FRIENDSHIP FORCE Sarasota • JOURNEY 26277

Costa Rica

A week of home hosting,
shared culture & discovery

Alajuela • February 17–24, 2026



Post-trip: Monteverde, Quepos & Manuel Antonio

Our journey at a glance

- 14 ambassadors traveled from Florida to Costa Rica to meet our Alajuela hosts.
- February 17–24: home stays, local culture, gardens, farms and friendship.
- February 25–March 1: an optional adventure through cloud forest and Pacific coast.
- The highlights were not just the places—we remember the generosity, humor and connections.

  Our usual mode of travel--bus





FEBRUARY 17

A warm welcome in Alajuela

- Our hosts met us at Juan Santamaría International Airport and welcomed us into their homes.
- Heriberto and Marlene made the arrival especially memorable—with welcome signs, an American flag and a birthday cake for Terri.
- Home stays gave us a personal window into everyday Costa Rican life.
- The week began with the feeling that we were guests among friends.





Trapiche Arias-Artisan Sugar Cane-Abe/Dori

- At Trapiche Arias, we learned how sugar cane is pressed, boiled and transformed into tapa de dulce.
- We tasted fresh cane juice and traditional sweets—and saw how leftover cane fuels the fire.







Trapiche Arias-artisan sugar cane processing



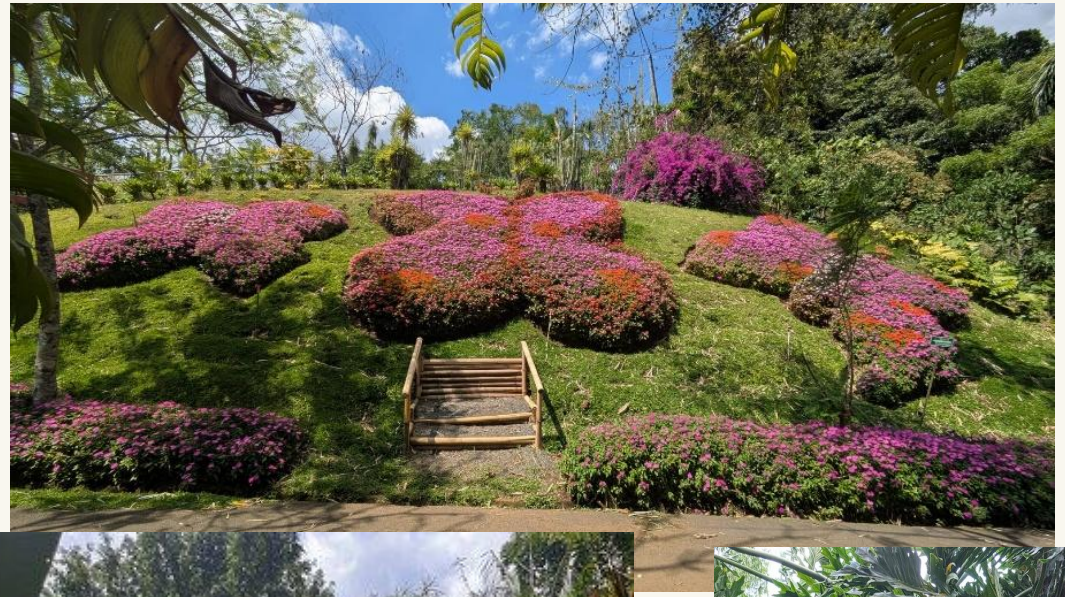




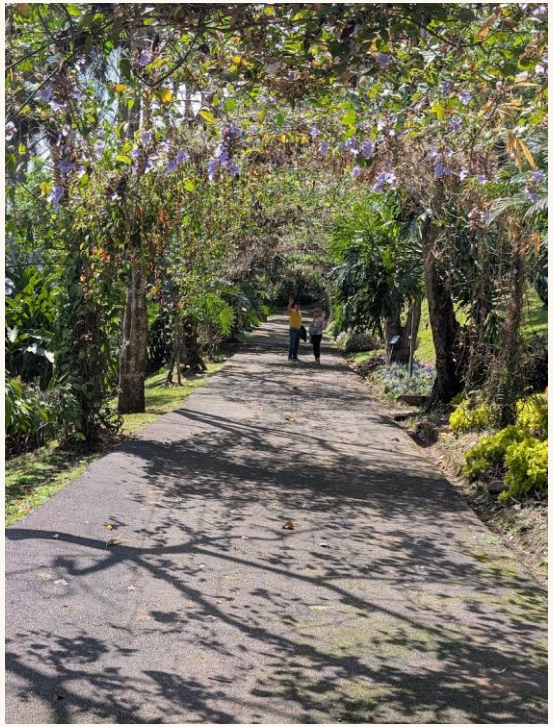


Else Kientzler Gardens

Else Kientzler Gardens offered lakes, paths, waterfalls and a relaxing group lunch.











Chaverri’s Cart Factory, Sarchí

Artisans hand-painted colorful ox carts and used water power to run saws.





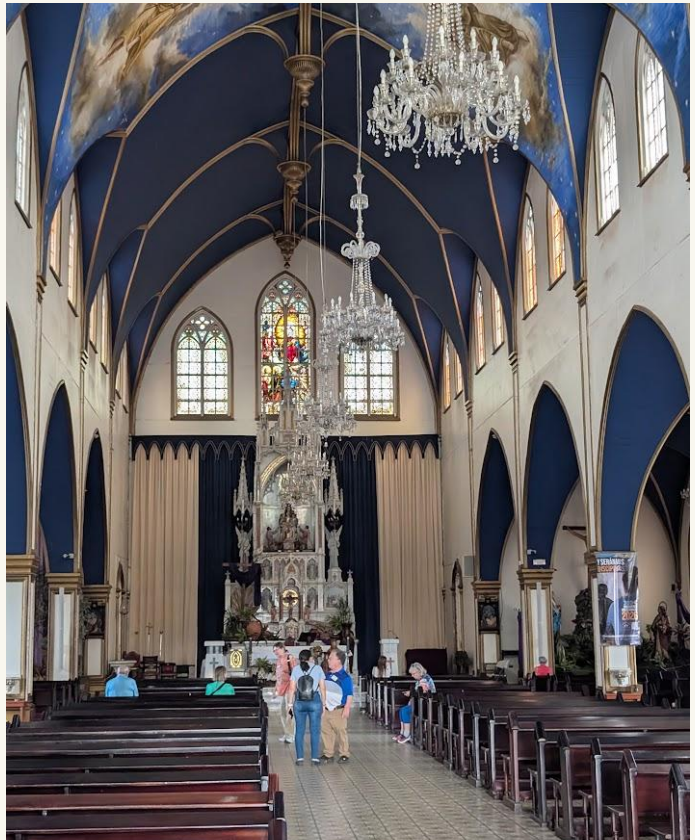


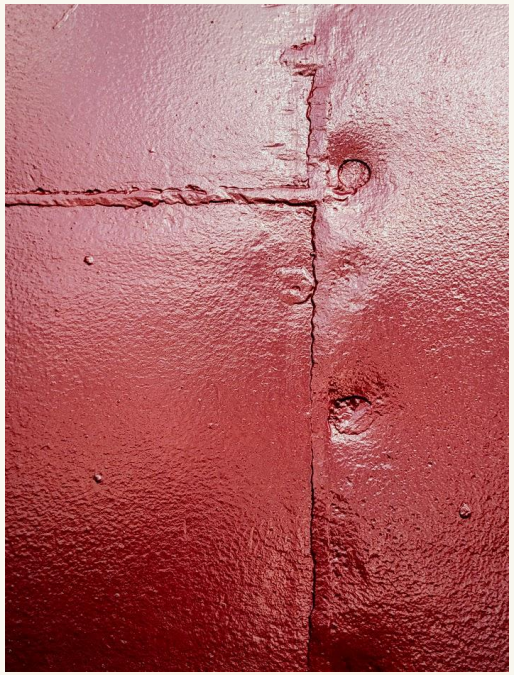


A colorful stop in Grecia



- We visited Iglesia Las Mercedes, a striking red metal church with a painted ceiling mural.
- At the welcome reception hosted by Arturo and Ileana, former Friendship Force members, we shared food and stories.
- The evening included birthday cake for John’s 80th birthday—celebrated in both English and Spanish.
- It was a joyful start to a week of conversations and new friendships.





