

May 2006

Mike Cobb's Gringo Life

Greetings from Nicaragua,

Thanks for your continued interest in Nicaragua and the stories of our life here. The Cobb family update deals with some of our latest adventures. From trips to Costa Rica and Belize, to the home building process that we are engaged in to get our new home built here in Managua, we are enjoying new experiences at every turn. Inside the Update you'll get a new twist on "Country girl goes to the big city" with some of Amanda's comments from our visit to NYC last month. You'll also hear about the first Cobb to Bungee jump, Amanda again, and how Emily isn't far behind her big sister with her climbing exploits.

We continue to enjoy living here in Nicaragua and we are back in the "family home" building process again. Almost 2 years ago we purchased a lot here in Managua to build a home for us here in the city. However, we never quite got around to taking the first step and hiring an architect to get going on it, so we continued to rent where we have been since day one. Our rental house is nice, but after nearly 4 years, it seemed crazy to keep renting. And besides, we really like Managua and are seriously considering living here for quite some time.

Out of the blue a realtor called me in January and asked if we'd consider selling the lot we had purchased. It wasn't on the market, but when we were offered nearly twice what we paid in just 18 months, it was hard to say no. So we sold it. And instead of buying another lot and not hiring an architect for another 18 months, we decided look for something already built.

In the mean time, my development team for Gran Pacifica had been looking at projects and builders in the area for homes at Gran Pacifica and came across a development called La Rioja that was doing very good work according to Kurt Long who is inspecting homes during construction at Gran Pacifica. Carol and I looked at the model and within a couple hours, we were buying a home.

As it turns out, the home can be customized and Carol has been working with the architects to add electrical outlets, fans, lighting, and some additional terrace space. One thing we now know is that we live outside on our terrace, and that the outside space is so much more critical than inside space. With this in mind, we doubled the standard space of terraces in the model. As usual, there was also the debate about my pool table and Carol was kind enough to allocate one covered terrace for it as well.

As with anything here there are challenges and Carol has "enjoyed" the process with the builders. After waiting more than an hour on several occasions to meet with the architect, she now knows that when she brings Emily, they take care of her quickly. Way to go Emily. More on the home building process over the next 8-10 months.

Amanda and Emily continue to grow and change at an incredible pace. I know I mentioned this last time, but I am amazed at just how different 2 kids can be with the same parents, same food, same almost everything. Emily loves balls and throwing. Amanda never really did. Emily loves climbing and has gotten to the point that she can climb the avocado tree in our front yard. She can actually climb higher than I can reach so I'm working with her on climbing back down. It's hard to watch sometimes, but she's getting it figured out. Emily is also starting to speak a lot more recently. She clearly understands both Spanish and English and uses the two languages interchangeably. Incredibly, she already intuits who to speak Spanish to and who to speak English to. Kid's brains are amazing.

Amanda continues to love dancing and will be performing at the National Theatre later this month as part of her ballet class. She is now in 2 different classes and dances 3 times per week. This is in addition to art class once a week and play dates some afternoons. She has a full and fun

schedule including kindergarten at the German School which was a great choice. Amanda loves her class, new friends, and teachers. She is now singing songs and counting to 12 in German as well. Getting kids into language early really does work.

The girls are also getting to experience some incredible activities as well. Recently we were in Belize for meetings and, just like last year, I was the conductor of the “estrogen mobile.” Tooling around San Pedro on a golf cart is a lot of fun. So is snorkeling and fishing along the incredible Belize Barrier Reef. But many of you know that I’ve ranked Cave Tubing as one of the top 10 coolest things I’ve ever done and so we introduced the girls to cave tubing this year.

Captain Mike of the “Estrogen Mobile” – April 2006

Along with the Nagel Family we drove out to the jungle west of Belize City to a resort called Jaguar Paw. This property sits along a river that has over the millennium carved caves through the limestone mountains that you can inner tube through. I know of nowhere else in the world that you can do this. After a scenic walk through the steamy jungle, you jump into the refreshingly cool river and start floating. It is an “otherworld” experience tubing through a cave with a miners light strapped to your head looking at stalactites and other geologic formations. Only in Belize, and almost worth the trip there just for this. If you visit Belize, be sure and cave tube.

<http://www.jaguarpaw.com/caves-branch-river.shtml>

Cobbs and Nagels enjoying Costa Rica’s Alpine Settings

After the Belize meetings, The Nagel’s traveled directly onto Costa Rica and later we joined them for a long weekend. We based in the mountains above San Jose and enjoyed some 70 degree weather in the cloud forest. Hotel Tirol is excellent and the accommodations are Swiss Chalets set in a small village concept and there is a great path along a rushing creek to a 50 foot waterfall nearby.

