

Journal

Cross-Cultural Design Thinking | Exploring Costa Rica
Abigail Christian, Summer 2023



Activities

Observations

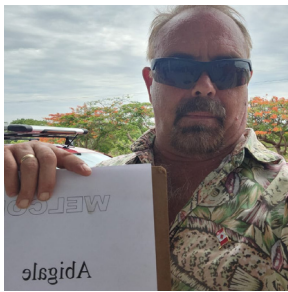
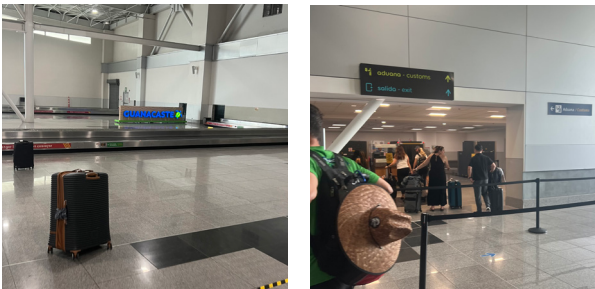
Independent Study

Images

Illustrations

Day 1: Arriving

As the plane began its descent into Costa Rica over Nicaragua, I looked out the window at the volcanos below, Concepción and Maderas, a stunning and unmistakable sight. A few moments later I was landing in Liberia International Airport and on my way through customs. To my relief, my bag and the driver were ready and waiting and I was off to my new home for the month at Cocomarindo Condos in Ocotol, Guanacaste, just outside of Coco. After dropping my bags, it was off to the golf cart rental up the street for some transportation and then a quick drive into town where I found a local restaurant called Selena Barre for some fresh seafood and a few moments to relax.



Then after a quick stop off at the Playa Del Coco black sand beach, it was off to the Megasuper grocery store. Finally, excited but exhausted, I headed back to the condo and got settled in for the night.



Observations

1. Signage and wayfinding in the airport had a very clean, high contrast, and modern look.
2. The restrooms signs were unique from those in the United States featuring the woman with curves and hair, rather than the usual triangle dress.
3. In town advertising signage is everywhere, and sometimes in both English and Spanish.
4. There seems to be mostly fresh or locally sourced items at the grocery store.
5. People in town seem to know a little English.
6. Restaurant bills offer amounts in both US Dollars and Colone's.
7. Traffic consists of everything from dirt bikes to Lexus'. There are some traffic signs but not many street signs.



Day 2: Getting My Feet Wet

A trip to the bank and then the beach started my day, and led me to find a wonderful little restaurant called, “Claudio Y Gloria.” A delicious traditional breakfast called Casado was just what I needed. After a few cups of coffee and practicing my Spanish with the waiter, I headed to the shops. Kids were selling bracelets. Street vendors, restaurants, and giftshop employees were flagging me down in the hopes that I would buy their handmade crafts, fresh cut coconuts, or try their menu. Among the shops was a little tour/excursion booking center, with air conditioning. While I must admit that the cool air was my main reason for stopping in, I ended up learning a lot about the area and booking a snorkeling tour. With forty-five minutes to spare before the boat came, I was glad that I wore my bathing suit. A little dingy picked me up from the shore and ferried me out to the catamaran.



Snorkeling was great and I met people from all over the United States and Europe. The boat anchored offshore from a small island. The water was clear. There were stunning fish, sea urchins, and water snakes. The guides were local fishermen who said they sometimes come there to camp. They took me to a cliff atop the island with a stunning view. Then, after a short hike down through the island’s caves and along its beach, teaming with hermit crabs. Then it was back to the boat. As we headed home, I saw the most amazing sunset over the Pacific Ocean. Shortly after, the water turned choppy and delayed us. Late in the evening and happy to be on dry land, I finally arrived and headed straight for the condo.



Observations

1. Typical snacks include plantains and other fruit, tortilla, and salsa or guacamole.
2. Banks utilize red frequently in their signage and have several strict security measures.
3. A typical breakfast consists of Casado (beans and rice), fried cheese, eggs, chorizo, yogurt or fruit, and coffee.
4. Menus are laid out similarly to the US.
5. Colone's are made of plastic and the bills vary in size and color. Coins are all gold in color and vary in size and texture.
6. Even the slightest tear in foreign currency is not accepted.
7. Eco tourism is popular in Costa Rica.
8. Most of the nearby coastal cities are small.
9. The same types of electrical outlets are used.
10. Pura Vida (pure life) is the common greeting.



Day 3: Neighbors

At the entrance to the condos is a convenience store called Cocomart. I made myself a quick breakfast and walked over to check it out and get a laundry card. After two very busy days, it was nice to take a moment to settle in and get organized. Midday I headed out down a nearby dirt road and found a quiet spot on the beach to do some yoga. At well over ninety degrees in the shade, I quickly realized the point of a siesta and decided that my next practice would be during a cooler part of the day. A dip in the pool when I got back was heavenly! I met visitors and expats from Canada and Europe, some of whom had gotten stranded during COVID and then chose to stay, some that retired here and, one couple who just adopted a kitten and were teaching it to adventure with them. As everyone went on with their day and the pool area emptied, iguana and hummingbirds started showing up. Howler monkeys appeared in the trees and jumped onto the rooftops. I couldn't believe how many curious creatures had been hiding just out



of sight. For dinner I stopped at an open-air place I had noticed the day before called Zi Bar. I treated myself to a pizza and was soon joined by a stray cat. After sneaking her bites of my meal under the table, she trotted off. A few moments later she appeared at my feet with her two kittens. I was so touched that I decided to just feed them the rest. After dinner, we went our separate ways, and I headed back to the condo.



Observations

1. Many people here are immigrants from the US, Nicaragua, Canada, or Europe.
2. Many side streets are not paved or marked.
3. Many homes do not have numerical addresses.



Day 4: Technical Difficulties

After making myself a quick breakfast of fruit, cheese, and other local snacks I headed off to the bank and to the golf-cart rental shop for an upgrade. Driving in Costa Rica is fun but not for the faint of heart. My little gas cart had two speeds, why isn't it going, and mack 3. So, I decided to see what else was available. I found a 4x4 option with bigger tires and a little more power and was off. I toured the shops and practiced the language with everyone I met. Like most days, I took lots of pictures. During the hottest part of the day, noon to three, I headed back for lunch and a swim. Cooking on the stove here has been a bit of a challenge. It's electric, but not in the usual way. A half hour later I was content eating my grilled cheese by the water. Still having no luck finding an affordable rental car, I chose to book an excursion and tour online so that I can see other regions and experience different parts of the country. In the evening I headed back into town and enjoyed live music at a place called Coco Nuts.



