

TRAVEL

# Livonia family takes road to adventure in Costa Rica

Ronald Picard and his family live in Livonia. BY RONALD PICARD SPECIAL WRITER

Last summer our vacation plans just never got off the ground. The summer came and went without our annual vacation to the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

When fall rolled around I began looking for a place our family could go. My wife, Rebecca, wanted someplace warm, preferably with a beach. I wanted someplace that would let us do some hiking. Our son, Andy, being 5 wanted Disney World.

After some checking we decided on Costa Rica. Our final plans included spending three nights at the beach, two nights at a cloud forest and two nights at an active volcano.

### Manual Antonio

We arrived in San Jose, Costa Rica on Saturday, Feb. 14. We then took a puddle jumper to Quepos, the nearest city to Manual Antonio. We landed at the Quepos airport where a van was waiting to take us to our hotel. We arrived that afternoon at the Hotel Villabesque and crashed into our room.

We had finally arrived and we weren't about to hang around the hotel room. We changed into our bathing suits and walked the 200 yards to Beach 1 (of 5), the only beach that is outside the National Park boundaries. After

vigorously sun screening ourselves, we spent a few hours with Rebecca beginning her hair while Andy and I battled the waves.

That night we informed the hotel staff that we'd like a guided tour of Manuel Antonio. They made all the arrangements and told us a taxi would pick us up at 7:30 a.m.

The next morning the taxi dropped us off at Manuel Antonio National Park. Actually that's not quite true. The taxi dropped us off at the closest spot a car can get to the entrance to the park. We had to wade through a stream to get to the park entrance. We were truly not in the United States anymore.

We spent the morning with Leo, our guide, and a dozen other tourists. We following Leo around the park while he spotted some of the local flora and fauna for us. I'm sure we would have missed most of the sights without him.

We went back into the park by ourselves that afternoon and went swimming at Beach 3. This beach is on a little bay and the waves and rip tide were much less intense than at the public beach. Andy was able to play by himself and not spend all his time bracing himself for the next wave. The park closed at 4 so we began the walk back to the entrance about 3:30.

That night we had the best

meal of the trip. We decided to try the restaurant at the hotel across the street, Volca Bar. Rebecca ordered the garlic shrimp, which turned out to be a heaping plate full of shrimp. I had the rice with seafood and Andy had chicken cordon bleu (I don't think we saw a children's menu the entire trip). The entire meal, including drinks and dessert, was under \$35.

Monday the National Park is closed, so we decided to take a taxi into Quepos. We spent the morning wandering through the shops and ended up eating lunch at a restaurant by the ocean. By mid afternoon we were back at Beach 1, making sure we went swimming on our last day at the beach.

Tuesday morning we flew back to San Jose and set out in a rented 4-by-4 for the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve, a privately owned reserve originally settled by Alabama Quakers in 1951.

### Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve

The trip to Monteverde was, to say the least, interesting. The people at Monteverde have campaigned to keep the road into the preserve unpaved. This is one of the methods they use to keep the number of tourists at a manageable level. They also limit the number of people allowed into the preserve at any one time to 100. Being private gives them the freedom to take what actions they deem necessary and avoid critics from people who insist they make the park available to everybody.

After checking in at the Hotel Belmar we informed the staff that we wished to take a guided hike into the Preserve. They made the arrangements for us, calling around town to locate an available guide.

The next morning after breakfast we met "Cokie" our guide. To me the hike with Cokie was the highlight of the trip. He was more knowledgeable about the area than I expected and tailored our hike (which was listed as a bird spotting hike) to include as much information about the different plants in the cloud forest as he did about birds. Before we entered the Reserve,



Volcanic action: Rebecca and Andy Picard stand on the lava rock at Arenal.

Cokie's ears perked up and we followed him to where we spotted our first and only pair of quetzals. Quetzals are a rare find in Costa Rica. About 100 pair nest in the Monteverde area. Its beautiful plumage was quite striking as different iridescent colors jump out at you whenever it moves. We spent the rest of the day with Cokie. The pride he took in his job was refreshing and he more than succeeded in making our trip more pleasurable.

That afternoon we stopped by the Monteverde Butterfly Garden. While interesting, this stop was one of the more disappointing parts of the trip. The Butterfly Garden is an educational preserve, so they don't have the number of butterflies that a butterfly farm has.

