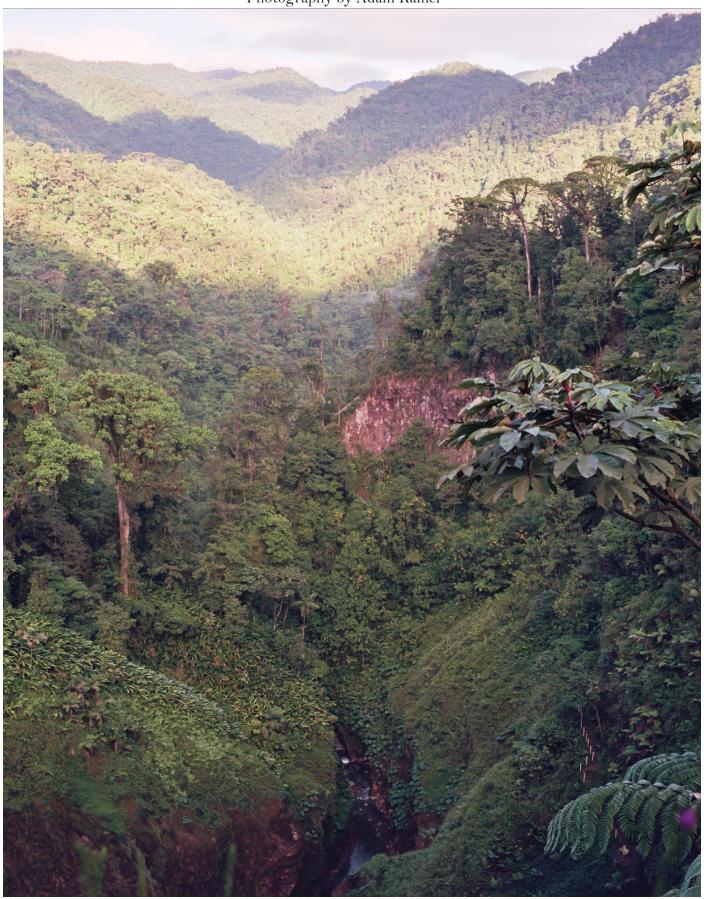
# COSTA RICA

EIGHT DAY ROAD TRIP - by Melissa Miller Photography by Adam Ramer





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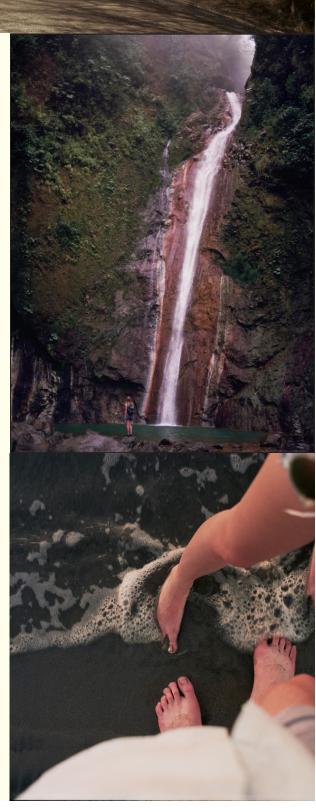
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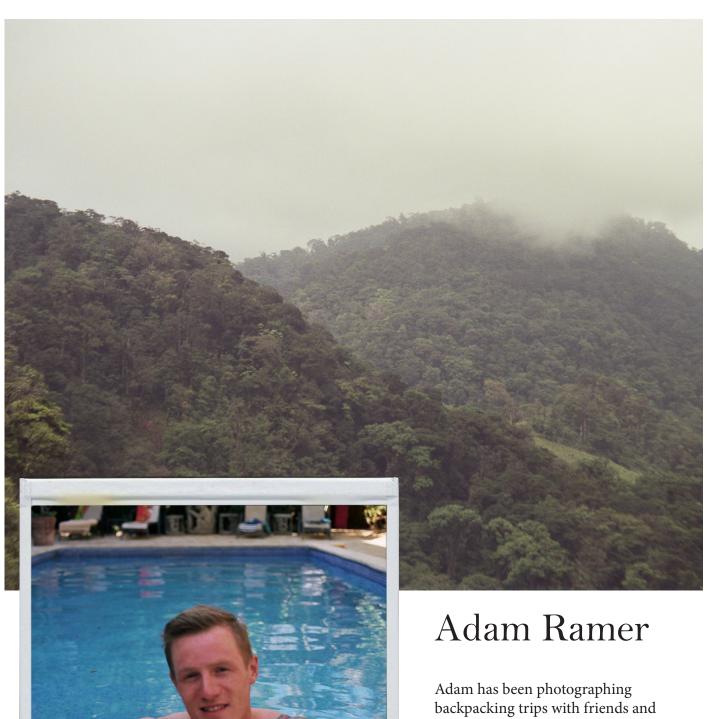
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POLAROID®3