<http://www.conozcacosstarica.com/vallecentral/hoteles/tirol.htm>

The families traveled together to the original aerial tram located in the Limon Province on the eastern side of the Central Mountains. The tram is like a very long ski lift and it tours you through the various levels of the jungle starting at the floor level just a few feet above the ground, to the heights of the tree tops. These diverse habitats are rich in biodiversity. In the space of just a few hours we saw tree frogs, sloths,

butterflies galore, a huge variety of bird life, and a Boa Constrictor in a tree. Carol, Amanda, Joel and his daughter Mary went on a zip line as well. All of this is only an hour from San Jose.

<http://www.rainforesttram.com>

Rain forest tram becomes
"Estrogen Tram"

The Nagels went home on Saturday and we had one more day to do some other activities. I asked Amanda if she'd like to go bungee jumping with dad. She didn't know what it was of course but in her typical spirit, readily agreed and we set up a plan for the day that included a bungee jump from the second highest drop in the world, over 265 feet.

First however, we stopped at the Children's Museum in San Jose. This former prison looks like a castle and has been remodeled to include an awesome museum that is perfect for children from 1-99. There are a myriad of hands on activities in areas from electricity, geology, water ecology, library science, food production, nutrition, classical and modern art, Egypt, and many other miscellaneous displays and activities.

www.worldheadquarters.com/cr/museums/childrens/

We had only allocated 2 hours to the museum and arranged a pre-scheduled time for the bungee jump. We had to leave before seeing much of what was there, but next time we'll keep an open-ended schedule for the children's museum.

Our driver then took us west out of San Jose towards the city of Grecia and the Rio Colorado Canyon. The directions were somewhat sketchy, but once we were there it made sense. The bungee jump is located in the center of the old bridge across the gorge. The old bridge is just that, an old bridge. I mean old. It is a single-lane, arched span with a white water river about 350 feet below cutting a narrow canyon in the granite mountain. Located in the center are two bungee stations—one on either side—representing the two companies that offer this incredible experience.

Amanda, they decided, would be the first to go, jumping tandem with the jump master. A small crowd of spectators and possible jumpers assembled to watch her get harnessed up and take the platform. "5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – Jump!" everyone shouted. Off they went. Head first with a flip and 265 feet down followed by a big bounce and almost back up to the bridge. Several more big bounces and they were gently bobbing and swaying at the bottom. During the whole time, not a sound out of Amanda. Then as I peered down over the edge, the jump master starts flapping his arms like flying and then so is Amanda. She's fine and enjoying it. After they hauled her up several folks asked her if she wanted to go again and she did. I suggested that we save that for another day.

As for dad, let me just say, that it's a good thing they do the counting out loud for you. It takes the decision (indecision) out of your control. Standing on the platform, toes over the edge, looking down, pondering the jump is a whole lot different than standing on the other side of the rail pondering the jump. The first 2 seconds of free fall is absolute exhilaration/terror/heart stopping/can't wait to do it again fun. The rest of the ride is cool too, but those first 2 seconds of

seeing the river racing towards you faster and faster is unbelievable. Oh yes, we'll be doing that again. Got to find out where the highest one is now.

With all the experiences that these girls are having, I tend to forget just how out of the mainstream our lifestyle is. But conversely, the things that kids in the States take for granted are unique and special for our girls. Going to NYC highlighted this. We flew into Newark and took the train to Penn Station. Upon coming out of the station, Amanda's first words were, ""WOW, this place is giant." Additionally, a few minutes later, "That looks weird. Look at that person with pink and black hair." She rode to the hotel with her face pressed against the cab window staring at this strange sight of buildings as far as the eye could see.

The week in NYC was great. Carol's cousin, Renee, met us for an afternoon walk about and the girls enjoyed a lot of time in Central Park. We do take playground equipment for granted in the US and what the girls wanted to do more than anything else was go to Central Park and play on the playground. So we did. Amanda saw her first show, "Hair Spray" with Carol, and as a family we enjoyed eating a different ethnic food every night and some afternoons.

Now for a statement that may come as a shock to some of you, but I think the similarities between NYC and Nicaragua are incredible. You may be thinking how can that be, but NYC is a real and raw place. Much of America has become homogenized and pasteurized with strip malls, McDonald's and Walmarts about the same everywhere. I'm not knocking that, just commenting that suburbia everywhere is becoming more and more similar every year. NYC has character and authenticity. The sheer numbers of non-franchised business, restaurants and shops are incredible and refreshing. Before living in Nicaragua, I'd made the statement that I could never live in NYC. I imagine that I might like it now.

As always, keep in touch,

Mike