

Costa Rica

Field notes from the rainforest, cloud forest, and beach

APRIL 2023

Video Journal



https://youtu.be/Gpq5ze_BE7c

The rich coast

I heard a writer describe the traveler's eyes as "the eyes of love—disoriented and incredibly curious," attentive to the micro and the macro-view of their surroundings, immersed in noticing, full of wonder.

We spent a week in Costa Rica, where my senses were awakened by the disorientation and awe of being in a place so different from anywhere I've ever been. Long days spent under aggressive sunlight and stifling heat made me sip greedily on water and apply sunscreen religiously. I ran to the ocean to cool down and feel the sting of the Pacific's salty spray, the chaos of sand swirling around my feet. Between my teeth, a caramelized cacao bean shattered into rich, bitter shards. Waxy, pre-historically sized elephant ears ("the poor man's umbrella") hovered along a path to the volcano's viewpoint. Our van traced up and down winding, hilly roads outlined by hydrangea bushes in full bloom. We walked back to our AirBNBs along dusty roads under the shush of palm fronds, wondering if we'd see the capuchins or red macaws again. Costa Rica's rich biodiversity is unparalleled.



Costa Rica's topography from above



José , our driver, gave us our first taste of Costa Rican hospitality.

Between leaning my head forward to respond to his comments (“there’s the Gulf of Nicoya...those are coffee trees...and these are milk factories”) and turning my head back to answer our French marine biologist pal, Frank, I was starting to get dizzy... Then José decided to gun the hairpin turns up the mountainous dirt roads to Monteverde so we could catch a good view of the sunset (it’s the thought that counts). I rarely get carsick, but I nearly threw up several times! Sweet José emphatically agreed to slow down when I apologetically suggested the idea. In my nauseous state when he dropped us off at the street corner, I left my earbuds and only realized until after we checked into our AirBNB. The next evening, we returned home from our activities to find my earbuds (and a coin purse full of coins) by our door. We had no idea how he found our AirBNB but his motives seemed sincere – he must’ve thought that coin purse was ours, too.



A quick stop at an open-air soda before arriving to Monteverde for dinner at Taco Taco



I was planning to stay in a hostel until my mom decided to join the trip and requested a slightly more expensive AirBNB. Good choice, Mom.





Walking through the cloud forest on Selvatura Adventure Park's hanging bridges.







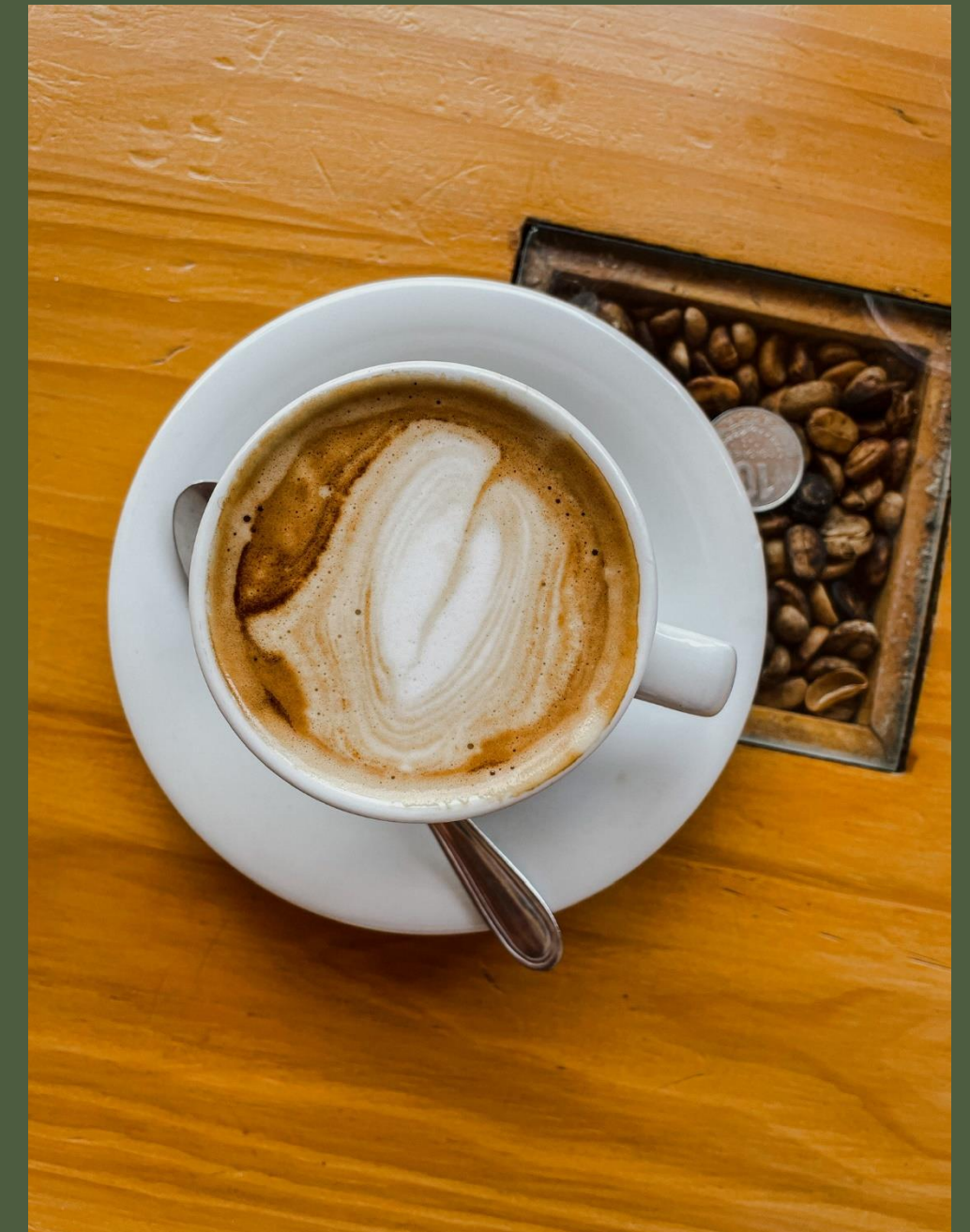


Ziplining through the cloud forest. There, we exercised our spirit of adventure, Spanish, and German. The canopy guides – Diego, Sebastian, Elian - were the kind of guys you'd want to have a good time with. Oh, and we saw our friend, Frank, there and at dinner!



