match that lasts until everyone is in the bus. once again, everyone is polite.

I won't talk about the immense political involvement that the u.s. has had on all these countries, be it good or bad. but two aspects of that bus ride symbolize that influence. the bus itself and

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the driver's shirt. both are hand-me-downs. the bus is an old school bus, no longer fit for its original purpose. most of the buses down here are. the shirt said "world's greatest lover." if you saw the driver, you would know that he had no idea what it said. you see, many people here have old t-shirts from the u.s--all of those old sayings and slogans that we've chosen to throw away. a kid with one advertising hooters bar, from pensacola florida. an old lady claiming she'd run the marathon of hope in Chicago, etc. anyways, the world's greatest lover turned out to be a pretty good driver in spite of the bus. and he (like his honduran counterpart) set the world's (slow) speed record: 120 kilometres in 5 hours.



but enough of the transport. chose to fly to bluefields, since there's no road in anyways, now staying at the euphemistically named Hollywood hotel. all of these traveller places have names like this. coca banana, for example, is a favourite for restaurants, always a shared bath, and the trick is getting everyone together at the same time to have that bath. the towels they hand out (although they usually don't have one--hence my previous memo) are a miracle of science. made of some high tech fabric, once you "dry" oft, you find the towel is dryer than it was before, good for the towel and the laundry service. thus, all the towel is



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good for Is to wrap around you so you can get back to your room and stand in front of the fan. tomorrow I hope to take a two-hour "speed" boat ride westward to a place called rama, the slow boat takes five hours and if you paddle yourself the trip is more than ten. on with the show, this is it. a few last comments on pirates. christophercolumbussailed this coast on his fourth voyage in 1502. that's 500 years ago. thus began the push to pillage the riches from these people. as far as I can tell, the modern history of central america is directly related to its geography. where the wealth was, there began the Spanish cities. there's a river in the south of nicaragua called the rio san Juan which allows boats to go all the way from the Caribbean into lake nicaragua (almost at the pacific coast). thus both the spanish and the pirates fought hard for control of the river and the route it provided to get gold back to europe. captain henry morgan took a shot at the spaniards in the 1700s and a young horatio nelson beat them in the late 1700s. but as far as I can tell, that history is really one of the cattle rustlers stealing from the horse thieves.

well then, that's about all I can say (from a vagabond's perspective) about vagabonds and pirates. except, perhaps, that not much has changed here on the moskito coast, until the next, catfish at large

