

The Project:

ON COSTA RICA'S CARIBBEAN COAST

Question: How do efforts in Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast, with a largely Afro-Costa Rican community, unfold compared to those of the Pacific Coast? How do you engage in eco-tourism while preserving culture?

While in Jaco, I encountered a man who was asking for money to buy a meal. He asked me where I was from. I told him that I was travelling from Boston, but I was born in Haiti. He nodded as if he had already known. He told me that I should visit the Caribbean Coast and that I would "Fit right in." We laughed and talked a bit more before he went on his way. That encounter stayed with me the remainder of the trip.

The initial impetus for this trip last year came from my former student, Safiya, raising questions about our own efforts here and how they compare to those in her mother's country of Costa Rica. Last year's trip was transformative and it also left me wondering about the country hours away from the initial trip on the Pacific Coast closer to her and my Caribbean roots. How does ecotourism intersect with the Afro-Costarican culture that was so conspicuously missing from the Pacific Coast?

By the end of the trip, I'd learned so much and still there was a lot to learn still left on the table. This year, the interest remains the same. I don't want to go anywhere else, but still somewhere new. I would like to deepen my understanding of Costa Rica's sustainability efforts but this time on its Caribbean coast.

The reason why is fairly straightforward for me. There are regions of Costa Rica that are still very much impacted by eco-tourism and conservation efforts that are Afro-Costa Rican. These communities are primarily along the Caribbean coast. From conversations with locals and Costa Ricans here at home, my interest in those communities is high. I am interested in how Costa Rica leads the charge in protecting their environment while preserving their cultural heritage. Visiting the Limón region and engaging with eco-tourism initiatives there could provide a deeper understanding of these efforts.

While I am unsure what I will learn, based on initial research and curiosities stemming from the first trip it seems that conservation efforts focus on different areas in each coast and overall, there may be more community-led efforts on the Caribbean coast versus some of the more Tourism-driven approaches on the Pacific coast. That is an interesting distinction I look forward to comparing. It would be interesting to consider how equitable sustainability efforts look in different places.

I learned quickly last summer why Costa Rica is a leader in this work. I saw how Costa Rica could be an educational hub for those looking to learn more. What if there is more to learn about successful

efforts, but those that directly impact black communities? How are communities involved in preserving both their culture and their environment? I look forward to an opportunity to learn and share about these more grassroots efforts.

COMMUNITY PROJECT

Some of the text I'll be using in preparation for the trip and for the project back to the community:

Central Text: *Turtle Bogue: Afro-Caribbean Life and Culture in a Costa Rican Village* by Harry G. Lefever

Ethnographies for Younger Readers:

- "The Most Beautiful Roof in the World: Exploring the Rainforest Canopy" by Kathryn Lasky
- "Tales of the Tikongs" by Epeli Hau'ofa
- "Number Our Days" by Barbara Myerhoff
- "Sidewalk" by Mitchell Duneier

Costa Rican Guides

- Caribbean Coast (Zona Tropical Publications / Costa Rica Regional Guides)
- Historia de Costa Rica
- Rough Guide to Costa Rica

I would like to share again with the teaching community at my school when I return. I will plan a development plan for staff to deliver during orientation. This will be an overview of my project, the question, and the answers I find. I will also present the initial ideas for a student-facing plan and gather feedback from the teachers at each grade level about accessibility of materials.

For students, this topic could be directly aligned with units they already engage in: Climate Change, Civic Engagement, Identity, Geography, Social Movements, Story telling, etc. I would like to focus on the ethnographies and how we can understand history and cultures through community perspectives. By the end of the unit I would like students to:

- Understand ethnographies and their purpose and components
- Analyze excerpts from ethnographies to learn about Costa Rica
- Conduct a mini-ethnographic study in the school, neighborhood, or community

Throughout the unit, I'll share how I engaged in this myself as a model. I will also use my own interviews and videos to weave into the unit for the students.

THE TRIP

I will stay primarily in and explore Puerto Viejo to Immerse in the vibrant Afro-Caribbean culture through food, music, and grassroots eco-tourism initiatives.

Some noteworthy organizations to connect with:

- a. Tortuguero Conservation Area - Tortuguero Conservation Area
- b. Cahuita National Park
- c. Gandoca-Manzanillo Refuge
- d. The Bribri Indigenous Community (sustainable farming & indigenous practices)
- e. Kekoldi Indigenous reserve - program run
- f. Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de Puerto Viejo - insights into grassroots efforts
- g. Osa Conservation - found across the country; know a lot of local initiatives
- h. Costa Rican Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) - national policies, how do they support?
- i. Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC)
- j. Local Farms and Food heritage
- k. Puerto Viejo exploration