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Adam has been photographing backpacking trips with friends and solo road trips the last few years. He recently bought an Olympus OM-2 that he used to take the photos throughout this edition. Adam is currently working on two fiction books that you'll need to keep an eye out for.

adamramer.wordpress.com



# Trip Overview



10 days, 13 locations, 900 kilometers



- 1. Alejuela
- 2. Bajos Del Toro
- 3. Catarata Del Toro
- 4. Blue Falls
- 5. Arenal Volcano
- 6. Monteverde
- 7. Playa Brasilito
- 8. Playa Flamingo
- 9. Playa San Juanillo
- 10. Samara
- 11,12. Playa Islita & Carillo
- 13. San José

WHEN TO GO - Mid December- April

82° / 60 Fahrenheit

As the Ticos and Ticas say... Pura Vida



#### Catarata Tesoro

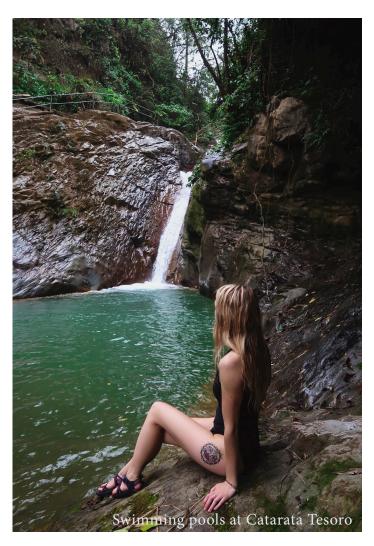
The day after we landed in San José., we grabbed our rental car and took off towards the mountains. I may have made Adam a little nervous as I drove us around the winding cliff roads. Two hours later we pulled up to Catarata Tesoro in Bajos Del Toro, a "hidden treasure" waterfall with a sign just off the side of the road. You could honestly miss it if you blinked. We paid \$15 and were pointed in the direction of a misty trail complete with horses roaming around. It was a true jungle feel and we had the whole place to ourselves. There were swimming pools to enjoy as well as the waterfall. It was a bit chilly when we were there in mid-March, but it was comfortable to be in shorts and a light jacket.

#### Catarata Del Toro

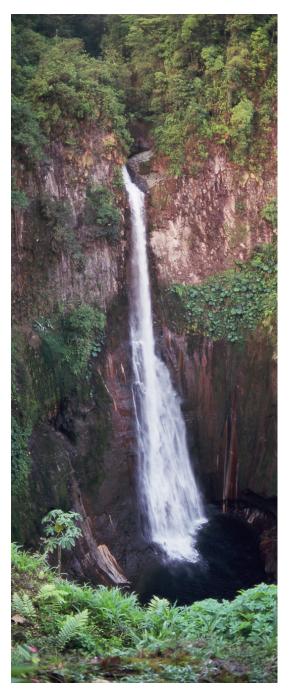
We hopped back in the car and drove another 20 minutes to get to Catarata Del Toro lodge where we would be spending one night. After checking in, we hiked down to see what's known as Costa Rica's most stunning waterfall - Catarata Del Toro, a 270 foot waterfall inside an old volcano crater in the rainforest. There was a decent set of steps to get down to the base of this falls. You have excellent views from the top as well. Again, we had the falls to ourselves, and there were even monkeys on the trail!

#### Blue Falls

The next morning we woke up and went to see Blue Falls. I'm relying on Adam's experience, as I had food poisoning. A guide leads you down a beautiful path through a hilly and forested farmland to a collection of waterfalls. The falls are are glacial blue akin to some famous Canadian lakes. It is a mild hike that can be enjoyed by anyone and is shared with cattle. The water is a bit chilly for swimming during March, but it's hard to stop yourself from taking the plunge when you're in a place this lovely.









