

## A SAILING ADVENTURE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

COSTA RICA – We arrived at the *Windstar* in Puerto Caldera after a two-and-a-half hour drive over a narrow two lane road from the capital of San Jose. It was Easter week, late summer in this part of the world, and the old Pan American Highway was crowded with vacationers headed for the beaches along the Pacific Ocean.

Our tall masted sailing ship floated under a cloudy sky waiting a new batch of exhausted passengers. We boarded and were greeted with smiles and stacks of paper forms to fill out. A warm rum drink with a slice of orange eased everyone through the chore of releasing Holland American Line Company from liability, setting up transfers, listing passport numbers for the fifth or sixth time, and establishing credit for the bar tab, gift shop and shore excursions. More papers with schedules were waiting for us in our cabins.

I was traveling with my husband, and our youngest son and his wife for a two week vacation which included seven days aboard this French built sailing ship which was run by British officers. We were all pleasantly surprised at the roomy size of our cabins which were 185 square feet. Twin beds had been pushed together in a space which once held either a double or queen size bed. One side table had been permanently folded up to accommodate the new king size bed, plus an additional cabinet with a mini-refrigerator had been added.

The color décor of our cabin was French flag colors of red, white and blue. Short curtains covering our two portholes matched the bedspread and blue carpet. An LCD flat screen TV had been attached to the wall above a long wooden bar which could be used by passengers to hold on when the ship was navigating heavy seas.

The cabin also contained a closet, drawers, counter space and a mirror. The bathroom, also spacious for a ship, had two medicine cabinets, a separate round-shaped shower, sink with counter space and a toilet which flushed with a loud vacuum sucking which sounded like those on airplanes.

The *Windstar* was built in 1987 and contained four stories including two lower decks of cabins, a third deck of public areas consisting of the main restaurant, gift shop, and lounge, and a top deck with a pool, an outside bar, and a dining area for breakfast and lunch. There were no elevators between decks.

The food was delicious and the service outstanding with most of the staff originating from the Philippines or Java. Dinner, which had only one seating, consisted of appetizers, soups, salads, entrees and a vegetarian selection. I especially enjoyed a variety of salads, fresh local fish, grilled chicken, and pork tenderloin. A “Sail Light Menu” was offered for those passengers counting calories. Desserts were a sumptuous mix of cakes, fresh fruit, Crème Brulee (regular and chocolate), sherbets and ice cream.

What set this ship apart from other cruise vessels I have traveled on was its magnificent 21,000 square feet of sails attached to four 204’ masts which could be unfurled at the touch of a button using a computer. The sails were opened daily, but I always heard the motors going at the same time except for a five-hour stretch one Sunday afternoon.

The *Windstar* was 400’ long and weighted 5,350 tons. Its 74, all-outside identical cabins held a capacity of 167 passengers, and there was a crew of eighty-eight. The ship also contained two bars, live entertainment, a tiny gym, casino, lounge and Jacuzzi. Water sports off the boat included wind surfing, snorkeling, swimming, water skiing, diving and riding on a “banana boat” pulled by a rubber dinghy.

We had traveled to Costa Rica to visit its magnificent national parks and see its abundant wildlife. Our sailing itinerary took us north along the Pacific Ocean to Nicaragua, then as far south as Corcovado National Park before returning to Puerto Caldera. A large selection of tours took us hiking through rain forests, river rafting through light rapids, and swimming from pristine beaches.

The variety of tropical birds was breathtaking and included green Mealy Parrots, tiny bats, Scarlet Macaws, Black-and-yellow Silky Flycatchers, hawks, pigeons, swallows, roseate spoonbills, brown pelicans, magnificent frigate birds, Keel-billed toucans, Blue-crowned Motmots, ospreys, snowy egrets, blue herons, kingfishers, and a wide variety of colorful hummingbirds. We also saw dolphins, sea turtles, a pencil-shaped snake, iguanas and hundreds of butterflies. The famous *Morpho peleides* (the large blue Morpho), could be found almost everywhere.

The flora of the rain forests, cloud forests and dry forests, included Costa Rica’s national flower, the *Guaria Morada* orchid. Other brilliantly colored flowers mixed with ferns, mosses and plants in a fantastic array of pristine nature.

While we did not see any of Costa Rica's dwindling number of jaguars, but we were entertained by Mantled Howler monkeys, plus dozens of White-faced Capuchin and squirrel monkeys. Other wildlife included various colorful frogs and Three-toed Sloth's.

We stayed in Costa Rica for two weeks adding more adventures to our nature viewing from San Jose. Additional tours included a coffee plantation, a gorgeous butterfly farm, waterfalls, a volcano, cloud forests, and a float trip on the Sarapiquí Jungle River.

Costa Rica is fortunate to enjoy the highest standard of living in Central America and past governments have shown incredible foresight to have preserved so much of its forests, beaches, and mountains in a total of 107 scenic national parks and reserves for present and future generations to enjoy.

IF YOU GO: The *Windstar* has two sister ships, the *Windsurf* and the *Windspirit*. The three vessels, owned by Holland American Line, sail in French Polynesia, Costa Rica, the Panama Canal, Caribbean, Bahamas and the Mediterranean Sea. For more information call 1 (800) 258-7245 or check their website at: [www.worldsleadingcruiselines.com](http://www.worldsleadingcruiselines.com).