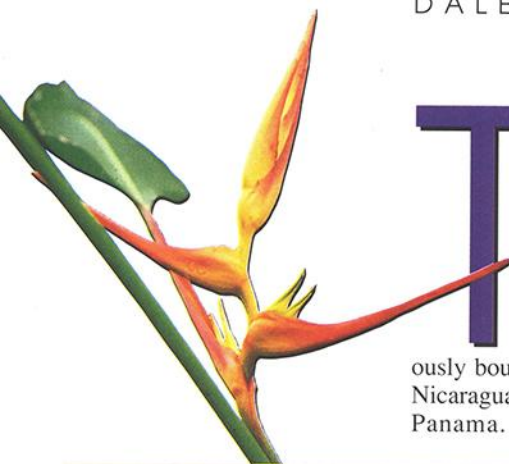


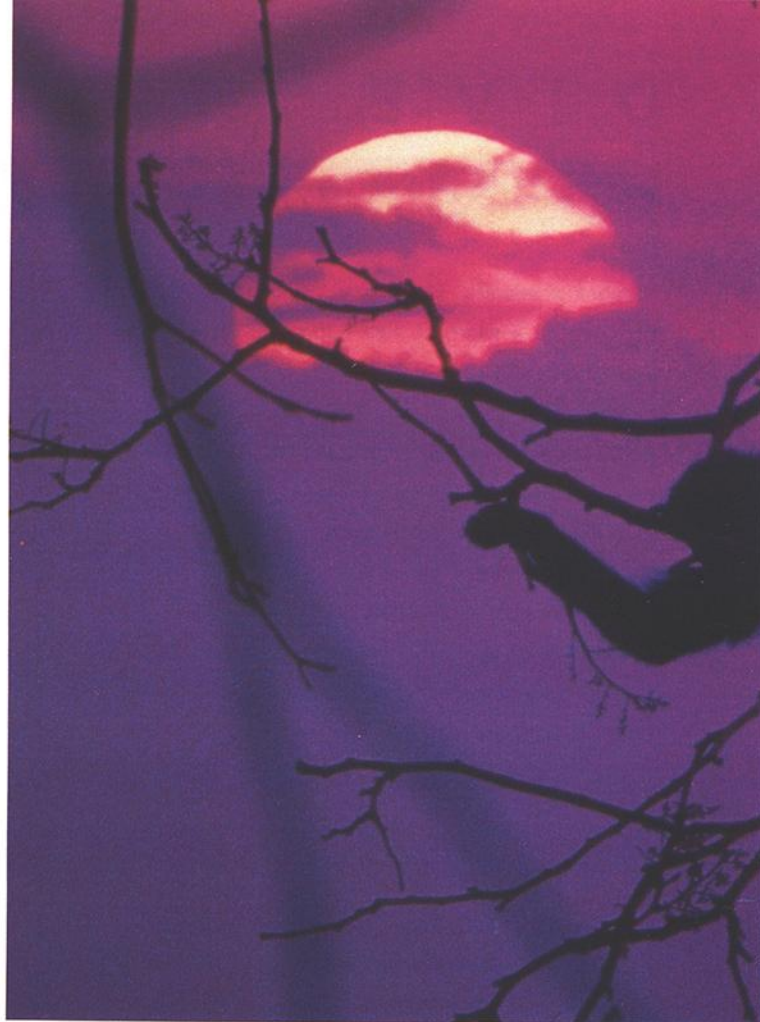
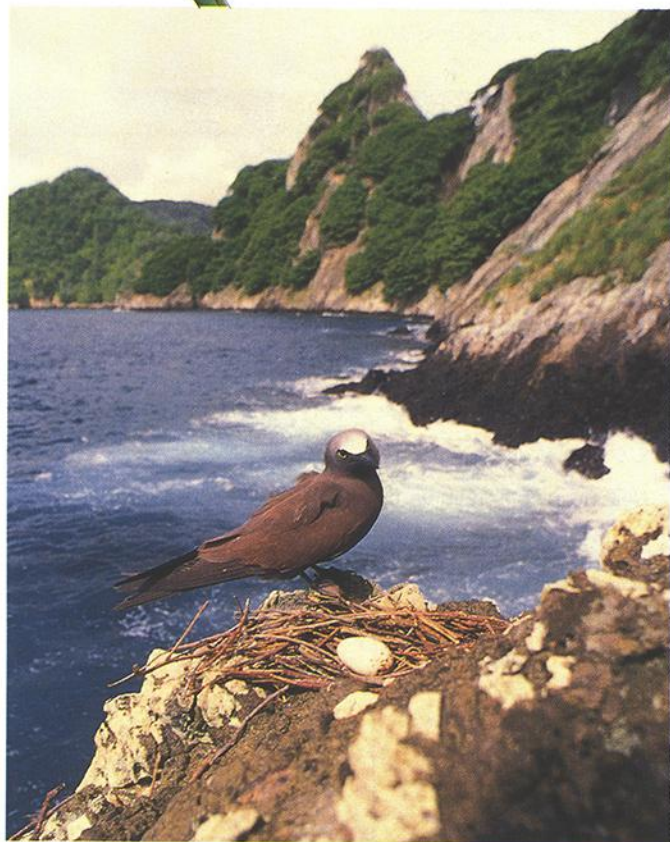
# COSTA RICA

## EMERSED WITHIN A SEA OF LIFE

BY  
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**T**he country of Costa Rica is an enigma. A peace-loving nation which disbanded its army in 1948, it is precariously bounded on the north by Nicaragua and on the south by Panama. Although a small



country about the size of West Virginia, it somehow harbors 848 kinds of birds and more species of butterflies than is found in the entire continent of Africa. To preserve its beauty for generations to come, more than 10 percent of Costa Rica is national park property. In this forward-thinking, peaceful country, citizens enjoy the highest level of literacy and per capita income in Central America.

This seismic region, volcanic in origin, spawned a dramatic landscape both topside and underwater. More than 12,000 species of plants blanket the sloping green savannahs and mountain rain forests. Likewise, a similar variety of lifeforms exist beneath the water's surface along the Pacific coastal region known as Guanacaste. The Guanacaste region occupies roughly one third of Costa Rica's Pacific shore which is punctuated by massive rock out-croppings and secluded sandy bays. Located in the heart of Guanacaste is the Golfo De Papagayo (Gulf of

the Rooster), home to Costa Rica's dive operators.

Three dive resorts handle the flow of divers seeking Costa Rica's rich underwater expanse. Of these, the Flamingo Marina Resort is the newest to operate out of Playa Flamingo. Flamingo's dive boat primarily focuses on diving the area of the Catalina Islands. The second oldest dive operator, Diving Adventures, runs dive packages from Condovac La Costa Resort to local dive spots and more distant destinations on demand.

We stayed with the founding fathers of diving in Costa Rica, El Ocotol Beach Resort and Diving Safaris. Mario Vargas, a local legend in diving for over 10 years, runs this operation with his partner Bill Beard.

For our first dive, Mario took us to a site appropriately named Surprise. Within our first 10 seconds of entering the water, an inquisitive 100-pound jewfish appeared to greet us. His eyeballs swiveled wildly, checking us out before allowing us to proceed to his