Carlos





Café Monteverde for honey processed coffee



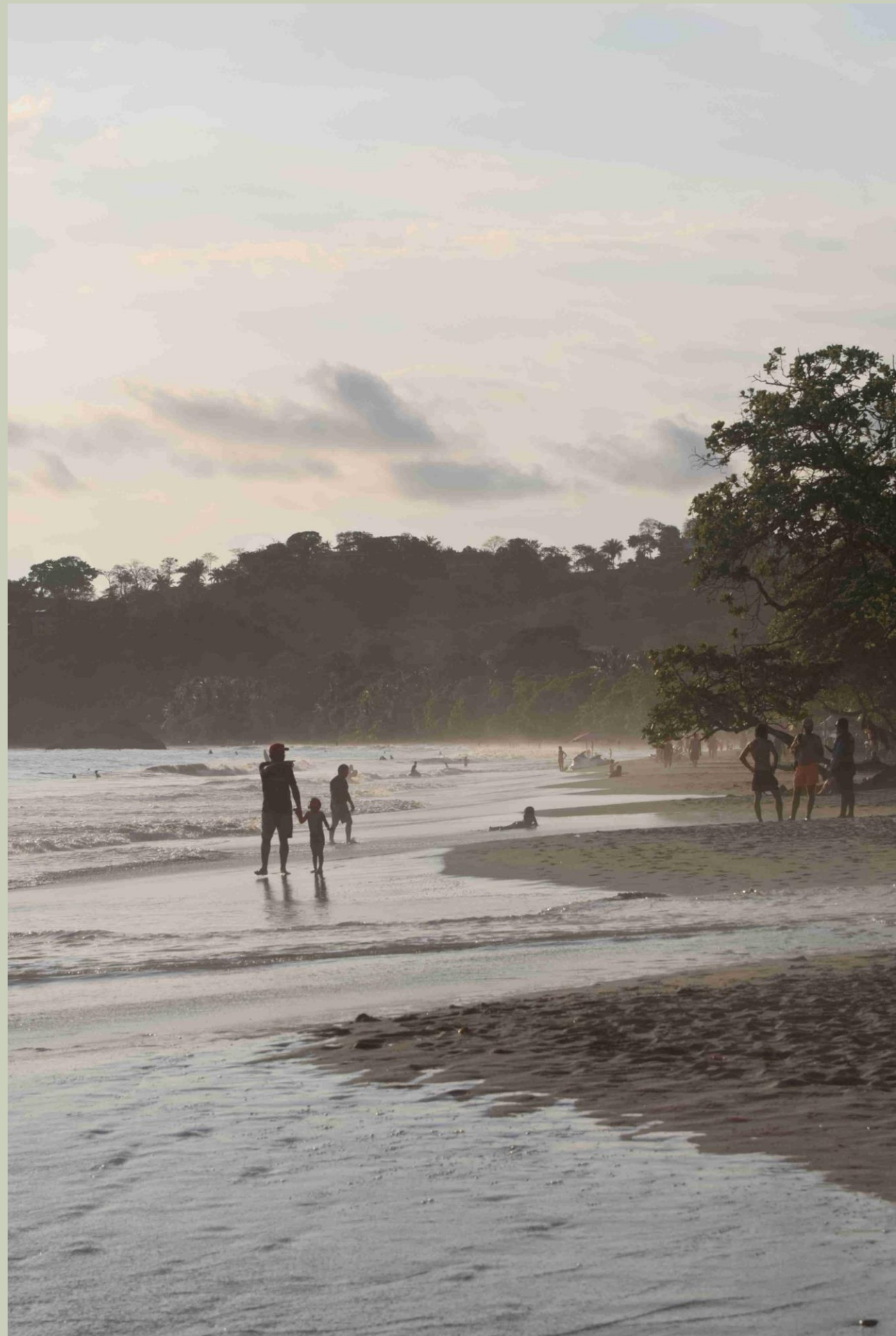
Made the journey from Monteverde to our jungle cabin in Manuel Antonio. Upon arrival, we saw capuchins run along the corrugated tin roofs.



