



# Different Directions

Born in a place not so far, yet not so near, I am accustomed to seeing and thinking of a variety of diseases which would not otherwise come to my U.S. colleagues minds. Born, raised and trained in Costa Rica, I consider my international experience coming to the United States. First and foremost in my mind for GI bleeding is *Entamoeba histolytica*. For seizures I think of cysticercosis. For skin nodules I think leishmaniasis and sporotrichosis. Severe anemia in children is Ancylostomiasis first. That's not to say other diseases don't exist, but that's my perspective on disease. I tell you, perspective is an interesting thing.

Costa Rica is an interesting place and I intend to give you the nuts and bolts and encourage you to go for a visit. It's a country in Central America, squished between Panama and Nicaragua, that gained it's independence from Spain in a roundabout but peaceful way in 1823. It was pretty much left alone by all European explorers because it didn't have any riches, at least not like the Peruvian and Mexican gold, so aggressively sought after at the time. The word Costa Rica itself actually means "rich coast," given that name by Christopher Columbus himself on his fourth trip to the "new world."



# Costa Rica- The basics

10 00 N, 84 00 W



- *Total area: 51,100 sq km*
  - *water: 440 sq km* -includes Isla del Coco
  - *land: 50,660 sq km*
- 1,290 km of coastline
- Size of West Virginia
- Population: 3,896,092 (July 2003 est.)
- Language: spanish
- Official religion: catholic

My original trip to the USA began as an exchange program as a medical student. In Costa Rica, in order to become licensed as a general physician, every medical student is obligated to do one year of internship, which encompasses 4 three month blocks of inpatient care in each of the major subspecialties-OB/Gyn, Peds, surgery, and internal medicine. From there you can apply for residency. I was offered the opportunity to do my block of internal medicine at HCMC and ever since then I haven't been back. My experience here has been interesting. I knew little of obstructive sleep apnea, bariatric surgery, and about 13 trillion new medications before coming here. Learning all new English medical terminology coupled with new lab tests and medications was admittedly a game where I'm still playing catch up.



Hospital beds for me are wards of 10-12 beds per “room” and rounds are bedside. What’s this computer thing. I never had such a thing. You want an x-ray, get it yourself!!

**Hospital Mexico**, modeled after a renowned hospital in Mexico. I did many a long nights of training here.



Hospital Vicente Paul in Heredia-long  
ENT days!

The medical system in Costa Rica is one of socialized medicine, similar to that of Canada. The argument there is which hospital you belong to, not which insurance company you belong to. I still don't understand this whole "insurance" thing. Admittedly, that has been the biggest educational experience of all. Health care on the whole is very good in Costa Rica, with health indexes virtually similar to that of the United States.

There are 4 Level 1 trauma centers, all in the capital San Jose, one of which is the children's hospital. From there, regional hospitals branch out in each of the provinces and then there are local clinics and of course docs in the boonies. The rural clinics are frequently roving- the doc and nurse traveling to where the patients are or from town to town.

# Costa Rica Health Basics

- Infant mortality rate: 10.56 deaths/1,000 live births
- Life expectancy: *total population*: 76.43 years  
*male*: 73.87 years  
*female*: 79.11 years (2003 est.)
- Literacy: *total population*: 96%  
*male*: 95.9%  
*female*: 96.1% (2003 est.)
- Fertility rate: 2.38 children born/woman



“Giants” that come out every holiday season



Independence day

## PICTURES OF SPECIAL OCCASIONS



Traditional “carreta” pulled by oxen and used to carry sugar cane and other agricultural products

Hennepin has an exchange program to go to Costa Rica. I know several of the residents that have gone. They spend the majority of their time in a local hospital in the city of Grecia. The hospital is equipped with a basic lab, an x-ray machine and a few other basics. You'll see among other things, lots of skin disease, lots of regular old diarrhea, and interesting infectious diseases native to the tropics.

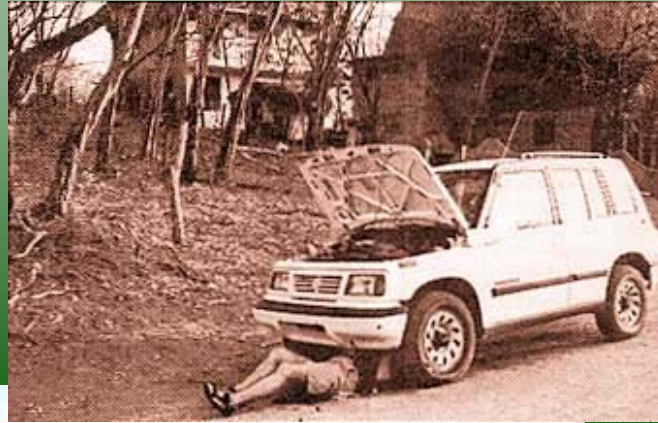
I'm always willing to answer questions and give advice about things to expect if you are to travel there. Safety is really not an issue, public transportation is very effective and the tropical fruit is always fresh. The weather is about 60-80 degrees year round!

Pura Vida!

Rebecca Zadroga

G2- Internal Medicine

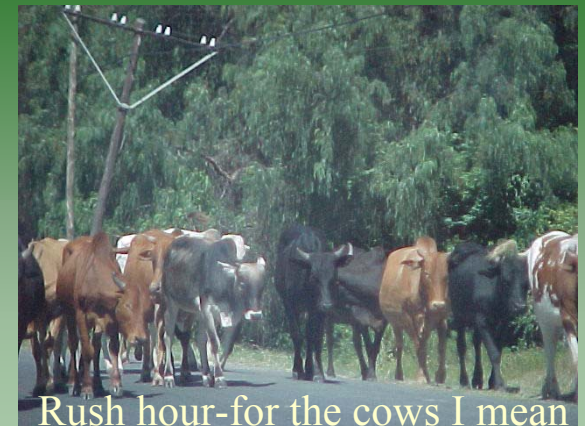
# LIFE IN THE FAST LANE



Always the car ahead of me!

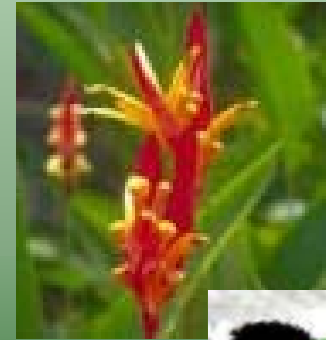


Our lovely roads



Rush hour-for the cows I mean

Cascada de la Paz: From the Trees, Costa Rica



- [www.exo-eco-photo.net](http://www.exo-eco-photo.net)



THE GENTLER SIDE