Welcome Dinner

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Welcome Dinner





FEBRUARY 19

Pacific coast day: Jacó Beach, Dave & Sue



- A scenic bus ride took us from the Central Valley toward the Pacific coast.
- At the Tarcoles River area, we hoped to see crocodiles, but construction limited the viewing area.
- We enjoyed lunch, three pools and plenty of iguana sightings at the Tangery Hotel.
- Some explored the town and beach; we stayed out of the ocean after warnings about rip currents.



FEBRUARY 19

Pacific coast day: Jacó Beach







From our bus we saw coatimundi playing along the road, related to raccoons.

Chocolate: from pod to sample-Kay-Claudia

- At Costa Rica’s Best Chocolate Tour, our guide walked us through harvesting, fermenting, drying, roasting and grinding cacao.
- We learned how cacao percentage and ingredients affect the finished chocolate.
- The samples were a highlight. The group consensus: more chocolate, please!





Chocolate: from pod to sample

Debbie and Terri raced to crack cacao shells using different methods—it ended in a tie.







The sweetest pineapple tour

- At **Organic Paradise**, we rode a tractor-pulled wagon through an organic pineapple farm. They sell to Costco but say their best pineapples go to Europe.
- Our hosts cut ripe fruit straight from the field and expertly sliced it for tasting.
- We saw how deep trenches help manage the heavy tropical rain and learned tips for choosing a ripe pineapple.
- The warm day ended with icy pineapple daiquiris.





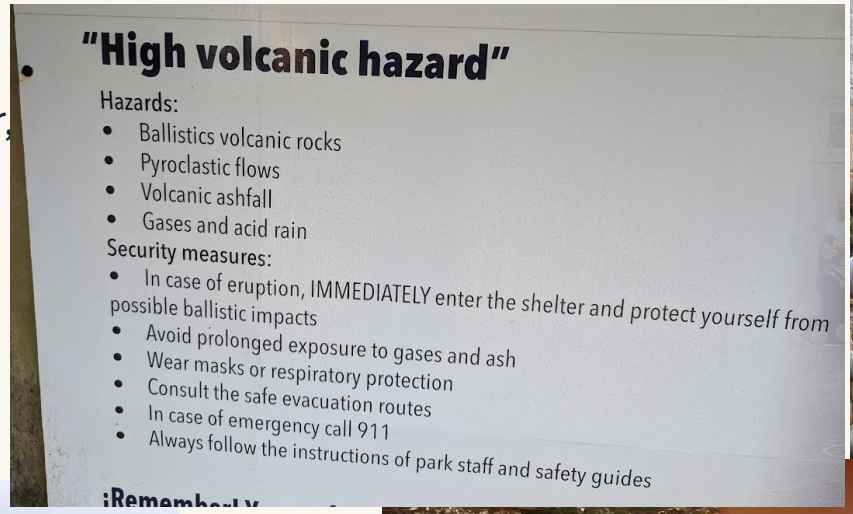


FEBRUARY 21

Poás Volcano-Reeta

Clouds kept covering the Poás crater, but occasional breaks gave us quick photo opportunities.

Some of us continued toward the lagoon, which was also shrouded in cloud.