Playa Espadilla Norte, Manuel Antonio



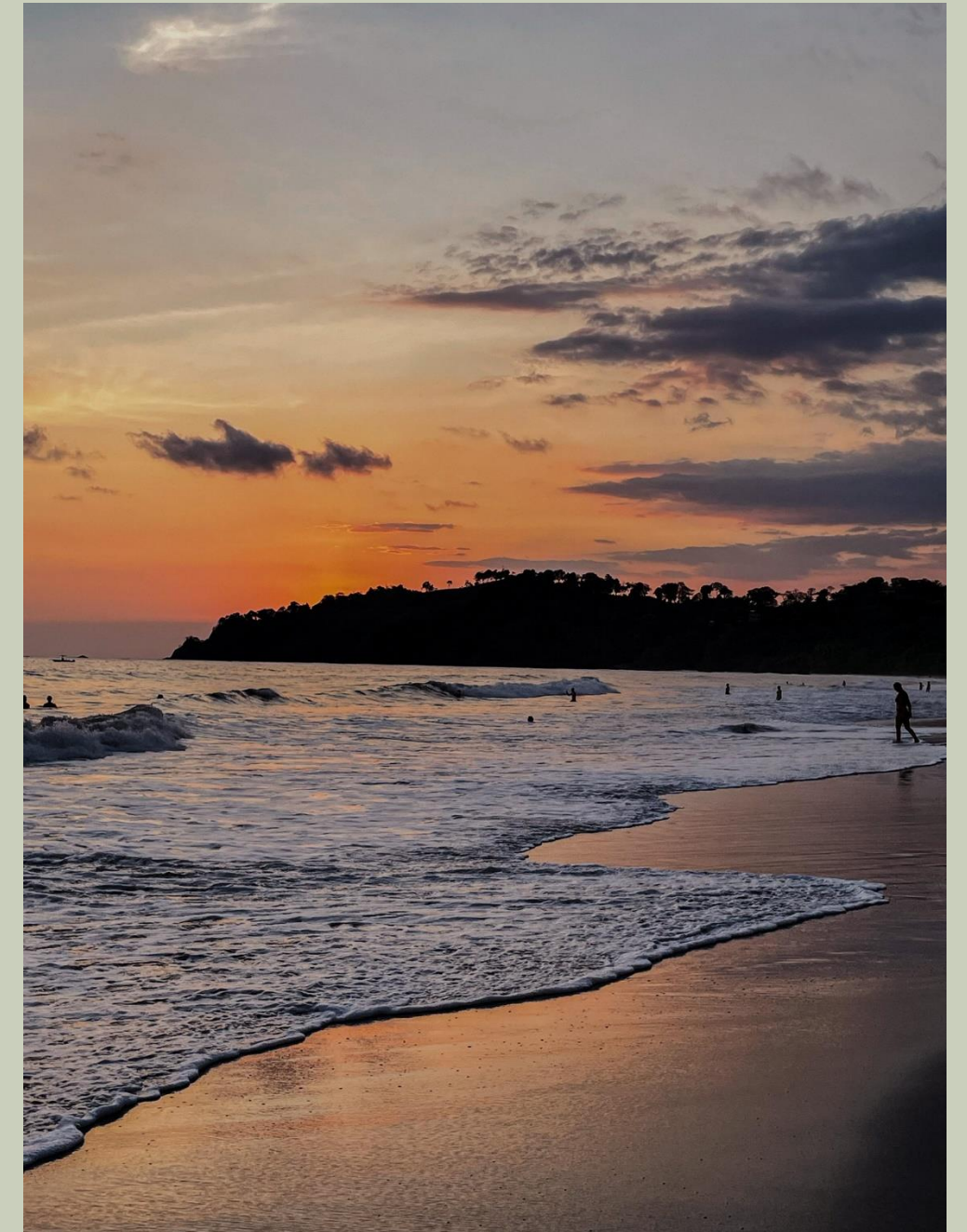


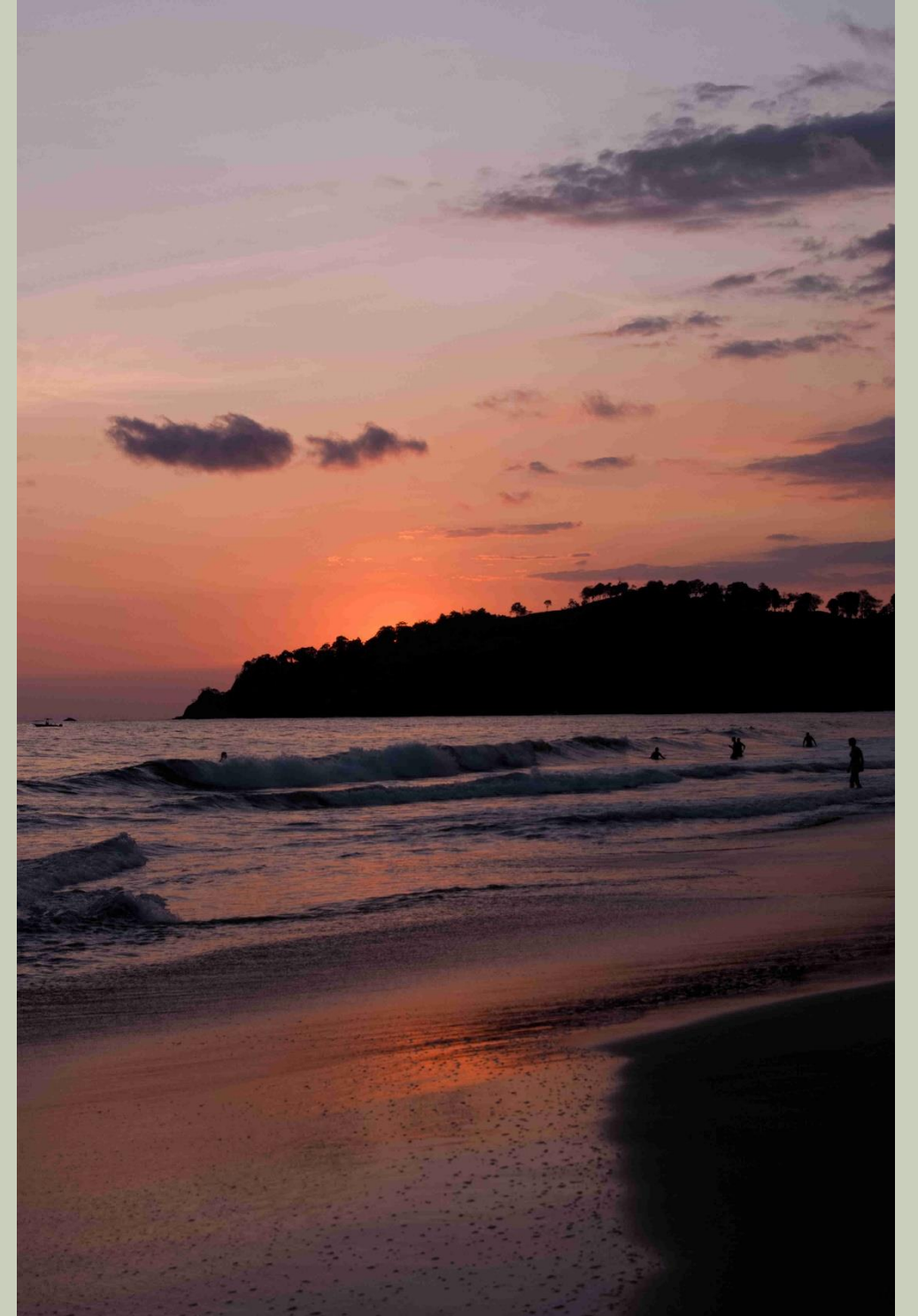






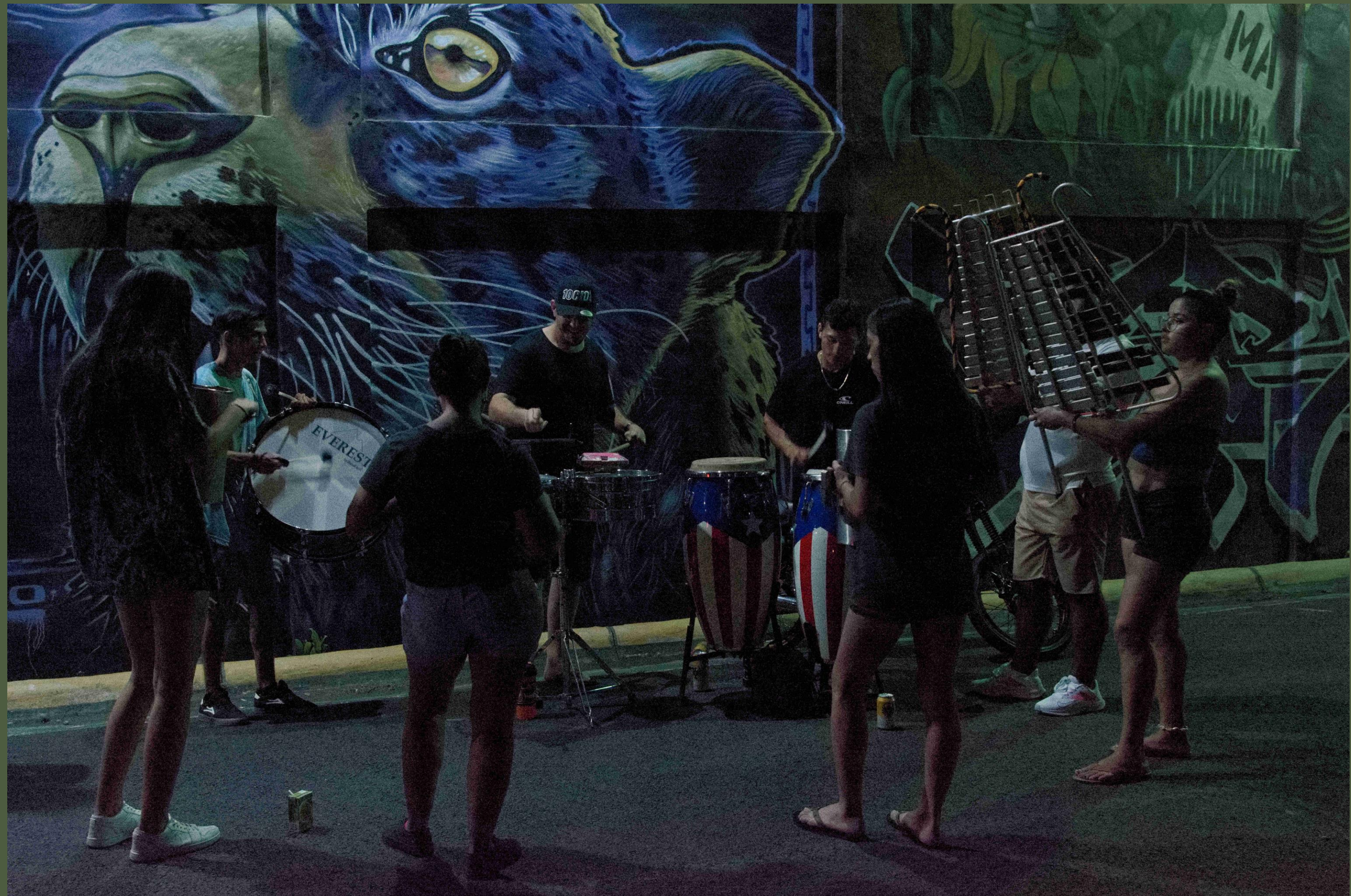
iPhone





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Grocery stores in Monteverde, Manuel Antonio, and San Jose. Where else would I be?