The next day we went to the Sky Walk, a 2.5 mile hike that combines trails with pedestrian suspension bridges to allow you to walk through the canopy of the forest. While this was a peaceful walk, I wish we had gotten up early enough to take the guided hike.

### Arenal Volcano

After our hike we set out for Arenal Volcano. Arenal erupted violently in 1968 after 300 years of dormancy. It did not, howev-

- ### Travel Tips For Costa Rica
1. Find a good travel agent. Don't settle for one who will just make your arrangements; find one who knows and travels in Costa Rica. I mentioned Pat above and he was invaluable. He can be reached at Costa Rica Travel Exchange at 800 258-0124.
  2. Don't try and do too much. As we started to leave all three stops, we wished we had more time. There were a lot more things we could have done at each stop. If we were going to go on a 10-day trip, I'd limit it to two areas and explore them in more detail.
  3. Be prepared. When we got to the beach I opened my camera bag and found the camera batteries were dead. I spent the rest of the vacation with a battery in my pocket to show people what I needed. We were fortunate to have had our other camera along.
  4. Hire guides: They're quite reasonable, and they made the trip much more enjoyable.
  5. Enjoy the local cuisine. Seafood at the beach and fruit throughout the country. I'm still not convinced bananas in Costa Rica are the same fruit as we have in our supermarkets. Coffee is a must throughout the country.

er, lose its conical shape so it looks exactly like you would expect a volcano to look. These days the volcano averages a few eruptions a day, which keeps any real pressure from building up. We stayed at the new Tabacan Lodge and Spa. Our room was quite nice and had a splendid view of Arenal.

Adjacent to the lodge is the Tabacan Hot Springs. The water from the hot springs is diverted into 8 pools of varying temperature from comfortably cool to hot (I don't think I've ever worked

up a sweat just standing in it pool before).  
The next morning we went to Arenal National Park. We hiked up to the lava field that the 1968 eruption created. I highly recommend this hike for an older reason than you can really hear the volcano when there is no vegetation between you and the eruptions.

We never got a good view of the top of the volcano. It's clear during the day you can see it shoot ash into the air.



Tropical heat: Andy Picard feels the steam at the Tabacan Hot Springs in Costa Rica.

## GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentricist Newspapers Inc., 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 691-7279.

### TELL US YOUR STORY

We want to hear from you! Have you been somewhere interesting? Have you had a special adventure? Is there a quiet island you'd like to recommend or a highly promoted place you'd like to warn against? Do you have special tips for other travelers to make their journeys easier? Have you met some interesting people in other countries that you'd like others to know about? We want to share your stories and your color pictures on our travel page. Call Hugh Gallagher at 734-953-2118, or fax him at 734-591-7279 or e-mail him at hgallagher@oe.com.

### FOUR SEASON PLANNER

In a newly released 1998 Four Seasons Travel Planner, Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation Association provides information on a numerous travel destinations.

With vivid colors and pictures throughout, the Travel Planner leads off with a friendly introduction, followed by information pages from all 40 counties. New

sites can be found in the Finest Attractions guide with 53 listings.

To order the Travel planner, call Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation at 800-562-7134.

### NORTHWEST GARDENS

The Observer & Eccentricist's Art Home garden columnist Marty Figley is hosting a tour, "Spectacular Gardens of the Northwest," visiting Seattle, Tacoma, Victoria and Vancouver, Sept. 8-15. The tour package includes round trip airfare from Detroit to Seattle, eight nights first-class hotel accommodations, daily continental breakfast, two lunches and two dinners, all admission fees, a tour manager with horticultural knowledge, taxes and most gratuities.

The tour includes several noted gardens in Washington and British Columbia including the Lakewood Gardens, the Betty Miller Gardens, the Bellevue Botanical Garden, the Butchart Gardens, Stanley Park, Dr. Sun Yat-sen Classical Chinese Garden, the Nitobe Memorial Garden, the Van Dusen Botanical Garden, the Minter Gardens, and the Elizabeth Park. The trip includes a ride on the Victoria Clipper through Puget Sound to Victoria.

The cost is \$2,649 plus \$50 tax per person based on double occupancy.

A deposit of \$300 per person is

required to secure a reservation with the final payment due 60 days before the trip.

For more information, call Chuck Randolph Travel & Tours, (248) 645-6050 or (800) 936-1490.

### HIGHLAND GAMES

The 31st annual Alma Highland Festival & Games will be held Memorial Day weekend, May 22-24. Friday's festivities begin with a Judge's Concert featuring Scottish dancing and music, 7:30 p.m. at Alma College.