Observations

- 1. ATM's offer the option to take out US dollars or Colone's.
- 2. Homes and businesses in the area run on electric only.
- 3. Regular fuel is expensive and dirty. Vehicles backfire frequently.

Day 5: Fish Spa

After a pit stop at the ATM for some Colone's, I found a little fish spa and got myself a pedicure. Having 100 tiny little fish tickling your feet as they clean them is quite the experience. The owner seemed to get a kick out of my reaction. She explained how important tourism is to the area and how important reviews are. This was not the first time I had this mentioned to me since arriving so, I left a rave review. Talking to her and other locals, I have learned that Coco is predominantly a fishing and farming village. Tourism makes up most of the rest of its economy and the season stretches from December through April. May is typically the start of the rainy season though so far, it has been hot and dry. Without the rain fires are frequent. The cattle and horses look emaciated. The cliffs on the cost are brown and baren. Everyone and everything are waiting on the rains. Walking near the beach there are several people napping under shade trees. For a break from the heat, I stopped into a place called Bar El Ancla. A few refreshing frozen drinks helped cool me down before heading to the Coco Mart. During the day, quick snacks are better than whole meals. I picked up fresh fruit and plantain chips, yogurt, and juices to get me through instead. After catching up on work at the condo I headed back to town for dinner at Coco Nuts.



Observations

- 1. Tourism drives much of the economy in the Guanacaste province of Costa Rica.
- 2. Many businesses rely heavily on Facebook or Google to advertise.
- 3. Many restaurants and businesses are open-air.
- 4. There are a lot of homeless near the beaches and in town.
- 5. There are a lot of stray animals.
- 6. Costa Rica uses the metric system.

Day 6: Going for a Drive

With big plans for tomorrow, I decided to take it easy. I headed to Claudio y Gloria for coffee and a lite traditional breakfast consisting of fruit, yogurt, fresh orange juice, coffee, and eggs. Next I drove around Coco. I wanted to get more familiar with the area and take it in. As tempratures climbed I headed back to the condo to cool off in the pool, and prepare for tomorrows all day adventure. Late afternoon, I treated myself to a seafood dinner of cevichhe at the same resteraunt.



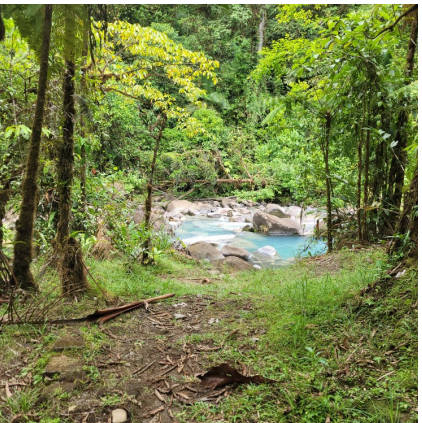
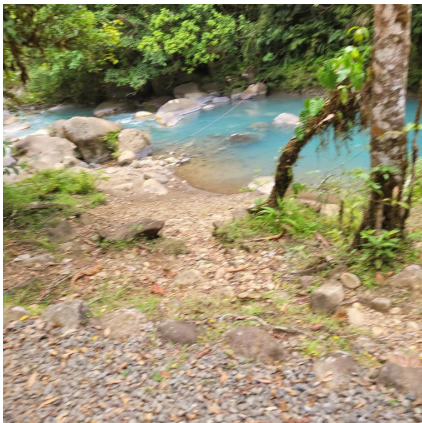
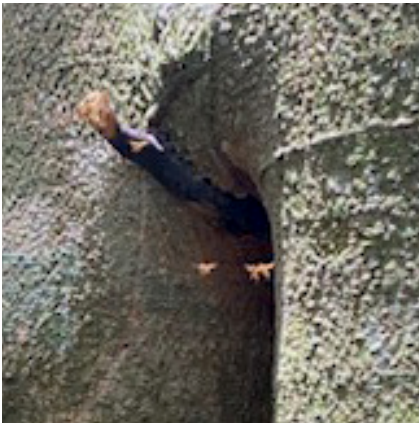
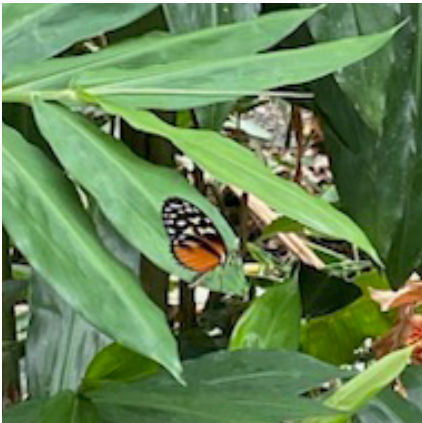
Observations

- 1. There are new businesses, homes, and resorts being built in the area.
- 2. Locals typically take Sundays off of work and many are religious.
- 3. Many homes and businesses are constructed out of concrete and have metal roofs. They are brightly painted. Other homes are a patchwork of many materials.

Day 7: Sloth Discovery Tour

The tour and hiking guides were so kind, attentive, and knowledgeable. The views of the volcanoes and landscape along the way were breathtaking. Even miles away, volcanic bombs littered the ground. When I arrived for the hike, the wildlife was unbelievable and everywhere! I saw spider monkeys, white-faced monkeys, howler monkeys, several sloths, butterflies, birds, red-eyed tree frogs, hummingbirds, and more. Along the trail, there were little refreshments of fresh fruit, coffee, and water waiting. I hiked down a beautiful path surrounded by vibrant flowers to swim in the most fantastic river of cool turquoise blue water. After cooling off I headed to a delicious traditional lunch made fresh, and while I waited for it to be ready, I relaxed in the butterfly garden. There I saw giant blue butterflies the size of your face. The trip ended with a nap on the ride back and a pit stop at a great gift shop. Then, just as I was nearing the condo, it rained. The driver and I celebrated and cheered. Everyone we drove by had a smile on their face. What an amazing day.