Manuel Antonio National Park



White faced capuchin



Squirrel monkey



Common vampire bat

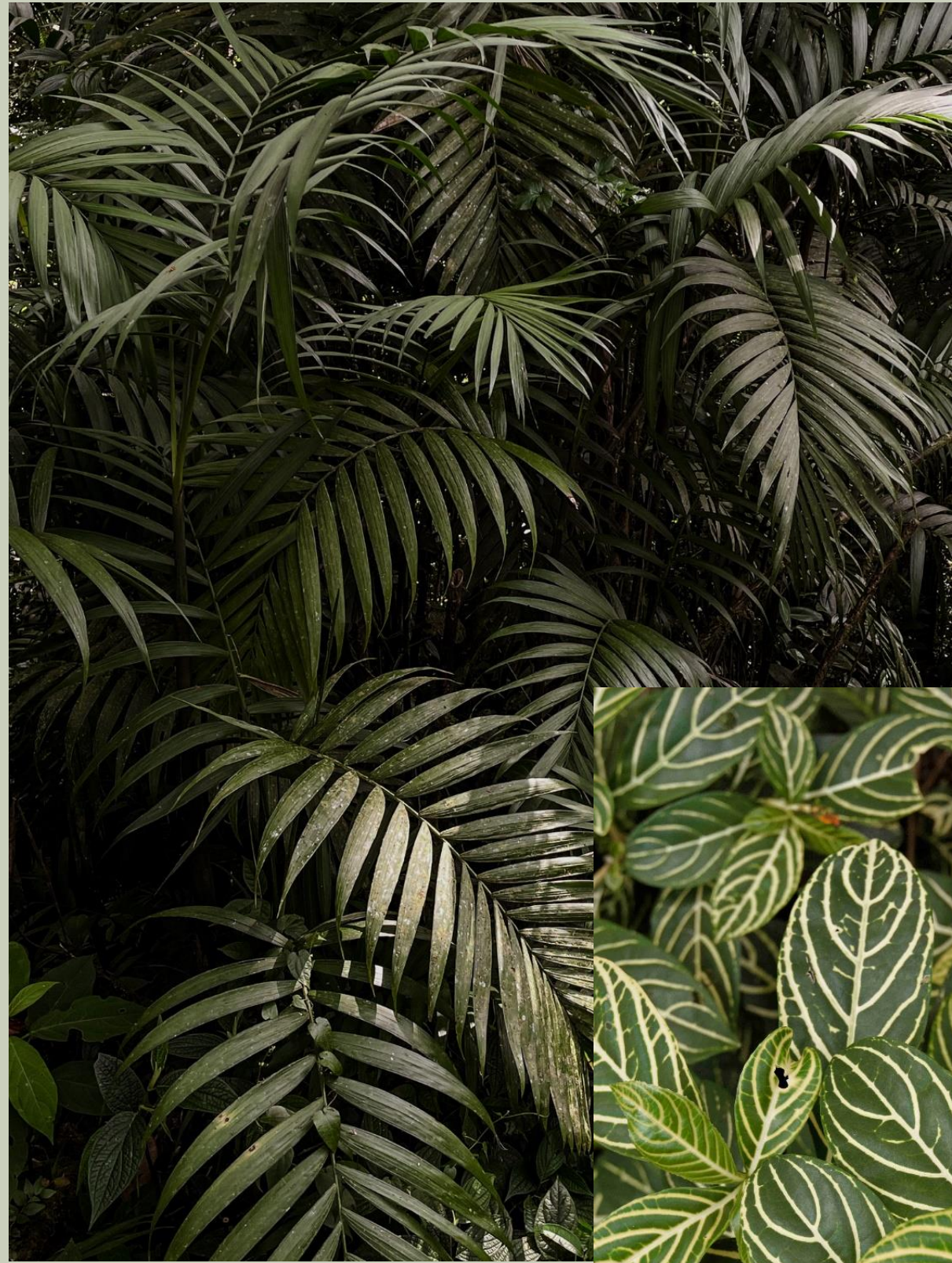




We had taken a (not so great) tour and spontaneously met Harlem as we wandered on our own. He was giving his own tour group some free exploration time and graciously gave us an impromptu, private tour, pointing out a family of 7 long-nosed bats and some sloths he noticed on the spot as we wandered in the same direction. *How do you know where to look for the animals? !* He joked, “Donde estan los animals.”



Manuel Antonio National Park, Playa Espadilla Sur











Herman



The view at Emilio's Café was so nice we returned for breakfast the next day after grabbing smoothies one afternoon.







On Surfing

In Dominicalito, I discovered why speakers so often use surfing analogies to illustrate life lessons. *That's the hospital. I don't want to take you there today, okay?* I thought Marlin, my instructor, was joking on our drive there, but I wasn't so sure halfway through our lesson. Trudging against an onslaught of waves with a surfboard twice my size was harder than I realized. *Get down!* My conversations with Marlin were frequently interrupted by his alerts. I'd hold my breath and duck under the closeout that roared over me, letting him hold onto the board so I wouldn't lose it to the waves and get pummeled. Salt stung my eyes red, dried out my lips and the back of my throat, and made my nose run like a toddler's. My face was raw from the gritty sand and salt. My lungs burned from the lack of oxygen and occasional gulp of briny water. Was it wise to eat light that morning? My gut was wrung out but I also felt weak. *You okay?* Marlin kept shouting over the deafening waves. I raised two thumbs up over my head, not wanting to admit defeat and trying to save my breath before ducking under the next swell. As we waited for the right moment, Marlin tried to keep me lying on the board for as long as possible unless an incoming wave was too dangerous and threatened to throw me off. He knew my lungs were weak.

Listo?! Time to go back to my third and final round, and by grace, I didn't feel myself as wiped out by the waves as I did previously. On one of my last rides, I jumped off to dismount and landed on rocks, slicing my feet and scraping my shin as I stumbled to find a patch of sand. Bruised and cut, I asked for one more shot at a wave.... And after that, one more. I began to embrace the thrill of surfing until a river of blood began to trickle down my shin and we called it a day. I left with lungs wide open and a purple bruise beginning to spread across my left elbow, grinning from doing something outside of my comfort zone, partially relieved it was over for the day, but mostly thrilled.

Pura vida.





A palm oil factory and a public school donated by the Republic of South Korea in Quepos