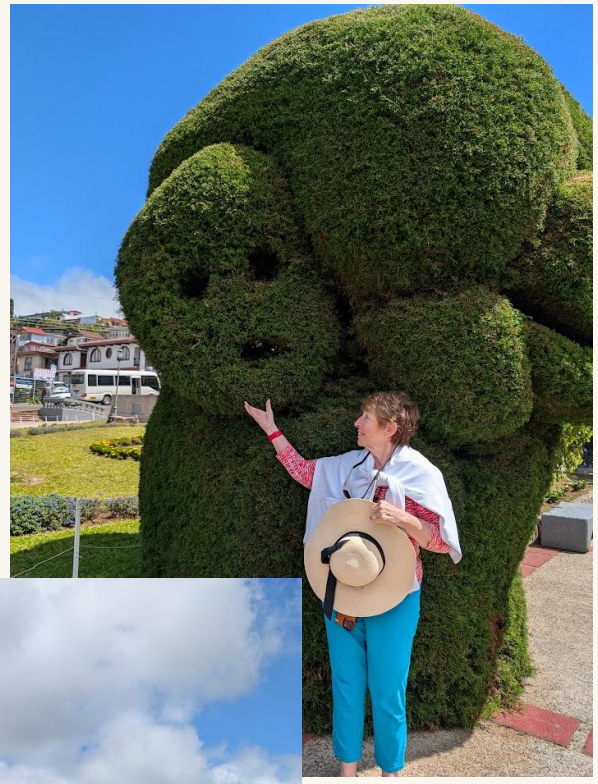








Family Day: seeing Costa Rica through our hosts



- Hosts planned very different days, from an Italian meal together to scenic drives through farms, coffee fields and small villages.
- One group visited the unusual Cavernas Anfiteatro de Villa, a hand-dug complex of themed rooms and tunnels.
- Another explored the Naranjo and Zarcero area, including DinoLand and the San Rafael Arcángel church.
- Family Day gave everyone a chance to connect at their own pace.



FEBRUARY 22

Family Day: seeing Costa Rica through our hosts









FEBRUARY 23

History, faith & tranquil gardens

John & Donna

- We explored the ruins of Ujarrás, near Cartago, in the scenic Orosi Valley.
- Lunch at La Casona del Cafetal brought garden views beside Lake Cachí and coffee served through a traditional filter stand.
- We visited the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels in Cartago.
- An optional stop at Lankester Botanical Gardens included a Japanese garden donated by the Japanese government.





FEBRUARY 23

History, faith & tranquil gardens

Lunch at La Casona del Cafetal brought garden views beside Lake Cachí and coffee served through a traditional filter stand.









FEBRUARY 24

La Paz: waterfalls in the rain- Debbie & Gary



Our last full day took us to La Paz Waterfall Gardens, with five waterfalls and wildlife exhibits.

The weather turned cold and extremely wet; rain gear was tested, and many of us bought ponchos or warmer clothing.