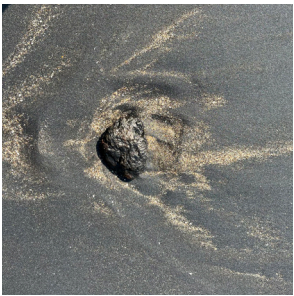


Observations

1. It is much cooler inland, rains more and is a lot more green.
2. Costa Ricans value and have a close connection to the natural world.
3. Costa Rica does not have an army. It was disbanded so that the money could be used for education.
4. The country generates so much clean energy that it can sell it to other nearby countries. Over 90% of its energy comes from wind and water with the remainder coming from geothermal (volcanic) energy.
5. There are not a lot of factories and many goods like vehicles are imported.
6. In the province of Guanacaste many towns require that only environmentally friendly materials be used to build and 80% of trees cannot be cut.
7. There are around two hundred volcanoes in Costa Rica. Six of them are active. One of them erupted a week ago.
8. Crops like rice, sugar, coffee, and coco are grown here and exported in addition to a variety of fruits.
9. Costa Rica is home to one of the five Blue Zones on Earth where people live longer, healthier lives. It is the area called the Nicoya Peninsula.
10. Violent crime is low in most of the country. Most infractions are related to petty theft. There are some issues with drugs in the capital and on the South Caribbean coast.
11. The government is democratic and most of the population participates in the elections.
12. Costa Rica has had a female president.
13. Costa Rica is a developing nation.
14. The countries healthcare system is advanced. Nursing homes are not typically considered.
16. Costa Rica is one of the most biologically diverse places on earth and features climates, like the Cloud Forest, found nowhere else.

Day 8: Ocotal

Today's adventure found me in Playa Ocotal where the beaches are a mix of black and gold sands that glitter. Parts of the shore feature sheets of black volcanic rock that look as if they just flowed and cooled there. Where they meet the sea, the tide crashes into them and an array of beautiful shells litter the ground. After a walk on the beach and a moment in the shade, shared with a very large iguana, I headed to a little restaurant called Father Rooster's. Like many of the restaurants here there was a mix of American, Asian, and traditional Costa Rican dishes. Menus are provided in both English and Spanish and the servers tend to know at least a little English. This little town seems wealthier than Coco and houses nestled in the hills and cliffs have gardens and paved driveways. They are enclosed with gates and proper fencing instead of barbed wire.

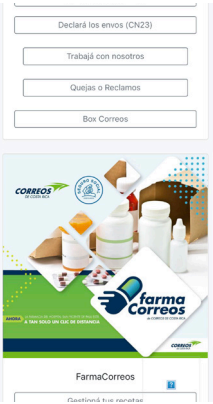


Observations

1. Menus are available in Spanish and English
2. White villas with terracotta roofs are popular here.
3. The landscape, elevation, and climate can change drastically within a few miles.
4. Each beach is different.
5. Red and green are popular colors for decoration and signage.

Day 9: The Post

Today I had a few more errands to run. I made a trip to the grocery store, stopped at the post office to mail a postcard home, and went for a drive.

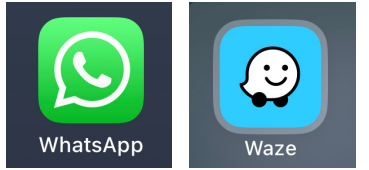


Observations

- 1. Stamps are thin, wide, and feature QR codes.
- 2. Post office colors are blue, green, and white.
- 3. Passports are required for sending mail, grocery store memberships, bank transactions, and act as a driver's license.
- 4. Many homes do not have mailboxes or visible numerical addresses.

Day 10: Soda

Today was spent trying to figure out a better transportation solution. The golfcart doesn't give me the range I would like and unfortunately, renting a car is very costly in Costa Rica. At over \$3000 with deposits and such, I visited a local scooter and dirt bike dealer (which, coincidentally, is also a home appliance store). While much more affordable, there is the trouble of getting a title and selling it at the end of my stay. So with that, I was off to the local grocery store for a few odds and ends. After a pitstop at the condo, I was off to try the catch of the day at Soda Mediterranean.



Observations

- 1. Signs warning against tsunamis.
- 2. A lot of businesses rely on Facebook for their online presence.
- 3. WhatsApp is how most people and businesses communicate.
- 4. Waze tends to be more reliable for navigation than Google maps or Apple.
- 5. Locally owned restaurants are called soda's.

Day 11: The Accident

I found a local woman named Alicia who runs a little rental business on a corner near the beach. Among the three options, she had a small electric vespa type scooter available. We agreed on a reasonable price for the next two weeks. It seems like most local businesses here are happy to work with you on price as long as it's fair. I headed back to return the golf cart and then to the condo to cool off. A few hours later, I left with a plan to visit the local chocolatier. Unfortunately, a patch of dirt and gravel in the road on the way there put a damper on that plan. I slid and came off the vespa pretty hard. A couple of locals along the road saw what happened and helped me up. I headed back to the condo to patch myself up.

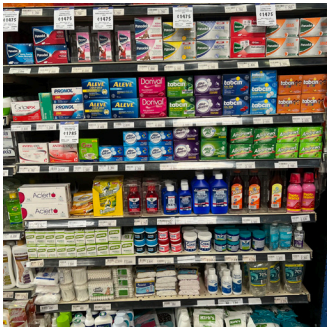


Observations

- 1. Many local businesses propose high prices but are willing to negotiate down.
- 2. There are not many big box stores.
- 3. Colone's and US dollars are accepted. Us dollars are typically preferred.

Day 12: Recovering

Luckily the vespa was ok, but having only a few small band aids and some Neosporin with me, I figured I should find some better first aid. I stopped to see what the local grocery store had on hand, but the selection was pretty limited, so I started looking up pharmacies in the area and headed to the closest one. With a little help from Google Translate and gesturing to my injuries, the kind pharmacist figured out that the wax strips I was pointing to were not in fact the big band aids I had thought they were. We had a good laugh as he bagged up some gauze, alcohol, and other items for me. I walked across the street to the Zi Restaurant Bar and enjoyed a good meal before heading back to rest up.