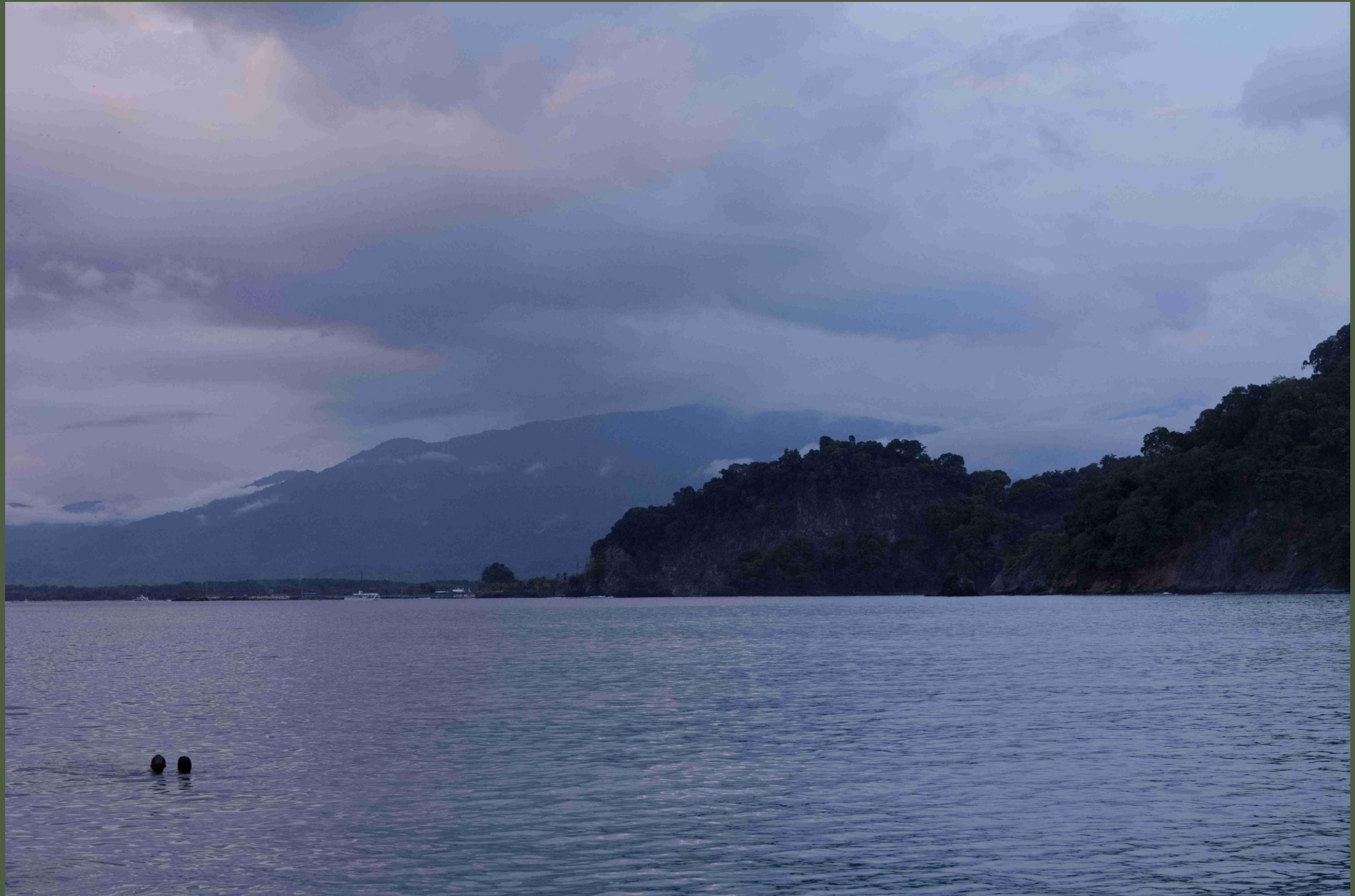






Playa Biesanz – it was worth the hike











El Rio Tarcoles











We wrapped up the last leg of our trip in *Alajuela/San Jose*. I snagged this stay with hotel points and don't think I've ever felt more grateful for central air.



En route to Tortuguero National Park – Mauricio and Arturo took every opportunity to enrich our day.



Breakfast at a rest stop. The U.S. needs to take notes.



Boat ride to and through Tortuguero National Park









Can you spot the white faced capuchin?



Basilisk ("Jesus Christ lizard")



Bats – I could hardly believe Arturo spotted these under a small log



Toucan in the wild (I tried)



This buddy followed us for our walk through Tortuguero











Public school in Tortuguero Village



Soccer, anyone?



I met Robert as he swung on a hammock. When I asked to take his portrait, he stood up with a grin. "Espera," and returned with a giant bug.



Tortuguero Village – if only we could’ve stayed for longer. There was an environmental portrait everywhere I turned.



Mauricio, our driver, and Arturo, our tour guide, are the ultimate Timon and Pumba, bound by a brotherly love forged by spending 12-16 hours a day together.

Mauricio is tall, quieter, and witty. His eyes would squint with a smile as he looked at us from the rearview mirror and his head would shake good naturedly whenever Arturo nudged him, amused with his own jokes. Even sitting through thick traffic, Mau maintained an easy smile on his face and made a sign of the cross every time he drove by a church.

Arturo is the gregarious entertainer with a laugh-inducing cackle. “Buena, bonito, barato,” “wa-hoo!”, and “The howler monkeys live in communities. 2 males and 25 females. Very lucky guys!” He needs his own tv show.

I’m deeply thankful for these kind souls, for their hospitality and energy and humor and love.



Breakfast and tour at Doka Coffee Estate



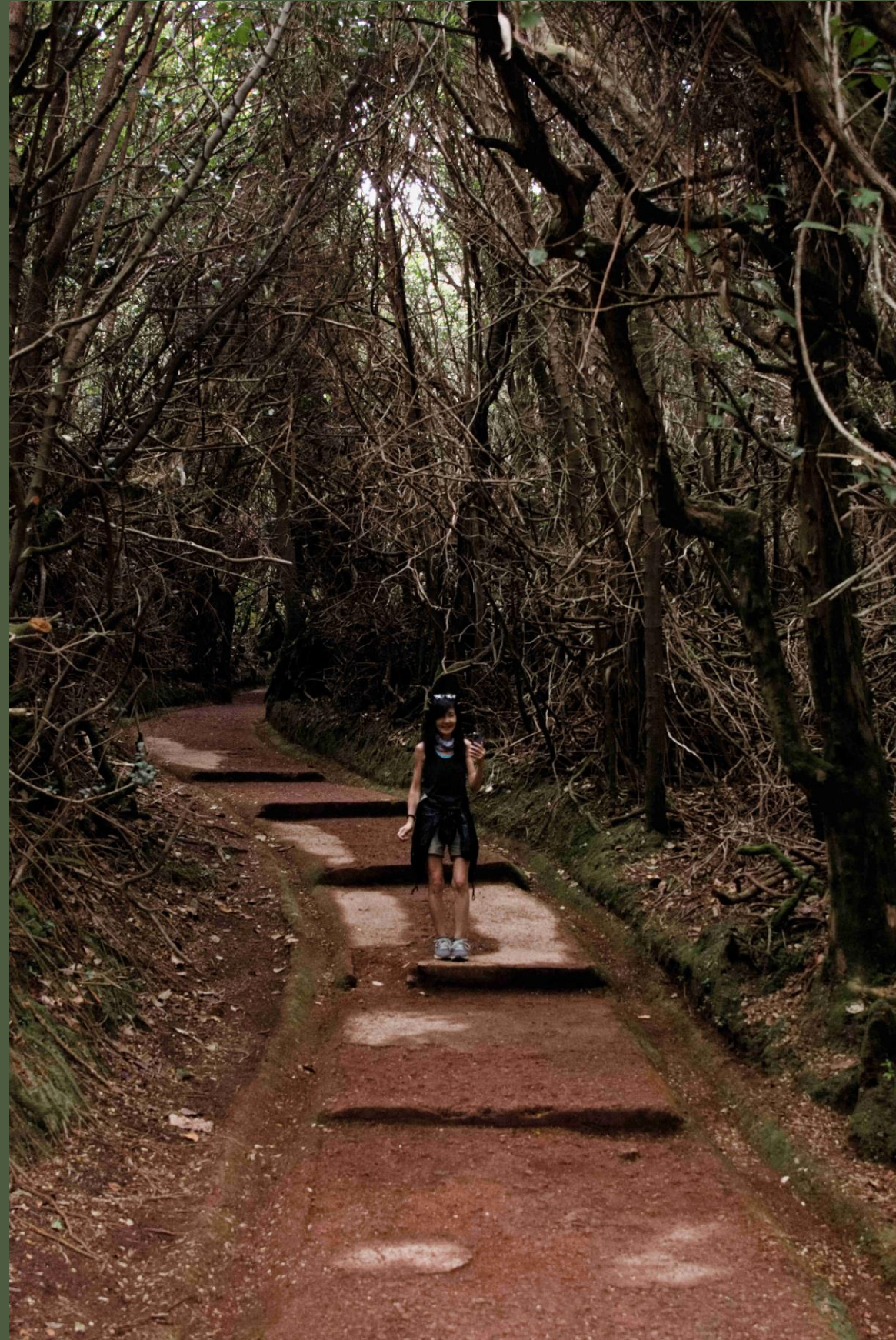






Elephant ears - the “poor man’s umbrella”