Saturday's events begin at 8 a.m. with the Great Lakes Open Dance Championship and Solo Pipe and Drumming Competition. The morning parade of pipe bands, floats and Scottish bagpipers through downtown Alma begins at 11 a.m.

Special events include a Border Collie sheep herding expedition, Royal Scottish dances, the Great Lakes Scottish Fiddling Championships and the U.S. Open Pipe Band competition. For more information, call or write to the Alma Highland Festival & Games, P.O. Box 516, Alma, MI 48801, (517) 463-8979.

### BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

The 22nd annual Spring Tri-State Bluegrass Festival will be held over Memorial Day weekend, May 21-24, at the Noble

County Fairgrounds in Kendallville, Ind.

Sponsored by the Northern Indiana Bluegrass Association, the weekend is a family event with music, camp fires and food concessions. Limited bleacher seating is available so lawn chairs are suggested.

A highlight of this festival will be the Lynn Morris Band from Virginia. Morris is a two-time national banjo champion and one of only a handful of female banjo players in bluegrass music. In 1996 the International Bluegrass Association named Morris the female vocalist of the year. Thirteen bands will perform beginning 7:30 p.m. Thursday. A weekend pass is \$17 and includes camping. Individual days are free Thursday, \$5 Fri-

day and \$8 Saturday and Sunday.

For more information, call (219) 432-4485.

### SKY GUIDE

The new 1998 edition of Sky Guides has been released for use by travelers and airport personnel at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. This map and directory lists and displays all the vital services of the airport. Sky Guides include professionally designed, detailed maps to parking lots, arena streets and expressways, the Davy (North) terminal, the Michael Berry International Terminal and L.C. Smith terminal. The guide shows where to find hotels, motels, restaurants, air rentals, airline gates and area businesses. A complete 11: 800 toll free phone listing includes all major services. The full-color 11 by 17-inch, eight-panel guide is laminated. It can be bought for \$4.95 plus \$1 handling by writing Sky Guides, 15324 Mack Ave., Suite 204, Grosse Pointe, MI 48224.

**AUSTRALIA**  
\$1999\* Per Person, Twin Share  
Includes Airfare, Meals, Accommodations & 8 Days Easy  
**The Best of the Outback Great Barrier Reef**  
Roundtrip Air from Detroit  
3 Nights Sydney & 4 Nights Cairns  
Pearl Coast Cruise, Sydney Harbor Cruise  
Includes RSI & Skylink  
**VOLARE TRAVEL, INC.**  
810-263-4500  
Aussie Specialist

**California**  
Golden West  
15 Days Per Person  
\$1099  
Open Saturday & Sunday  
Fun Filled Vacations Since 1967!

**South West**  
15 Days Per Person  
\$1099  
Open Saturday & Sunday  
Fun Filled Vacations Since 1967!

**CRUISE ONE**  
21st Anniversary Cruise  
MAXIMUM CRUISE SAVINGS  
BERMUDA 7 NIGHTS  
EUROPE 7 NIGHTS  
NORWICIAN 7 NIGHTS  
ALASKA 7 NIGHTS  
CANADA 10 NIGHTS

**Become an Official Member of the Woodward Dream Cruise™!**  
Saturday August 15, 1998  
A "Members Only" exclusive, collectible numbered membership/phone card good for 10 minutes of calls. This card is rechargeable with a portion of the proceeds supporting the Woodward Dream Cruise, Inc.  
An exclusive "Member" T-shirt (not sold separately).  
An official Lapel Pin  
An official Dash Plaque  
An official Keychain  
The official Woodward Dream Cruise™ newsletter with the latest news on this year's cruise.  
An official Refrigerator Magnet  
Send your \$50.00 check made out to Woodward Dream Cruise, Inc. and mail it along with the completed form below to: 1998 WDC MEMBERSHIP, P.O. Box 7068, Huntington Woods, MI 48070. Post office will not deliver to a P.O. Box. Deadline to apply is July 1, 1998. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.  
**1998 WDC MEMBERSHIP FORM**  
NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
DAYTIME TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
T-SHIRT SIZE: M L XL XXL XXXL  
\$50 MEMBERSHIP FEE INCLUDES 10% SHIPPING & HANDLING FOR THE CONTINENTAL U.S.  
WDC® Hotline: 1-888-4WDC-1963 Visit our Website: www.dreamcruise.org