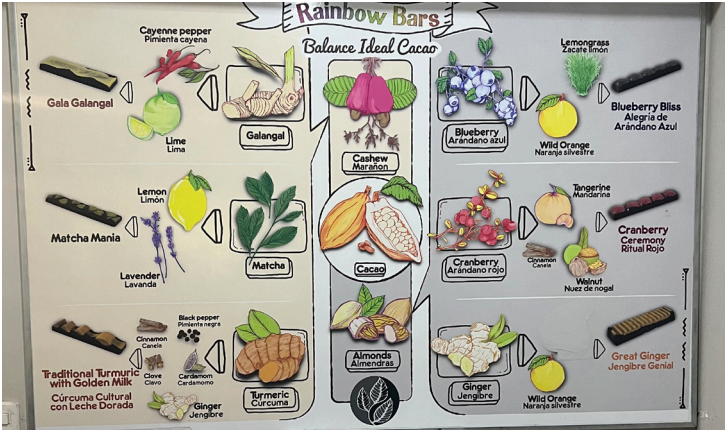
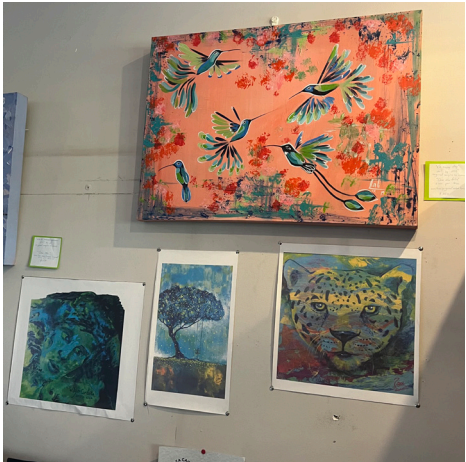


Observations

- 1. Pharmacies offer holistic and synthetic options side by side. They are very clean and modern.
- 2. Grocery stores offer a small section of medicines and first aid products.

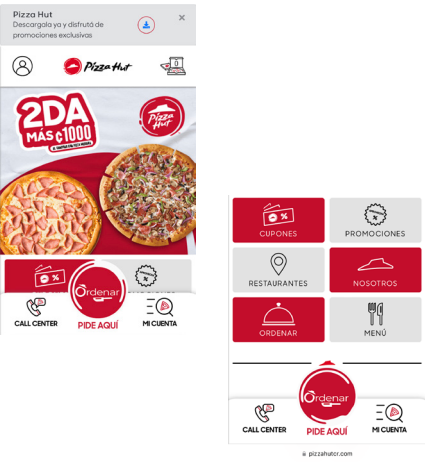
Day 13: Reset

I spent some time researching local tours and activities. Without a car a lot of my original plan had to be reworked. I ended up booking a trail ride for the next day and came up with a new plan. I also found a local art gallery called, The Art Boutique Gallery, and a local chocolatier, Cata Cacao. Two things I had been curious about. I think that art says a lot about culture and cacao seems to be an important export for Costa Rica. Visiting the gallery, I found it was home to hundreds of works by several artists from a range of provinces. On trip to the chocolatier, I got to sample amazing hand-crafted chocolate, learn a little about the process, and discovered that cacao has a deeper purpose in the region. When I returned to the condo, craving a little comfort food, I looked Pizza Hut up online. At forty kilometers away delivery was not an option, but it was interesting to see how the website looked in this country.



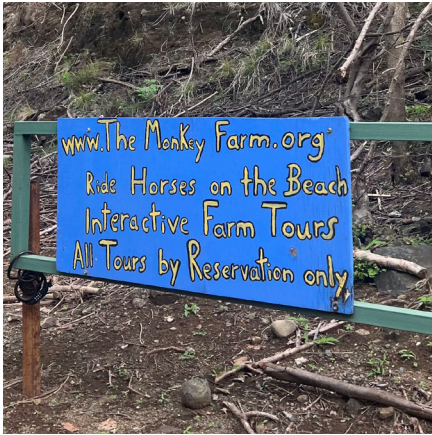
Observations

1. Common themes included the use of bold and primary colors, local plants and animals, faceless abstracted individuals, coins, and gold used within works.
2. Traditional artwork of painted feathers is also a prominent medium.
3. Cacao is viewed as an important crop for export but it also has a much deeper cultural significance.
4. Cacao is used ceremonially and as plant medicine for healing and calm energy.
5. Packaging is minimalistic and recyclable.
6. There is a close everyday relationship with the natural world.
7. Modern logo work with clean lines.
8. Hand crafted goods
9. Pizza Hut has a very similar appearance.



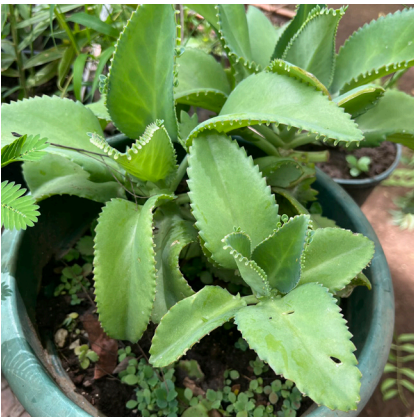
Day 14: The Monkey Farm

Heading out on my vespa, with a little help from Waze, I made my way to The Monkey Farm. Riding down the steep sloping entrance I could see the vast farm situated in the valley below. I pulled up to find a corral of horses saddled up. The tour began with a quick overview of what The Monkey Farm is and the many goals and services they provide. Horse tours help fund the farm, but its main goals are so much bigger. They rehabilitate children and adults, animals, feed the homeless, administer equine therapy, build monkey bridges, and more. Viki, the owner, and a few volunteers, created this nearly completely self-sustaining oasis from scratch. I knew right away that this place was special. Marlon, my guide, was incredible. We navigated miles of beautiful trails to the beach before heading up to a viewpoint on a cliff to take in the sunset. During the ride the injury to my knee got reopened. Marlon was quick to patch me up. When we got back to the farm, he pulled up a chair for me and ran to the garden. He came back with a first aid kit and leaves from a succulent plant, then asked if he could look at my knee. After cleaning it out he advised me to use the juice from the leaves twice a day to help it heal and not scar. As we talked, he invited me to help with the soup kitchen the following day. I promised him I would be there, thanked him, and was on my way. Totally captivated by this place, I donated and booked another tour with them as soon as I got back to the condo.



Observations

1. There is a unique relationship between the people here and the natural world.
2. Plant medicine is routine.
3. Everyone stops to watch the sunset.
4. New villas and resorts are being built in the Playa Ocotol area creating needed jobs.
5. Tourism funds much of Ocotol.
6. The Monkey Farm is a unique non-profit that is very important to the local community.
7. There is a large homeless population.