A rare look at an unveiled Volcan Poás (it was covered in clouds not too long after)





La Paz Waterfall Gardens



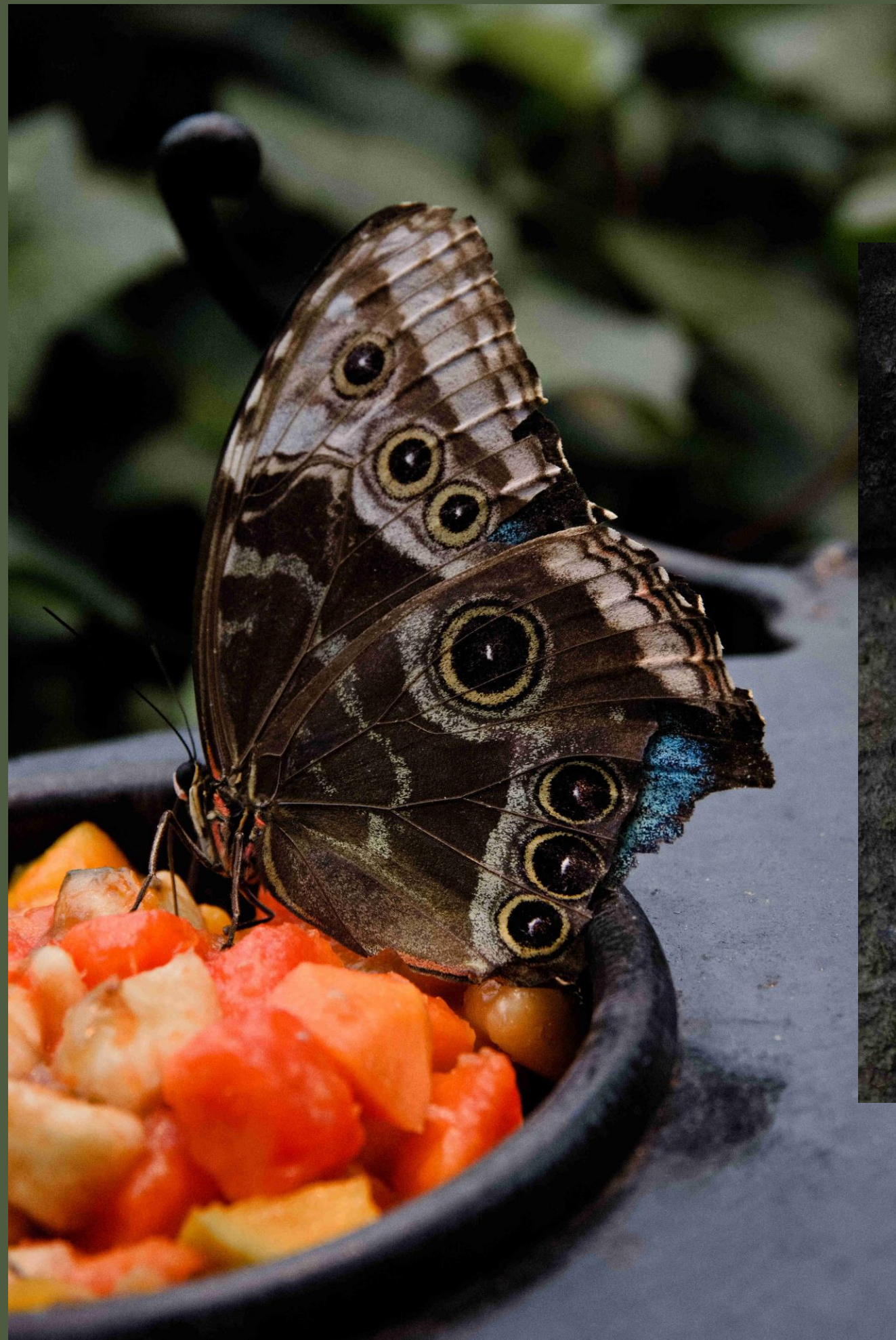


