

Surfing in Santa Teresa, Costa Rica
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In late March I headed to Santa Teresa, Costa Rica, for a long put off surf trip. This was my first trip to CR in many years and turned out to be one of the most physically damaging surf trips I've ever had (which I will explain as I narrate this tale). My friends Robert Farmer and Lynn Shell from the Outer Banks Boarding Company in North Carolina were shooting a surf instruction movie and invited me along. Their primary surfers were pros Noah Snyder, Jessie Hines, and young newcomer Chris MacDonald.

The 6 hour flight from Washington Dulles through San Salvador to San Jose wasn't too bad, but the long drive from San Jose to Santa Teresa, including the ferry ride was a little tiring. I missed the 6 pm Puntarenas ferry and had to wait in the parking lot almost 3 hours for the 9 pm ferry. Driving the bumpy roads after a long trip and arriving in the middle of the flight late at night left a lot to be desired.



We stayed at a nice hostel called Don Jons not far from the primary break we surfed. The picture is with the manager John and Lynn Shell in the restaurant area. There were several other visitors from various locations who came and went during the 9 days we were there.

Don Jons offered great food, roosters crowing in the morning, plus one of the most colorful large lizards I've ever seen lived there. We saw him or her several times, plus some smaller lizards, an owl, and two coonhounds, a Redbone and a Black and Tan pup. The pup reminded me of Shadow, a Black and Tan I owned years ago.





The pup was at my door every morning with his buddies, a cat and a German Sheppard pup, looking for either a handout or just some kind words.

The surf was good size and challenging every day with the pros ripping on the hollow overhead waves. Unfortunately for me, the waves were more difficult on a longboard, plus I had a few physical disasters as usual. The first day I managed to step on a sharp rock close to the outcropping pictured and nicked a chunk of skin off a toe on my right foot. After limping for a day with a swollen toe I was feeling a little better when on the third day I managed to tear my right shin up on a large rock surfing into the shorebreak. It was bruised and bleeding so no surf for me the next day, plus I had a hard time walking in general by then.

One day I saw two German girls trying to surf on a rental board way too small for them to easily learn on. It looked like they were about to kill themselves in a rough shorebreak so I offered to show them what to do. Within 20 minutes after getting them back out in the surf, each had managed to stand up and catch a wave. At least they probably wouldn't try to paddle outside and hurt themselves or anyone else.



After a day to heal I was back in the water and doing fine on one of the bigger days when a novice surfer decided to bail out paddling over an outside cleanup set wave while I was dropping in. The board landed on the back of my head (now who says I don't have bad luck) and put an inch long gash almost on my bald spot.

I had a headache but didn't know I was bleeding until I came in and went to a restaurant for a drink and to shoot some pool. A waiter came up behind me said

“Do you know you have blood all over the back of your shirt.” By then I wasn’t in the mood to get a strip on my head shaved for stitches so I just put some ice on it until it stopped. It did ruin my pool game though.

I stayed out of the water another day for my head to heal some and spent the day sight seeing. That made my score wrecked 3 days and surfing 3 days.



Since I was in the area already, I taught a NSSIA surf instructors certification class at Don Jons one evening and the next morning early. Three instructors from Tamarindo came down, Luis Seitour, Lavinia Pandis, and Rafael from Secret Spot Surf Shop, plus Peter Ottinger, a local instructor and also owner of one of the Santa Teresa on the beach surf school resorts attended. Peter invited us to dinner at his restaurant where we found the best margaritas. I had been looking all week for a margarita and not finding one worth drinking. One sip and his place became my top pick for an evening drink.

On my last weekend I decided to rent a 4 wheel ATV and do some exploring. You need a vehicle

like that to navigate the rough roads around the region. I cut across the peninsula jungle road to Montezuma to see their waterfall (below), have lunch in a nice restaurant in town overlooking a very picturesque cove, and also check out the easy longboard waves in that area.

Then the next morning to sightsee I drove north to Playa Hermosa and a sand castle festival. Playa Hermosa had some surf but didn’t have the kind of waves I was looking for. Finally, I got back in the water again that afternoon in Santa Teresa for some easier high tide surf and the next morning for super low tide hollow take off and crash waves.

Next morning I was on my way home early, still healing and tanner then when I went. Going back was different though, I took the small Natural Air shuttle from the airport in Tambor to San Jose. It’s a short flight but you land at a different airport and then need to take a taxi to the big San Jose airport. There is the taxi to



Tambor of around \$30 per person, an airport tax at Tambor, the taxi runs \$10 between airports, and then there is the \$26 airport tax at the big airport. This means much less travel time overall but you pay through the nose. Don't just look at what your primary airline ticket to San Jose will cost as this isn't what your trip will cost.



I have a few other observations about the old Costa Rica of the 70s – 80s and the new. The roads in CR are still bad, very dusty with no solid road base underneath. There are a lot more surfers than in the olden days, still not super crowded but it's getting that way. Most surfers in the Santa Teresa area are shortboarders with few longboarders on the outside waves. Also, there are many beginner board rental places

(between \$8 and \$12 per day), surf schools, and instructors there now, only a few of which try to achieve the higher levels of certified surf instructor professionals.

One item of interest about Santa Teresa night life, there isn't much and many spend their free time reading. While there is a good deal of advertising about beach parties, dances, or other events, the events themselves don't always go off. At least if they do, they don't have anyone there until maybe midnight or later. I attended several advertised events, only to give up after a few hours waiting for others to show. I really don't know what time the dancing spots got going since I never saw anyone dancing while I was there. I attended to two best advertised, and didn't see a single person going strong on the dance floor. For me, I got out on the floor a few times just to show the locals what an "old fart from Huntington Beach" can do. Saw a number of flashes go off and had some applause, but that was it. Most everyone just watches the bands and drinks.

Remember that everyone raises chickens and the rosters will start going off at 4 am most mornings. Be prepared to go to bed early and then get up at dawn. Finally, while the food is great, meals and drinks are just as expensive, and sometimes more so than in the US. You automatically have 10% for a tip added to your bill, and if you pay by credit card there's an additional 13% fee added on.