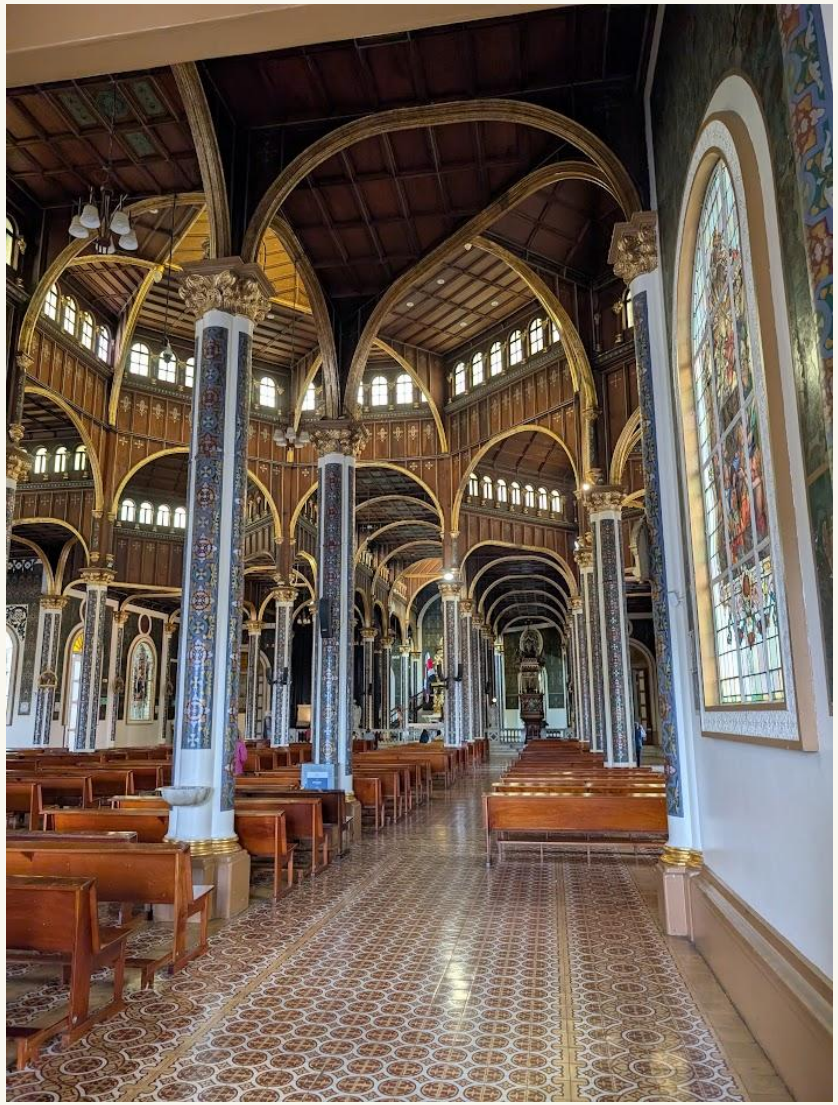


Butterflies, hummingbirds, exotic birds, mammals and reptiles made the sanctuary memorable.



Even in the rain, the waterfalls were spectacular—and the fireplace and buffet lunch were welcome comforts.

Basilica de Nuestra Senora de los Angeles, Cartago







Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends

- The farewell gathering brought ambassadors and hosts together for a final evening of food, music and conversation. And Dancin' Dave.
- Our club sang Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again," and coordinators thanked everyone who helped make the journey successful.
- The week's most lasting souvenir may be the friendships formed across cultures and homes.
- A heartfelt thank-you to our hosts, journal writers, photographers and organizers.





Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends



Heriberto, Marlene, Terri & Stan



Dori and Claribeth



Juan Luis & Angela, Debbie & Gary

Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends



Donna, Elana, Walter & John



Lillian, Gina, Sue and Carlos

Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends



Kay and Maureen



Dave and Alvaro



Xinia, Abe and Noé

Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends



Abe and Maureen, Coordinators



Reeta and Sandra



Mario, Claudia & Marielos

Farewell: gratitude, music & new friends





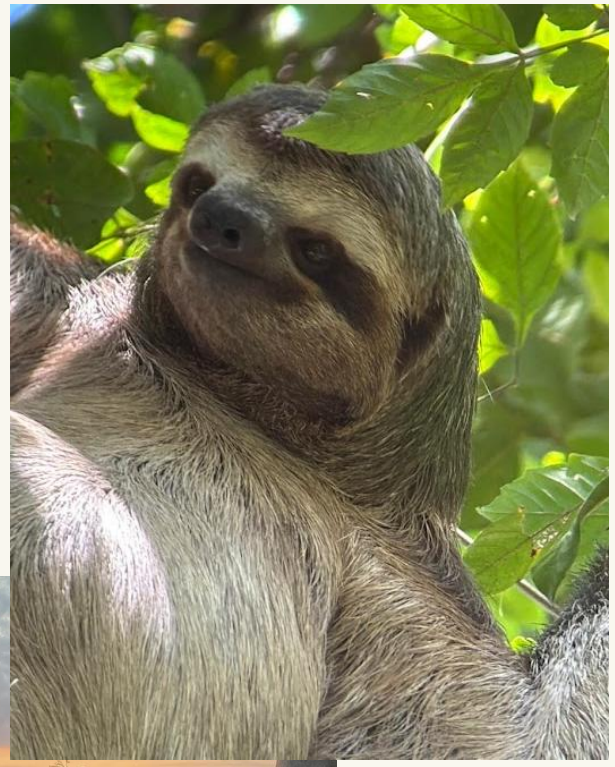
What we brought home

Costa Rica offered extraordinary variety: mountains, volcanoes, farms, gardens, waterfalls, cloud forest and Pacific beaches.