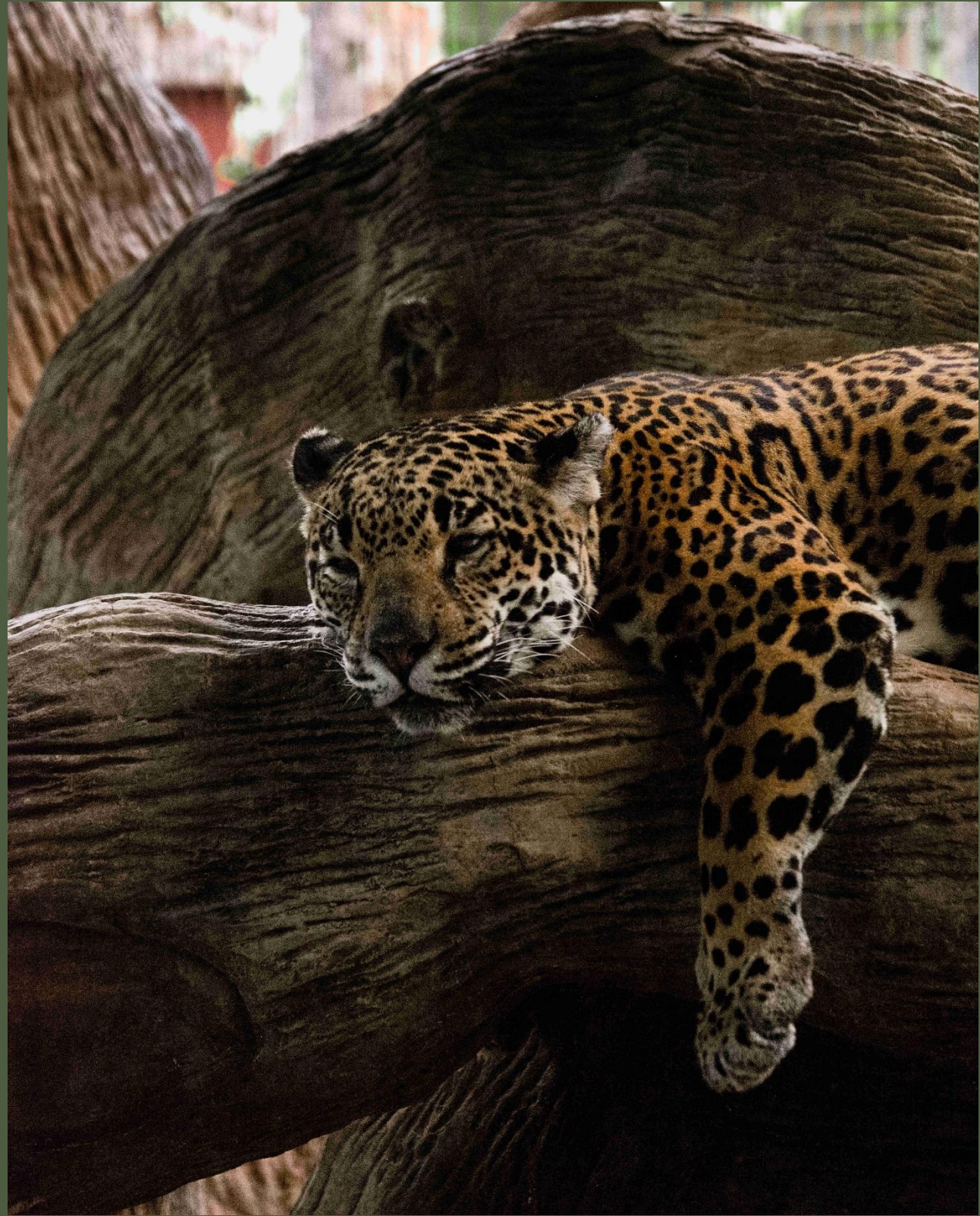


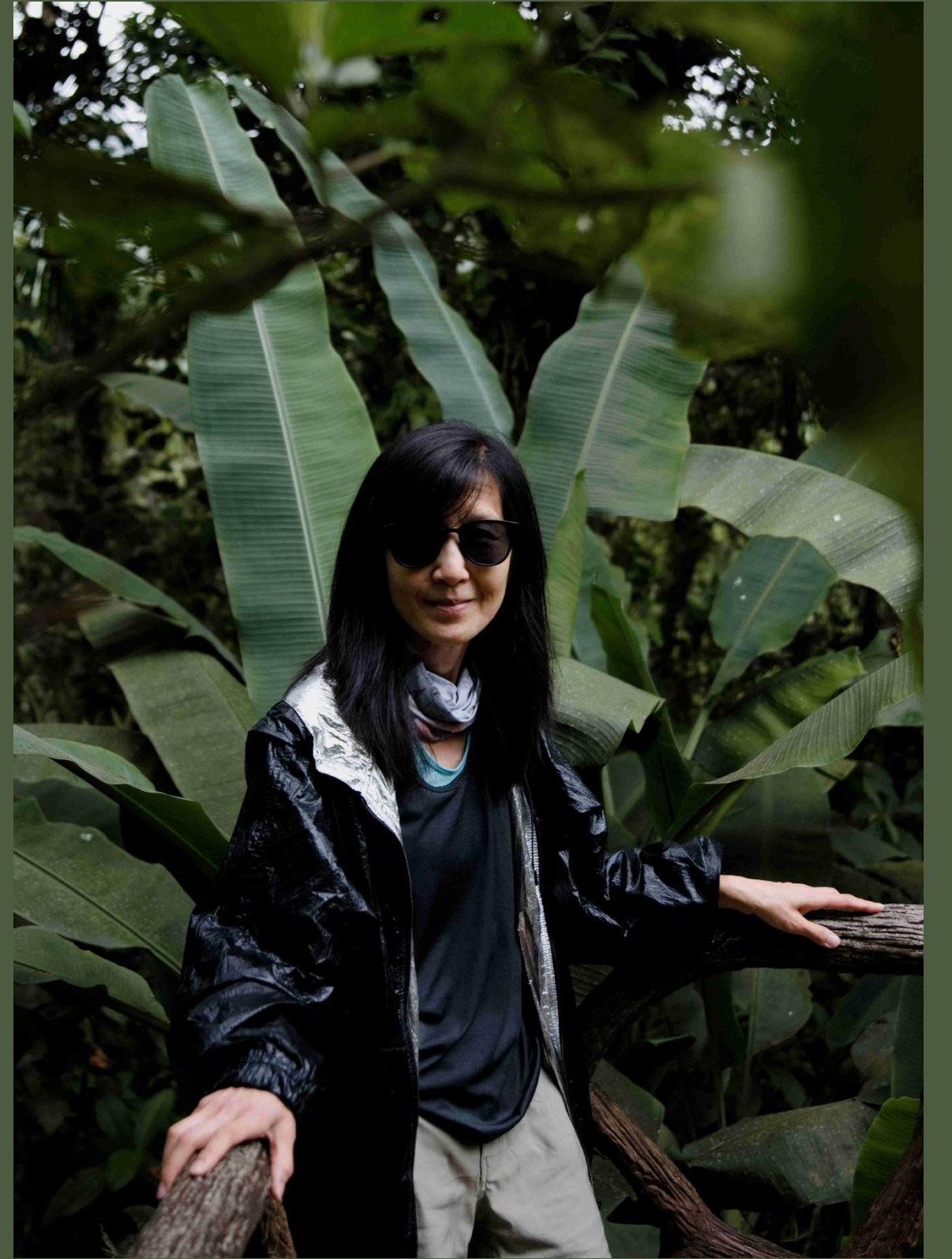




















Hasta la próxima vez, Costa Rica.

Until next time, Costa Rica.