Day 15: Volunteer Work

On a walk through the town after lunch, I met a gentleman named Carlos, a photographer and tour guide. As we chatted tourists and locals alike kept coming up to shake his hand or say hi, so when he eventually offered a private tour, I was open to the idea. We took a quick drive to the far side of Coco to a place called Snakes Head, a strip of land that juts out separating it from Playa Hermosa. On the drive back to town I explained my transportation issue and we agreed on a reduced rate for an all-day tour. After a quick stop at the condo, I headed to Coco beach where I met up with volunteers from The Monkey Farm to feed the homeless. It was an amazing and humbling experience. A soup kitchen on wheels, they had loaded up the back of their truck with soup, bread, iced tea, and dinnerware. Before serving the food, they held a quick streetside church service. There was a large crowd of old and young. They sat on the curb as we walked each tray over to them. Some had adopted strays and shared meals with them. As they finished, we came around and collected their plates. There were lots of hugs and handshakes.



Observations

1. Artifacts and sacred cultural sites are being lost to construction.
2. Jobs are limited.
3. The homeless sell handmade goods and offer security during the day.
4. When the crowds leave the beaches at night the homeless clean up the trash, separate the recycling and set up their camps.
5. Locals do not like litter or waste.

Day 16: Two Volcanoes

I headed to breakfast with my new friend and guide, Carlos. We enjoyed pancakes and several cups of coffee before starting our journey through Guanacaste and into Alajuela province. On the way we could see giant wind turbines and the geothermal vents used to harness the countries energy. Three giant volcanoes made up the skyline, their tops covered in steam and clouds. After a few hours in the car, we stopped on the far side of Liberia for refreshments. The city didn't have tall buildings or skyscrapers. It was cramped and dirty. Trash was everywhere and the smell was stagnant in the air. Carlos explained that Liberia is experiencing a huge trash problem and inside the city businesses would have to burn their trash. The city grew much more quickly than the infrastructure. As we reached the outskirts, it was worse. People had begun dumping loose trash and bags. It was everywhere you looked. Then, nothing. It was as if there was a magic line where the National Park begins. He told me that the park is patrolled heavily and that there are serious penalties for dumping and even littering. The road weaved back and forth up the volcanoes foothills. A one lane, beautifully paved road turned to dirt and the views were spectacular. Carlos and I took turns spotting wildlife as we went. It was like a safari. We stayed close to the vehicle for safety but stopped every few meters and got out to look and the amazing wildlife. So many species







of toucans, parrots, parakites, frogs, snakes, plants, giant insects, birds of paradise, lizards, monkeys and more. It was incredible, like walking into the pages of National Geographic. We photographed as many as we could before stopping at the ecolodge. An oasis with views of a breathtaking waterfall and garden. We explored the grounds and enjoyed a good meal. After seeing La Fortuna, two volcanoes, the National Park, dry jungle and rainforest we started the drive back. At night the road was covered in frogs and snakes. We made our way out and stopped at a gas station. Drivers could not pump their own fuel and the cost was 759 colones per liter. That would be \$5.31 per gallon US.

Observations

- 1. The indigenous tribes of Costa Rica are Huetar, Maleku, Bribri, Cabécar, Brunka, Ngäbe, Bröran and Chorotega. While they were influenced by Inca and Mayan culture, they were not part of either.
- 2. Liberia has grown too fast for the infrastructure that is in place. The city has a huge trash problem.
- 3. The national park is fiercely patrolled to protect wildlife and prevent dumping.
- 4. Many roads in the national parks are left unpaved to deter excess visitors.
- 5. Eco lodges and farms are scattered throughout the jungle.
- 6. Costa Rica is a developing country.
- 7. Fuel is very expensive.
- 8. Hydroelectric, geothermal, and wind turbines provide a surplus of energy which Costa Rica is able to sell to neighboring countries.
- 9. Ecosystems include The Cloud Forest, dry jungles, arid regions, rain forests, volcanic geothermal regions, plains, freshwater marine, saltwater marine, and more.

Day 17: Taking It Easy

Tired from yesterday’s adventure, I took some time to rest. I made a quick run into town for cash and treated myself to a simple meal at one of my favorite restaurants.



Day 18: New Friends

In the morning I caught a cab to The Monkey Farm. I had promised to come back to deliver art supplies and help the staff practice their English. It was challenging, but a lot of fun. We all learned a lot and shared a lot of laughs. Marlon returned from a horse tour and as I helped him feed the animals, I explained why I had come to Costa Rica. He invited me to come back the next day to learn more.



Observations

1. Costa Rican's often refer to themselves as Tico's and Tica's. It is a complimentary term.
2. The Costa Rican flag is red, blue, and white.

Day 19: Interview with Marlon

My interview with Marlon began with a traditional cup of tea. As he strained the ingredients he explained their purpose, “The lemongrass is a powerful antioxidant, antibiotic, and antifungal that does lots of good things for your body... Moringa leaf gives relief from pain and swelling. It also helps with things like cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and constipations... Soursop (a type of tree) it is like magic, right! It gets rid of cancer, protects the organs, gets rid of bad breath, kills viruses... we use the leaves to make the tea, but you can use every part of it. It is one of the reasons people here live so long. We use this all the time.” The tea had a lite flavor similar to a lemon green tea. While we sipped, we talked. I asked Marlon about traditions and everyday life. He told me how important family is in his culture. “We don’t put our elders in a nursing home,” he explained, “We take care of them at home.” He talked about the value of work and overall attitudes, “work is a gift... like waking up in the morning.” The conversation evolved into broader cultural topics. He told me about the attitude towards voting in the country and the high priority people place on it. He explained some of the history of Costa Rica and how it had disbanded its armed forces. That money goes to education now,” he said, “We only have the regular police.” When I asked



how Costa Rica protected itself, he told me, “Our friends help us. If Nicaragua gets a little crazy, or something happens, we call our friends and within a couple of hours they can be here.” When we finished our tea, he gave me a tour of the Herbal Pharmacy starting with a few pots by the house. “These,” he said, “are like our everyday things”. One plant for headaches, one for diarrhea, another for scrapes and cuts... Then he showed me the larger plants and vines.

There was cacao, coffee, plantains and much more. As we turned the corner, there was a massive handmade self-sustaining terrarium. Plants grew out of holes in PVC piping and were fed by rainwater that was collected and cleaned naturally. The minerals collected by the plants and soil enriched the water below, creating an environment for fish and other wildlife and plants. Everything was connected and could be harvested year-round.