Top Left - Catarata Del Toro

Top Right - Catarata Tesoro

Bottom - Trail to Blue Falls



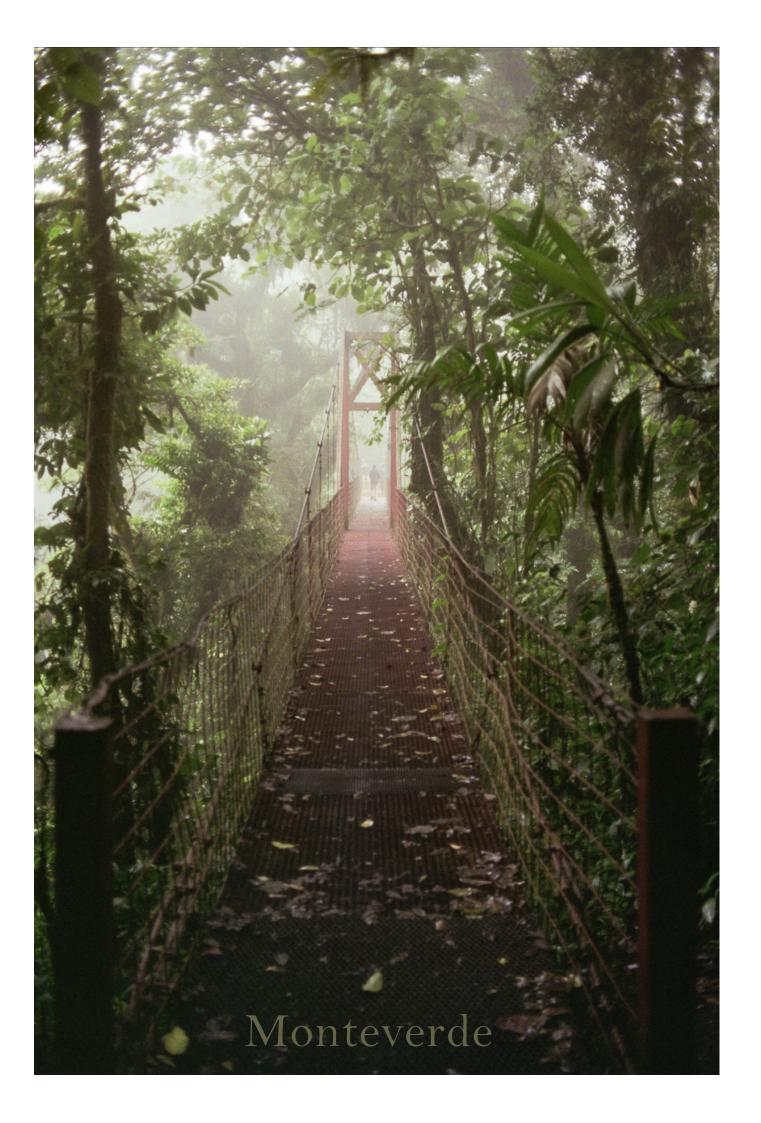
# Volcano Arenal



Arenal Volcano is Costa Rica's youngest and most active volcano. You can't see the full peak in our photo, but pictures of it look pretty dang impressive. It remained shrouded during the time we were able to view it.

La Fortuna is the village that sits outside of the volcano. It is bustling and full of tourism. There are at least a dozen hot spring resorts in and around La Fortuna that you can enjoy for the day or for an extended stay. We had planned to go for the day on our way to Monteverde, but ended up just driving through due to my digestive state of health.

I was initially against even going here due to how much it is blown up as a tourist attraction, but Adam reminded me, busy tourist destinations are popular for a reason. They are usually significant for the culture or region and are worth seeing in most cases. I'm glad we took extra time to drive past Arenal volcano. Even from this glimpse, you can tell it is pretty epic landmark.



# Where to Stay



Finca El Paraiso holds some of my favorite memories from our trip. Orlando, and family, focus on sustainable farming and farm to table meals. We loved getting to know them and so appreciated their hospitality.

I hope I never forget waking up in the morning to the view of the sloping hills and cows grazing, while a rainbow emerged daily in the distance. Or settling in on the front porch after a great home-cooked meal while the sunset lights up the sky in a golden haze.

I don't think we shut the curtains once. I remember waking up at 3am to see a scattering of stars, smiling, and going back to bed. This place is most ideal if you have a car, as it is a little outside of the city. This farm is a dream and a half.

