

NICARAGUA VOLCANO TREK



NOVEMBER 2016

REGISTERED CHARITY 1062559

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, with both a Pacific and Caribbean coast. Towards the Pacific side, there is a range of active volcanoes - this is where we trekked for the first three days.

A few days before leaving for Nicaragua, we received an e-mail with a change of itinerary, due to tremors and poisonous gases preventing us from trekking up Momotombo volcano as planned. That certainly heightened the feeling of not knowing what we had let ourselves in for.

When departure day came, we had an early morning flight to Managua, the capital, via the USA, and, due to the 6-hour time difference, we arrived the same evening. There was no time to indulge in jet lag - after breakfast the next day, we were off to tackle our first volcano, called Telica.



MAP CREDIT: WIKIPEDIA.ORG

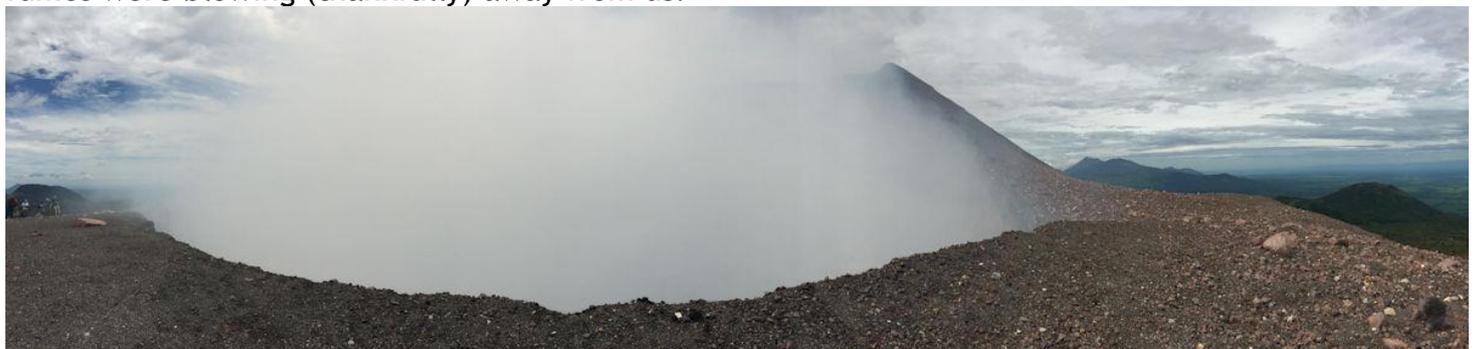


The sign at the beginning of the path was hardly reassuring, but we started off in a pleasant agricultural area, followed by

heathland, and then what seemed like a fairly tame, if steep and high, barren hill.



It was only after we completed the tough push to the top, that we found that, what looked from below to be simply the top of a hill, was in fact the edge of a massive crater, which rises to 1,061m (3,480ft) and from which clouds of sulphurous fumes were blowing (thankfully) away from us.



While in the volcanic region, we camped at small ranger stations, and were up soon after the day's 12 hours of light arrived at 5.30am. Facilities were basic, but a cold water pipe at head height served as a much needed shower.



Our second volcano was very different. Cerro Negro - or "black hill" - lived up to its name. Having first erupted amidst lush vegetation in 1850, there have been about 25 eruptions since, the most recent in 1999. We couldn't help thinking that another eruption must be due soon.

This type of volcano is known as a cinder cone, and the surface was indeed like cinders from a fire. In places plants were gradually re-establishing themselves in the hostile environment.



The loose surface and lack of shade, made for an arduous climb to the highest point at 726m (2,382ft), but we were rewarded with amazing views of the (still smoking) crater, and the surrounding countryside.





Despite the first two exhausting days, we were up at 2am the next day to trek by torchlight to the top of one volcano in order to see the sun rise behind another. We ascended El Hoyo (meaning the pit or the hole), close to the 1,088m (3,570ft) peak.

When we reached our destination at about 5am, it was just beginning to get light, and over the next 45 minutes we watched in awe as one of the most beautiful sunrises unfolded behind the smoking summit of the Momotombo volcano - the one that was too active to trek to.



Later in the morning, we descended to Asososca Lagoon, and were able to look back to our early morning vantage point of El Hoyo.

