

EXPLORING COSTA RICA



Hola! That’s “hello” in Spanish. A few months ago, we three girls visited the Spanish-speaking country of Costa Rica (see map). Our families were part of a nature expedition led by a group called Eco-Teach. Costa Rica is full of natural wonders, and our guide seemed to know everything about them. He took us to all kinds of special places, where we saw some really amazing wildlife—including the *red-eyed treefrog* we’re admiring in the photo at **left**.

Follow along with us as we relive our action-packed trip. *Pura vida!* That’s like saying it was totally AWESOME!

This story was written by Susan Zimmerman, as told to her by Soley, Caitlin, and Kelsey, shown here from left to right. The photos were taken by Randall Hyman.



MEETING WILD FRIENDS

At a place called Jardín Ecológico we spied sloths, huge blue butterflies, stingless bees, and lots of other amazing kinds of wildlife.

Here we were greeted by Misha, a *keel-billed toucan* (**above**). Toucans usually hang out in treetops, so seeing a tame one up close was a treat!

STICKY BUSINESS

Here's another *red-eyed treefrog* (**right**). Sticky pads on the bottoms of its orange toes let the frog cling to tree trunks and lots of other things.

PIOTR NASKRECKI/MINDEN PICTURES; RANDALL HYMAN (INSET) ©



ZIPPING ALONG

One afternoon we strapped on harnesses, hooked them to a long, high cable, and went zip-lining. That gave us a bird's-eye view of the forest's tallest trees. Here's Kelsey coming in for a landing (**above**).



FACE TIME

We laughed when an *owl-eye butterfly* landed on our new friend Luke's face (**left**). Now that's catching nature on the fly!

IGUANA STOP-AND-SHOP

Once, our tour group stopped at a store for ice cream. When we went to leave, a gang of spiny-tailed iguanas met us at the door (right). Iguanas usually live in the forest, but the ones at the store were pets. Even so, we thought they might bite. Our guide said they were harmless, though.

TURTLE PATROL

The people below are measuring the shell of a leatherback sea turtle at Estación Las Tortugas. Scientists



here study the giant turtles. They also make sure people don't steal the turtles' eggs to eat or sell. One night we helped out by searching the beach for nesting turtles. When we found some, we collected their eggs and took them to the center. The eggs would hatch in safety there, and then the babies would get returned to the wild.



ON GUARD!

The machetes (mah-SHET-ees) fastened around our waists at left are real! We're at a farm where workers use these huge knives to harvest crops and clear away weeds. The blades are big and sharp, but we learned to handle them carefully.



NEW FARMHANDS

We also learned how to harvest cassava roots. Before pulling up the roots, you have to cut off the tree's stem. Caitlin is using a machete to give this tree a mighty whack! (above) Back at the barn, Kelsey is milking Princess the Cow (left).



HANDS-ON SCHOOL

One day we visited the Cloud Forest School. It is an official Schoolyard Habitats™ site. That means the National Wildlife Federation (the group that makes *Ranger Rick*) declared it a good place for wildlife to live. When it comes to learning, the students here really dig in. That's Silvia Elena at **right** with *compost* in her hand. Earthworms made this rich fertilizer by breaking down (decomposing)



dead plants. Two boys named Luis use some of the compost to plant tree seedlings (**above**). The new trees will replace trees that were cut down.

LOOKING AHEAD

Jocelyn (**left**) and the other kids at this cool

school are learning how to take care of their country's natural wonders. This way, future Costa Ricans can enjoy them, too. As for us, we can't wait to share what we learned here with our friends back home. 🐼