Check them out on Instagram at @Fincaelparaisocr









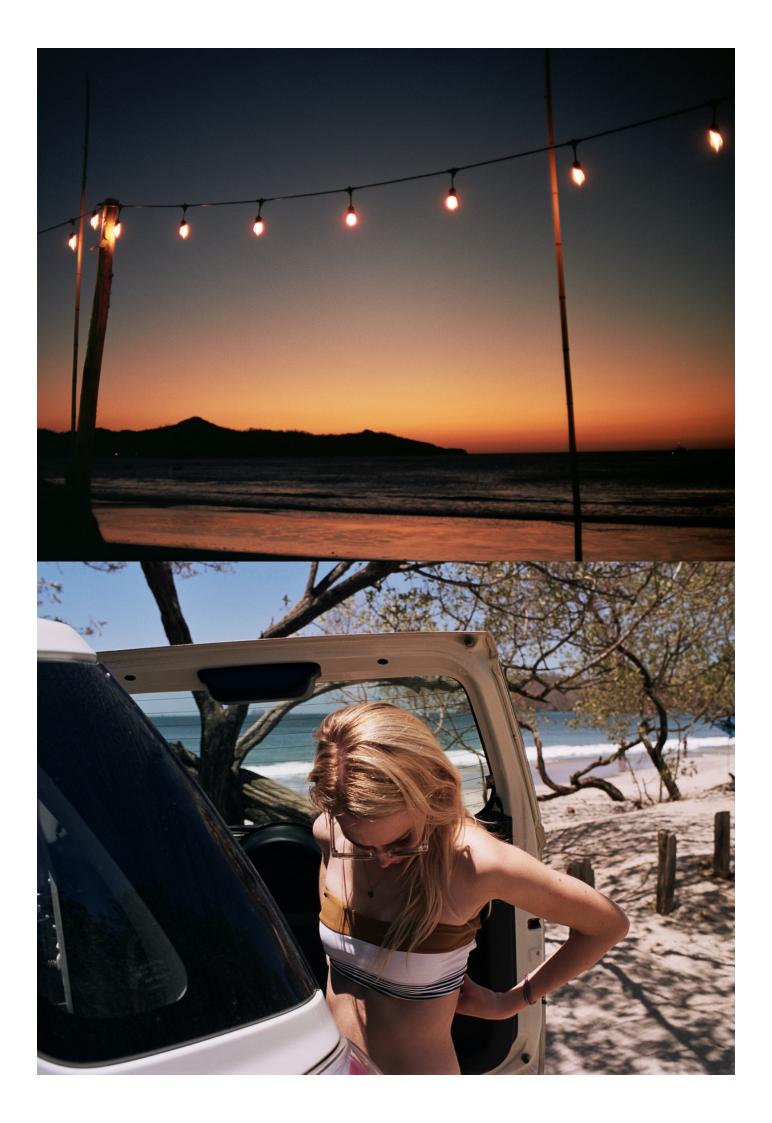
There are three cloud forests near Monteverde. We decided to go to the Monteverde Cloud Forest, as we were intrigued by the hanging bridges. The Monteverde Cloud Forest seems to be the most built up. There were tourism buses coming in and we ended up having to wait over an hour to be let in due to their restrictions of how many people can be in the forest at any given time. The wait wasn't bad since there is a cafe/restaurant on site that you can hang out in while you wait. And we had lots of trail to ourselves because of restrictions on people.

Cost: \$20 per person

Time: I recommend the morning as parking can get full quickly. It took us under 3 hours to go through all of the trails.

What to bring: Raincoat, shoes that can get wet/muddy

We thought about checking out The Children's Eternal Rainforest (Costa Rica's largest private reserve), but we felt satisfied with our cloud forest experience at Monteverde.



### Beaches

We had the pleasure of experiencing 6 different beaches along the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. I had thought that all the beaches would run together, but each place was different and special.

Playa Brasilito and Playa Flamingo. We stayed at Hotel Conchal in this area and thoroughly enjoyed the attached restaurant, live music and hospitality. Playa Barsilito was a 10 minute walk for us, so we took full advantage of hanging out there for an amazing sunset and beach front bar. Playa flamingo was a 10-15 minute car ride away and had more resort features. We hung out at Flamingo for a day. Renting an umbrella was around \$10 for the day and servers from the resorts would serve you food/beverages if desired! The water was as warm as bath water.