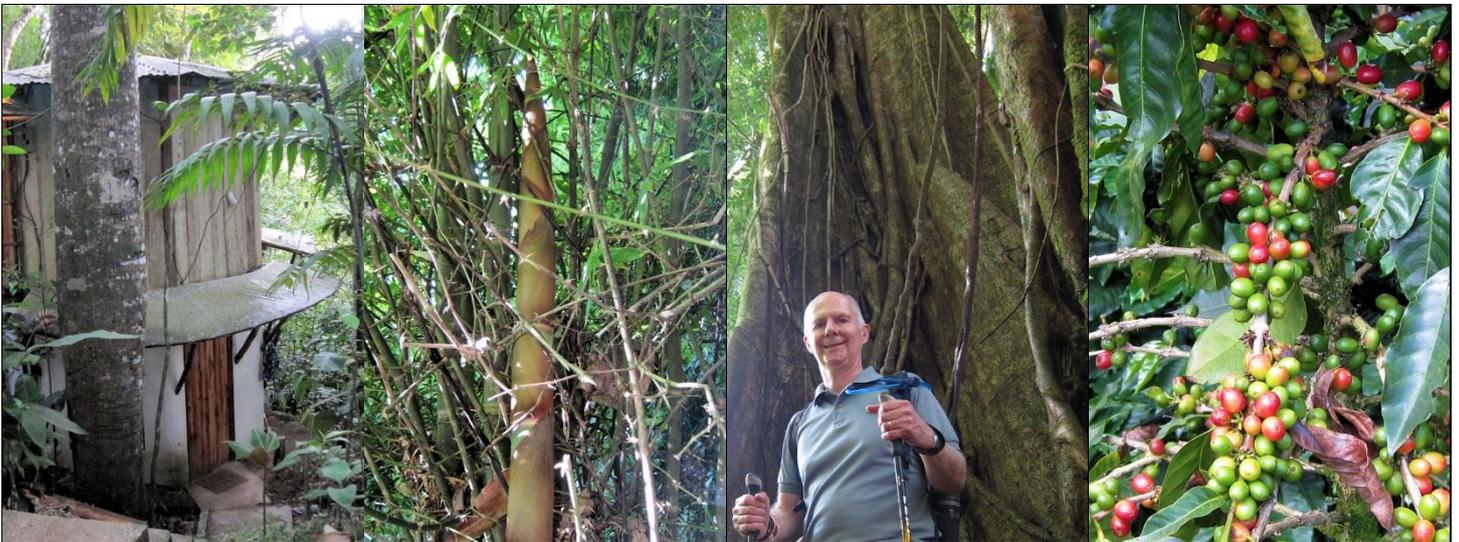
In the afternoon, we transferred by road to a neighbouring region to the north-east of the volcano range, closer to the border with Honduras, to trek in the cloud forest around the Penas Blancas Massif.

The humidity made the long uphill hike to the Rainbow waterfall especially challenging.



We stayed at two remote Eco Lodges. It was great to learn that this wild area has been returned to cloud forest over the last 16 years, when previously everything other than the largest trees had been cut down to make way for coffee plantations and cattle grazing. Although not native to the area, 14 varieties of bamboo had been planted, as it has the ability to collect and release water to the surrounding area, making the restoration of the forest much more efficient and speedy.

There's only space to share just a few images from the cloud forest area:



One of our huts at an eco lodge.

Once established, bamboo sends up massive shoots which can grow by a foot a day.

One of the larger trees which survived the destruction of the forest last century to make way for...

... coffee. Nicaraguan coffee is high quality and many people depend on it for a living, but it needs to be responsibly produced.



Tiny umbrella-shaped mushrooms.



One of the many colourful (but mainly photo-shy) butterflies: a Pink-checked Cattleheart



Also elusive, one of the most colourful birds of the cloud forest, a Quetzal.



The only snake we actually spotted - a baby snake curled up in a hollow branch.

I hope you have enjoyed what I think are some stunning images of an amazing country. It wasn't easy going, and our doctor was kept busy, including treating cuts from falls on the sharp volcanic rocks. As always, we had in mind the cause which we - and you - are supporting. Members of our group have personally been affected by their children's cancer.

Thank you to everyone who supported this, and my previous efforts to raise funds for Teenage Cancer Trust. This year you helped me raise £4,325 (at the time of writing) - almost £4,850 with Gift Aid - a personal best!

My fundraising page is always open for donations:
<http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/trekrise>
 But for now: Thanks again!

Nigel

NIGEL TURNER