Observations

1. The traditional men's hat is called the Chouete.
2. September 15th is Costa Rica's Independence Day.
3. In 1948, the President Jose Figueres Ferrer dispensed Costa Rica's army.
4. Money that had been spent on the armed forces was allocated for education.
5. Costa Rica is protected by it's allies who include The United States and Canada.
6. The country has had a female president.
7. There are seven province's that make up Costa Rica. They are Alajuela, Cartago, Guanacaste, Heredia, Limon, Puntarenas, and San Jose.
8. Protections put in place for nature include low light pollution allowances and environmentally friendly building.
9. In some areas, no more than 10% of trees may be cut down to make room for buildings.
10. National Parks are growing and preserving the natural environment.
11. Some areas, like Monteverde, refuse to pave sections of road in order to cut down on human impact. The Monkey Farm needs a grant writer.
12. New builds needed at the farm will require it to raise 160 K.
13. Tea made of Sour Sap, Lemon Grass, and Moringa Leaf, is revered as the elixir of long live.
14. Duty to family is a fundamental value of the culture. The elderly are cared for at home.
15. The Herbal Pharmacy at the farm is completely self-sustaining and holds cures for both the animals and people.

Day 20: Singing in the Rain

After a busy week, I spent some time at the condo cleaning and catching up on laundry. Later I headed out for a walk on the beach. Storm clouds started rolling in fast, so I stopped at Soda Carrillo for an early dinner and to wait out the rain. I couldn't believe the downpour. The rains had gradually become more regular but nothing like this. In the flooding a little Harlequin Crab found his way to my table. I stayed to enjoy some live local music and watch the sunset.



Day 21: The Flood

I woke up to water everywhere. I sopped up what I could and called maintenance. While they worked, I headed back to the beach for a little coffee and some breakfast. I got a call that it would be a while before I could return. So, unable to work at the condo, I drove to The Monkey Farm to volunteer my time.



Observations

1. Locals say the rainy season starts with a few light afternoon showers and grows heavier until it is a non-stop monsoon through October. Then, in November it clears up.
2. The rainy season is referred to as the green season.
3. Floods are frequent later in the year and can cause rivers to rise twenty or more feet.
4. Tap water comes from runoff of the volcanoes and is not only healthy but packed with minerals.
5. Samba, Salsa, and Calypso music are popular.
6. Homes have tile floors and concrete walls.
7. Overall the attitude of people is positive. There is sense of happiness and excitement for life.

Day 22: Interview With Viki

In my interview with Viki, I learned that homeless shelters and rehabilitation programs across the country don't operate honestly. She informed me that, "They make the homeless dig through the trash for things to sell. If they don't make their quota, they don't have a place to sleep." I couldn't believe my ears. Then she talked to me about the program she runs and how it is free. She is only able to house about thirteen at a time but when they come, they receive counseling, English classes, regular meals, medical treatment, and a safe place to live and recover. She and her volunteers help teach the men skills and they assist with work at the farm and in the community. Each is required to stay for thirteen months. When they graduate the program, they have the option to stay to work and mentor the others. They are offered a paid staff position. She stressed the importance of the farm being self-sustaining with so many mouths to feed. Money is almost entirely generated by the tours they offer and must be carefully budgeted to ensure they can survive the off season. We discussed her goals for the future. She talked about her plan of building tiny houses on the property to create needed housing for staff and those recovering. "In the future", she said, "I want to be able to use this farm as the model to base more centers off of." Some

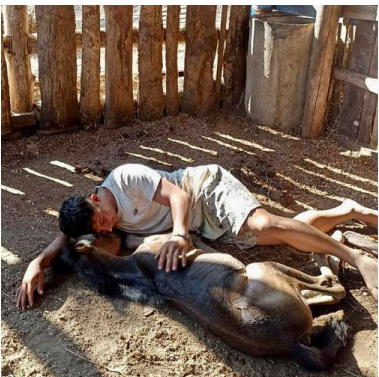


issues she faces are centered around supply. Getting things shipped to her requires a three-hour drive to the capital, San Jose. Packages are searched and taxes are assessed for each item. She said, "Someone sent me a t-shirt once and the post office charged me twenty dollars to pick it up." She expressed the need for better advertising and explained that while they have a website and signage, many tourists don't discover them. We talked about possible approaches that might help generate more business. I made several suggestions and

offered to help. We discussed brochures as a way to advertise to large audiences staying in resorts and hotels and more. She also expressed the need for a grant writer. As the farm expands and tries to help more people and wildlife their need for funding expands also. Viki had to get back to work and after finishing up another English class and some work on a monkey bridge I headed back to the condo to get cleaned up before meeting Viki and the guys at the beach to help with the soup kitchen.

Day 23: Under Construction

Finally sure of the source of the leak, maintenance spent the day at the condo finishing repairs. I spent the day doing a little construction too, at The Monkey Farm. Power lines create a huge problem for the monkey population across Costa Rica. As they try to cross or near roads, they get electrocuted and often die. To combat this The Monkey Farm has taken to making bridges for them to cross the road, in addition to rehabilitating the surviving monkeys. Some bridges are thirty-five feet long and each is hand crafted. Made from a type of plastic rope, mesh, and zip ties, they are durable and strong. The rungs make the bridges resemble a ladder laid on its side. The distance between each rung must measure exactly 90 centimeters and the length of each needs to be 30. This prevents the bridge from twisting and creates a stable structure for the monkeys to cross. Each rung is looped through the connecting length of rope and melted to itself with a heat gun at both ends. The base is crafted with a thick plastic mesh and zip ties. The ties are not cut to simulate the texture of twigs and foliage. A single bridge can take days to make. The current order calls for thirty. Heavy rains interrupted work but provided a much need break from the heat and a little time for a friendly competition to see who had learned the most new English words.



Day 24: Squirrel

At breakfast I spent some time studying a Spanish to English book a friend had lent me for the trip. It had come in handy at the farm. A short cab ride later, I was back to work building bridges. A few hours in, while taking a quick break under a shade tree, something jumped on me. I froze and looked at the guys who burst into laughter. They had been nursing some baby squirls back to health and, apparently, today was release day. These little ones were very sweet and loved to give kisses. Everyone took a break to play with them and gave them snacks. After a full day at the farm, I treated myself to dinner a Pacifico with an amazing view of the sunset.



Observations

- 1. Typical lunches consist of a protein, fried vegetables or a slaw, and casado.
- 2. Tourists and volunteers seem to hear about the farm from other visitors or locals. Some find it on TripAdvisor.
- 3. The culture is not wasteful.



