

# OUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

June 7, 2006



## PANAMA/CARIBBEAN BY MONIQUE

Our final big trip and tour of Costa Rica was at the beginning of May. Again, we needed to get our passports stamped so we headed to Panama this time. After a 10 hour grueling drive through potholes, we made it across the small border. We enjoyed the Island of Colon for three days and headed back over to Costa Rica where we stayed on the Caribbean side for another couple days. I think we have seen as much of Costa Rica as we wanted. We are now just finishing off school and planning on relaxing here in our village for the remaining weeks. We have sold our car to our previous neighbor Eleanor. I think we are all having mixed feelings about coming home. Yes, we look forward to seeing our family and friends again, our own home, and getting Raphael back to work. On the other hand, we will miss the Raihn family, all our new friends here, and of course, the tranquilo life. We hope to bring some of that peace and tranquility home with us.



*Crossing the Panama border*

## ISLA COLON IN PANAMA BY JESSICA

We left our little town of Esterillos Oeste at four in the morning. It was so dark outside, we couldn't see the road. As it got light out, we arrived in San Jose. We stopped and had a real American breakfast at Denny's. On the road again, we stopped several times for bathroom and gas breaks. After a ten hour drive, we finally arrived at the border. As we drove into the public parking lot, kids ran up to us, wanting to help. Of course, we didn't want help; after all, we had done this before in Nicaragua. We kept telling the kids that we didn't need help but they kept persisting. Carrying our entire luggage, we trudged over to a small building. There, we got our passports stamped out of Costa Rica. To get to Panama we had to cross this old, old bridge over an empty river. There were lots of holes in it and just boards to walk on. In the middle of the bridge was a sign that said Panama on one side and Costa Rica on the other. After stopping for a second to be in two places at once, we headed to immigration. Here, we got our passports stamped again to enter Panama. We caught a taxi and drove to the water taxi. The roads in Panama were the worst I



Two places at one time!

## ISLA COLON CONTINUED....

have ever seen. We liked to say that there weren't potholes; there were just patches of road. We had to take a water taxi to the island we were staying at. The boat ride to our island was a lot of fun. We rode on a river, which was calm, and then on the ocean, which was bumpy because of the waves. One thing we noticed right when we got to our island was the clear water. The island we stayed at was called Isle Colon. The island is about eight miles wide and very quaint. It used to be a banana plantation and some of the houses built for the workers are still there. The island had its own fire station, jail, and churches. I loved it at this island and wouldn't mind living there. The first night we stayed at a rustic hotel on the ocean. The rest of the nights were spent at this modern, nice hotel with AC and cable. If we weren't shopping or walking around, we were watching TV. It was such a nice treat to have cable in English. One special thing that we bought that can only be found in Panama is chocolate. It is really good and tastes almost like fudge. We

mostly stayed on one side of the island. The other side was really just surfing and houses. One day while walking we saw some kids jumping off the dock. Everyone is so laid back, just enjoying life.



Riding up to Isla Colon in Panama

## SNORKELING IN PANAMA BY HANNAH AND MAYA

Maya: We are still in Costa Rica. We went snorkeling when we went to Panama. It was so fun. We did it two times. The first time it was fun. The second times I had a little bit trouble. We saw huge fish and small fish. We saw colorful corals (coral), fishes, and some starfish. I want to go snorkeling again. I love snorkeling. The glasses was big on me. They didn't have flippers.

Hannah: Snorkaling was really FUN! It was my first time going snorkaling. The mask clips (keeps) falling off. It was too big. It was fun!



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## BIKE RIDING ON THE CARIBBEAN SIDE BY NICOLE



Jessica's dead end ride....

The owner of the hotel we stayed at owned a store near by and rented out bikes. So we rented six bikes for the whole day. We rode through the town. We all got a chance to lead. Jessica led us to a dead end! We pretty much went around the town a couple times (it was a small town). We stopped at a couple shops to look for towels so we could go to the beach. Once we found some; we headed for the beach. The waves were small but it was still a lot of fun. After spending some time at the beach, we went for smoothies. They were delicious! After our delicious smoothies we started riding our bikes to another beach. There were many big pot holes on the way! This beach had better waves and lots of cool shells! Once we were all tired from our long day, we started to head back. When we got the hotel Jessica, Hannah, and Maya took a shower. My dad, mom, and I rode around to look for a nice place to eat. When we found one, we went to the hotel, showered off, and returned the bikes. It was a lot of fun cruising around on the bikes.

