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One of the most popular dive sites is Punta Gorda. Numerous sightings of eagle and manta rays, along with evasive whale sharks have been somewhat common here. Generally, the possibility of diving with whale sharks is dramatically higher in Costa Rica. These planktonic filter feeders appear to be drawn to the abundance of phyto- and zoo-plankton which often well up around these pinnacles and rocky points. Whale sharks encountered here range in size from a small 18 feet on up to a colossal 30-plus feet. Our dive on Punta Gorda also yielded schools of butterfly fish, Pacific box fish, frog fish, scrolled file fish, a tiger snake eel and several octopuses.

Back at the resort, with our week winding down, we shifted our interests to the flora and fauna of the jungle rain forest. Our group headed via mini-van to the remote outpost known as Ecocamp. Without a doubt, the most memorable experience here was our horseback trek through the rain forest and atop the mountain trails overlooking the Arenal Volcano with its adjacent lake.

The lush forests located next to the lodge have well-marked nature trails that point out many of the botanical treasures, which range from minuscule mosses to giant oaks and delicate orchids. Hikers may happen upon exotic birds such as the toucan or the quetzal-bird, or they may encounter a wide range of brightly colored butterflies. Howler monkeys are also prevalent, along with a myriad of other fascinating creatures. Wherever you go the sound of running water is never far away. In fact, there are 500 miles of white water rafting rivers.

During our final night at the camp, we were fortunate to have uncommonly clear skies which enabled us to see the intermittent eruptions of the active Arenal Volcano, a sight not soon forgotten.

The driver made the most of our transit day by arranging a close encounter with the volcano we had seen erupting the night before. Afterward, we traveled high into the cloud forests of the Poas National Park for a misty view of the La Paz waterfall. A short drive then took us to a mountainside view of the capital city of San Jose, whereupon we descended and were dropped off at our hotel.

Arranging a well-rounded, custom-tailored trip to Costa Rica is best accomplished by booking the entire package through a dive travel agent. Air travel is highly recommended on Lacsca, "The airline of Costa Rica." Lacsca operates more flights to Costa Rica than any other carrier via its Miami, New York, Los Angeles and New Orleans gateways. From Miami they offer a minimum of 10 weekly flights on their new A-320s. These flights offer a single comfortable class of

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service including complimentary bar throughout the flight. Travelers may soon have the option to fly into Liberia which is located much closer than San Jose to all of the dive resorts.

However you get there, plan to take advantage of the wide array of experiences Costa Rica has to offer. Without a doubt, it would be almost criminal not to partake of some alternate activities beyond diving when visiting this treasure trove of natural beauty. ▀

*Dale Sanders is a freelance writer specializing in shipwrecks and in dive travel. He has logged more than 3,000 dives around the world.*

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