Day 25: Progress

A little quiet time in the morning and a good breakfast at Jardin Tropical fueled another day of work at the farm. We made good progress on the bridges and spent a lot of time talking while we worked and cared for the animals. Marlon and a few of the guys expressed their ideas for the farm and a few needs they had. Simple things like shoes and books would make a big difference to them. They loved my ideas for promoting the farm and they showed me the flyers they used to use. Viki and I talked about how to make them more effective and came up with a list of local resorts, restaurants, tour centers, and hotels where we could display them. With our conversation in mind, I paid a visit to both Pacifico Resorts locations that evening as well as the beautiful Blue Bar located inside. All parties involved were excited by the idea. Resorts are always looking for new excursions to offer their guests and the farm, obviously, stands to benefit.



Day 26: Helping

I returned to the farm and ended up being put in charge of caring for a young goat. A sweet little guy who was suffering from an infection and needed constant care. He was a favorite at the farm for his gentle nature. Viki joined me for a bit to thank me for helping and let me know that she had spoken to their newest board member, a graphic designer, about implementing some of my ideas. It was an amazing feeling.

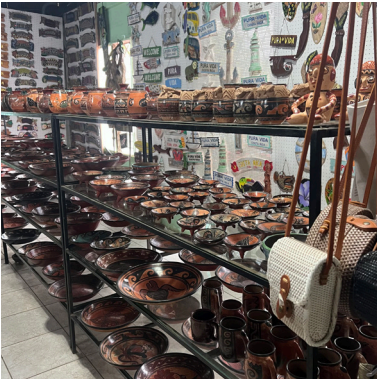
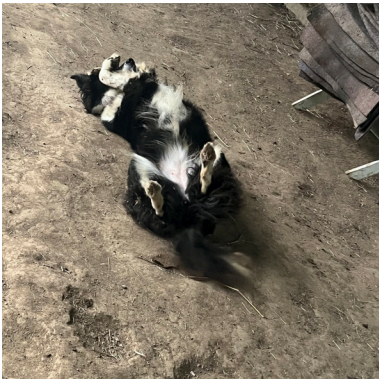
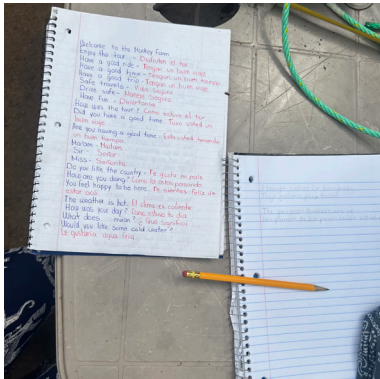
Day 27: Something for Everyone

I found the cutest little air conditioned café. It was the perfect place to start my day and get a little work done. I started thinking about the extra food and toiletries I had at the condo. When I got back, I bagged up anything I didn't need and separated it into two sections. One for the farm and one for the homeless. I headed to the soccer field near the beach and handed off a care package of food, a camp stove, first aid, and toiletries to a gentleman I knew would share it. He gave me a big hug and asked me to meet him at the beach. He found me a little while later and handed be a random assortment of books that he had used to help him practice his English. I felt so honored. He grabbed a beach chair for me and would keep an eye on my things while I swam. Before heading out I handed him a tip and thanked him. I ended the afternoon at the Zi Bar where a stray cat I had met, and her kittens, lived under the deck. Expecting company, I ordered a shrimp cocktail specially for them. The owner and I shared a laugh as he admitted he fed them too. I headed back to the condo for an early night.



Day 28: Saying Goodbye

With bags of food, supplies to donate, and the guy’s favorite cookies, I headed to The Monkey Farm one last time. I taught a final English class and helped with “manicure day” for the horses. It was hard to imagine leaving these people who had begun to feel like family. So, for a few hours, I didn’t. It was like any other day. But then, they surprised me with a big spaghetti lunch. We ate and laughed, and I promised to come back if I ever got the chance. After lunch it got quiet. A couple of the guys were getting ready to head into town and wanted to give me a ride so I wouldn’t have to pay for a cab. As I waited, we all double checked that we had each other’s contact info. When the time came, the tears we had all been holding back came rushing out. Marlon gave me a big hug and told me to always remember I have a family in Costa Rica. It was so hard to say goodbye. As I walked toward the parking lot by the corral, I heard Jackson say, “one more?”. I looked over with tears in my eyes as he handed me a treat to give to my favorite horse. We used to joke that I would make the horses fat because I always wanted to give them one more.

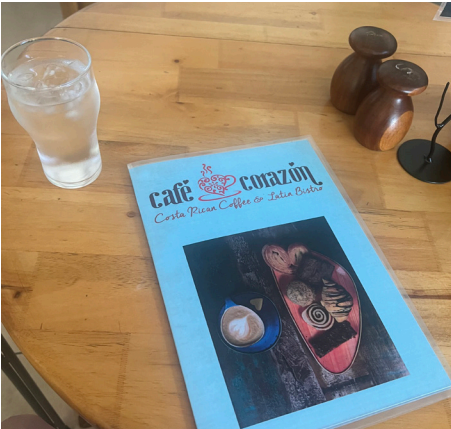


Back at the condo I finished packing and checked in for tomorrow’s flight. I confirmed my driver and made arrangements to return the scooter. With everything in order, I headed into Coco to get a few last-minute souvenirs and catch one final ocean sunset. Afterwards, as I sat down for a quick dinner on the beach, I got a notification. It was a group photo of the guys. Something I had really wanted but forgot to do before I left. It was the perfect send off.



Day 29: Heading Home

I got up early and set my things by the door. With a long day of travel in front of me, I headed to Café Corazon for a delicious breakfast and a little coffee before taking one last walk on the beach. The coast that had been barren and brown was now a rich emerald green from the rains. I had watched everything come to life in my time here. I took a few minutes to reflect and soak up the view before leaving to meet up with Alicia. I returned the scooter and caught a ride back to the condo to wait for my shuttle to the airport. A bittersweet feeling. Excited to be headed home but sad to leave this amazing place behind. My driver, a Canadian who had moved here twenty years ago, was eager to hear about my stay. As we chatted, I stared out the window watching the sugar cane fields go by, the manga and cashew orchards, and each little town. I thought to myself, what an amazing adventure this has been.