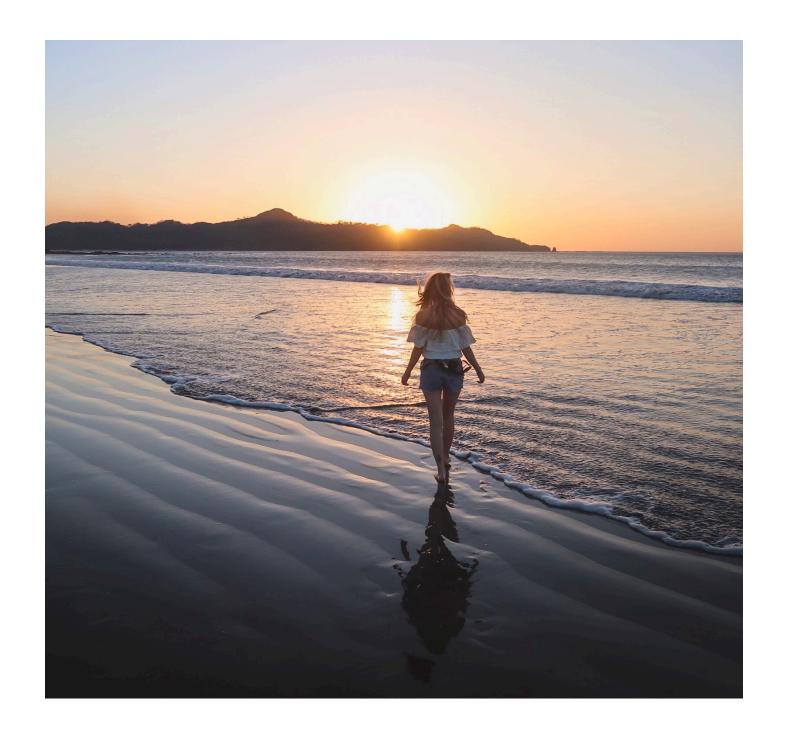
Playa San Juanillo was a bumpy 1.5 hours away from Hotel Conchal, and served as a pit stop on our way to Samara. We spent a little over an hour at this beach. Playa San Juanillo felt like a locals spot. A handful of people were hanging out when we arrived mid day. What is really neat about this beach is that it is a double crescent beach with a thin strip of beach separating water on both sides. It feels like a hidden gem.

Playa Samara is a fun spot for many reasons. The village of Samara is mellow and many locals and tourists alike go there to surf. There are a handful of beach front restaurants that are a little less touristy than some other cities we drove through. We stayed close enough to the beach to walk there, but ended up spending the entire day and most of the night at the beach. We went from hanging out under an umbrella and enjoying the warm water, to sitting in the sand with pizza and mojitos from one of the restaurants. At night we were able to enjoy a fire show and live music.

Playa Islita and Playa Carillo were beaches we visited before heading back to San José. Playa Islita felt very off the grid and was quiet, but Playa Carillo stole my heart with the swaying plams and lack of resorts and city development. We enjoyed fresh coconuts before grieving the end of our beach life.







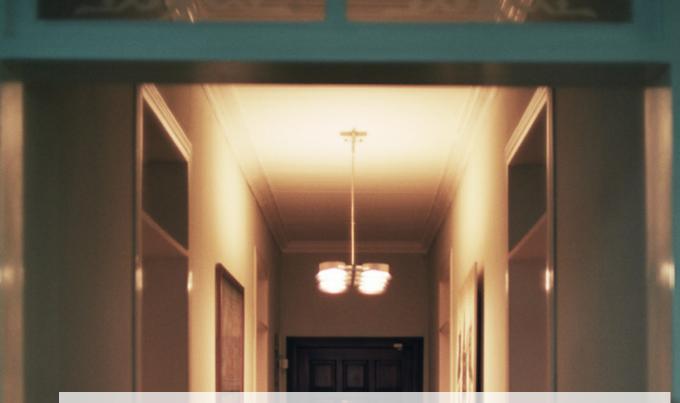
"Traveling – it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller."

- Ibn Battuta



ALEJUELA &

SAN JOSÉ



We barely spent a full 24 hours between the two cities of Alejuela and San José. I would love to go back and explore San José. more. When we arrived at the San José International airport, we found an Airbnb we \*thought\* was close to the airport. It ended up being a comical situation (after we were able to relax 3 hours later). Turns out our Airbnb choice was very hard to find with the given directions. So we did not save time for exploration and chose the only restaurant open within walking distance. We ended up having my favorite breakfast of the trip the next morning at Fogoncito in Alejuela before grabbing our rental car and getting out of the city.