## THE THREE WATERFALLS BY JESSICA

Back in April we went to some waterfalls for Jennaka's birthday that we had heard a lot about. These three waterfalls are called *Tres Piscinas* and are hard to find. Our friend Austin led us there and told us that they are a great experience. Because it is the dry season, not much water was running down them. To get to them, we had to hike for about ten minutes through the rainforest. There are three pools and two of them you can jump into. There is this natural tree that grows out, over one of the pools and we walked across it and jumped off. The water is nice and cool. The other pool you can jump into is a little bit trickier. You have to jump out, over rocks. A lot of people got to conquer their fears of heights. We packed a cooler and ate lunch under the canopy of trees. We had so much fun that for Tiana's birthday in May, we went back. This time there was a lot more water since we are starting our rainy season. The waterfalls were so loud and even colder. It started raining and the Central American squirrel monkeys (who are endangered) were playing in the trees above us. How cool! On the way back it was so muddy that we ended up taking off our shoes. We got some nice foot, mud massages! We plan to go to these amazing waterfalls one more time when our friends, the Grahams, come in two weeks.

Austin, Jennaka, Nicole, Tiana and Jessica  
Hannah and Maya

## ESTERILLOS RODEO BY MONIQUE

Our village put on a bull riding event one weekend to raise money to build an area for the community to gather for future events. This event happened to be up on our hill. Aside from all the extra people, cars, music and firework booms, we enjoyed the festivities. I think our best time was on Sunday when we all got to participate. We woke up early Sunday morning and walked over with the Raihn family to help set up tables and chairs for that days' events. One job led to another and both our families found ourselves busy helping serve most the day. We dressed in our cowboy hats, jeans and white shirts. Everything was going along fine, I was enjoying taking pictures, talking with Raphael. I wasn't sure where Hannah and Maya had gone. They were in and out helping in the food area. Kristy, Kurt, Tiana and Nicole were serving up the ceviche. Suddenly I saw the crowd of people screaming and running out of the food area. I saw a spooked horse was running through the food area. I was yelling at Raphael to help me find the kids. As I ran towards the food area to find them, the horse was coming at me. I turned and ran the other way.



A couple weekends ago a beach cleanup day was arranged for the kids. The village is trying to win back their blue flag award. Those that participated could win some prizes. We as adults had so much fun cleaning up the beach with our own kids but also with the local kids here. In addition to making our beach look good, we got to practice our Spanish with the kids and spend some fun time with them. What a great way to spend a Saturday morning! On top of that, Hannah and Maya were the lucky winners of a Jet Ski ride. They are hoping to get that ride this coming weekend.

Eventually the horse found its way out by jumping over the sink. It turns out that Hannah and Maya were already safely out, Nicole used her head and clung to a tree with Kurt, and Tiana and Kristy ran out. Kristy was able to manage saving some of the ceviche! It turns out that three people got trampled on. A couple and a boy we have played soccer with, Bryan. He broke his arm. All in all it was a fun weekend. Raphael and the kids really enjoy the bull riding event, I think I am done with that - it was too sad for me to watch.



## VOLLEYBALL TIME!

Thanks to Kristy and her perfect planning, we have been able to play some beach volleyball 2-3 times a week. After checking the low tide for upcoming weeks, Kristy is able to make a great schedule. We start by playing some kid/adult games. The kids have all improved! Once they are burned out, they jump in the ocean and the adults can get their serious volleyball in. No more, "nice try" and "good effort" that the kids hear. It's cut throat and down to, "you're going down" and "can't you do better than THAT?" No mercy! We enjoy the exercise and time to let out steam. After, we all enjoy the dip in the ocean. We will really miss these volleyball times with the Raihn familia!