We tasted local foods, learned traditional crafts and saw how agriculture shapes daily life.

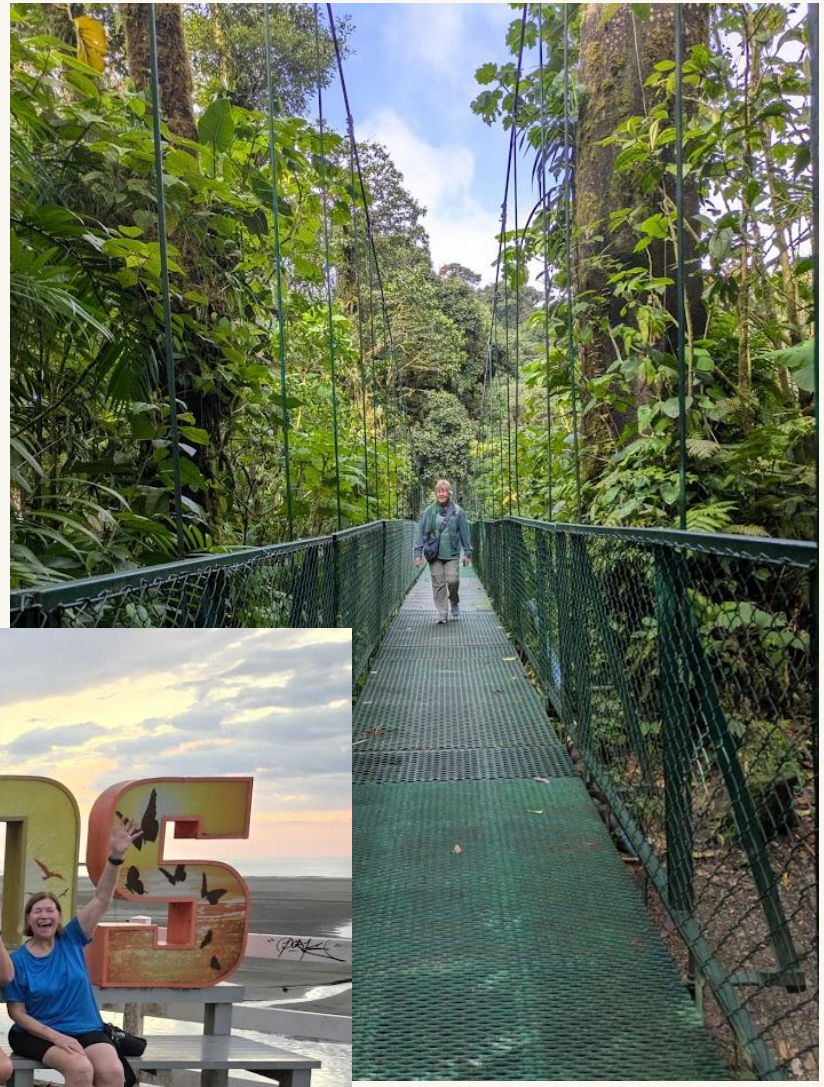
We adapted to tight schedules, winding roads, traffic and weather—and found plenty to laugh about.

Most importantly, we experienced the generosity of our hosts and the power of Friendship Force to turn travel into connection.





More photos














Parque Nacional
Manuel Antonio



PURA VIDA!

Thank you

For the hospitality, the adventures,
and the friendships.

Friendship Force • Journey 26277 • Costa Rica 2026