On our last full day in Costa Rica, we dropped off our rental car and took an hour Uber ride (rush hour traffic) into San José. It was within walking distance to a whole neighborhood of restaurants and shops. We had just enough energy to clean up and make it to a restaurant with live music for dinner. San José was lively and the streets were full of people on a Thursday night. The Airbnb shown in the pictures on the page before and here can be found on Airbnb as Casa Botanica on near Calle 19. It was perfectly eclectic and cozy for our last night in Costa Rica.



# COST (Total for 2 people)

CAR RENTAL	\$415
FUEL	\$80
LODGING	.\$649
FOOD & DRINK	.\$550
ENTRANCE FEES	.\$55
EXTRAS	.\$50

GRAND TOTAL \$1,799

Disclaimer: We were not stingy with food and drink. You could easily cut down on food/drink costs as well as lodging, as we chose some lodging that was a little more expensive than other options we saw.



BLUE FALLS

#### TRAVEL TIPS

It was very handy having a phone with a data plan. Adam used his T Mobile Plan without any hiccups and was able to navigate us around.

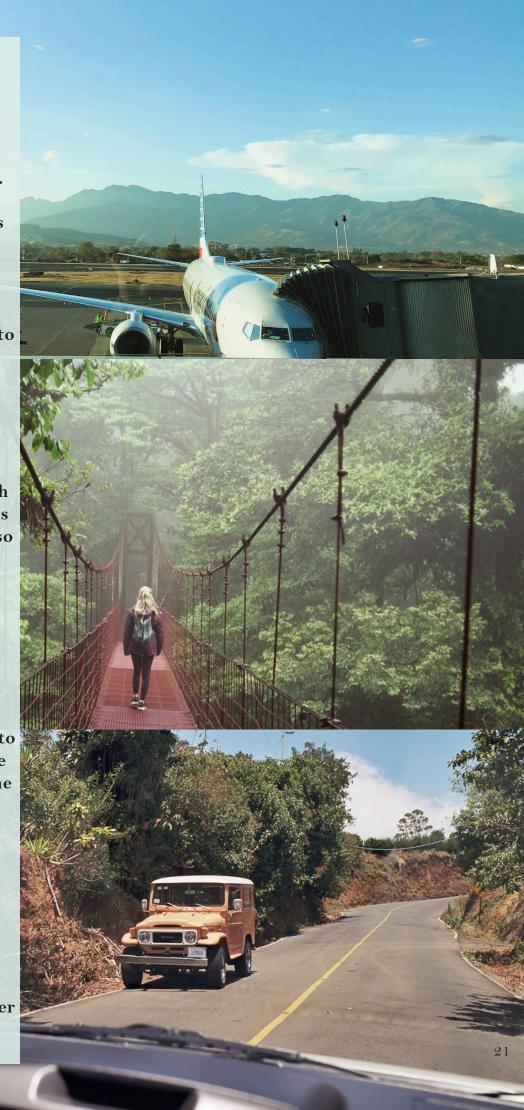
WIFI was pretty easy to come by, but the ability to call saved us a few times when we were trying to find our Airbnb.

A lot of Costa Ricans have US bank accounts andtherefore pretty much every establishment takes US Cash. Most places also take debit/credit cards.

Do yourself a favor and order a mojito....or 5.

The deposit for a rental car starts around \$1000. Don't let this deter you! Having a car allowed us to experience so much more and saved us money in the long run, as bus and taxi fares are not that cheap.

Sunrise and Sunset are very consistent year round. Rising around 6 am and setting around 6 pm. This made the roads pretty busy by 7-8 am since people get an earlier start.





#### PACKING LIST

- 2 bathing suits
- towel/swimsuit cover up (Turkish Towels can sunglasses double as both)
- 1-2 pairs of shorts
- 1 pair of athletic shorts
- 1 pair of long pants/leggings (it gets cold in sun hat/baseball cap the rainforest)
- raincoat
- lightweight shoes that can get muddy
- sandals
- 1 nice shirt/blouse
- 1-3 mix of tank tops/short sleeve shirts
- 1 jacket (I brought my jean jacket)

- SUNSCREEN
- camera
- shampoo/conditioner/soap (most places we stayed did not offer any)
- fanny pack
- -small backpack for day hikes
- first aid kit (include rehydration salts/pedialyte in case you get food poisoning like me)
- -reusable waterbottle (tap water is fine to drink)
- -emergency snacks