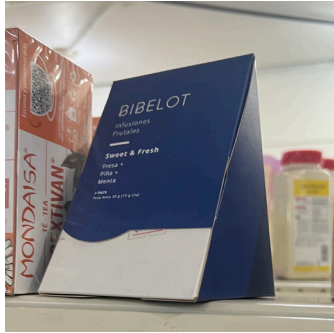




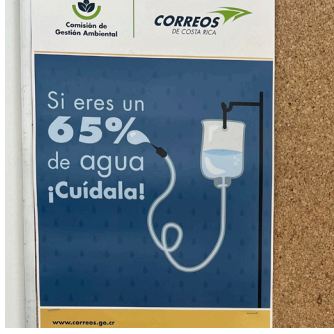
Observations

- 1. Highway signs for the airport have more dimension and are blue.
- 2. In the two weeks since the rains came the landscape as transformed.
- 3. Airport signage leaving Costa Rica has a different theme than when arriving.
- 4. My passport is the best thng I have ever purchased for myself.

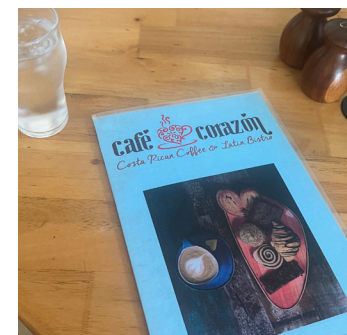
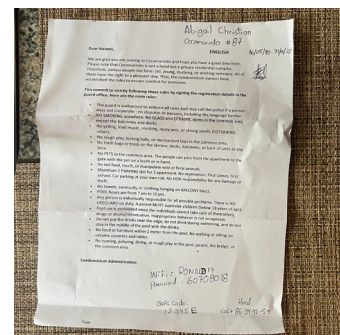
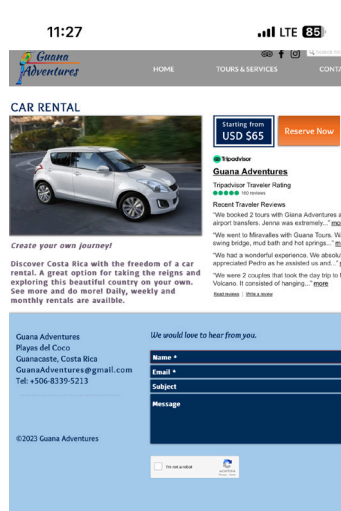
Packaging



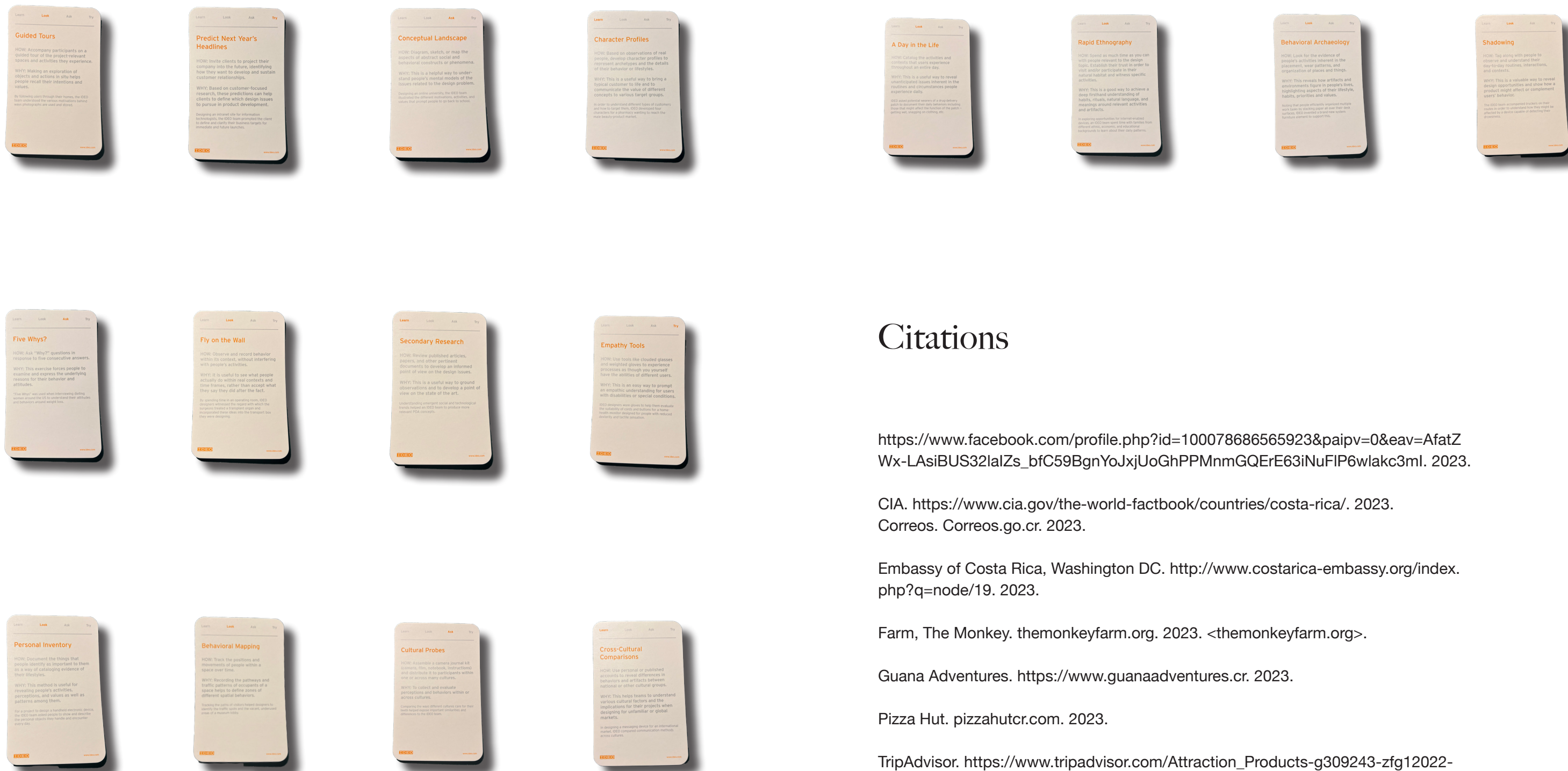
Signage & Wayfinding



Web



Ideo Cards Used



Citations

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