



A Jewfish surrounded by juvenile Golden Jacks
Nikon D100 Light&Motion Titan D100, Sea & Sea strobes Nikon 16mm f2.8
fisheye, 1/45s – f8

Famed as the most exciting dive around Isla del Cano, and I remember Lawson, our divemaster in El Coco (a diving area in the northern part of Costa Rica) saying “Make sure you dive the Bajo del Diablo, you won’t be sorry!” As we arrived at the divesite, we were greeted by the most amazing sight I have seen, an aerial display by Lesser Devil Rays, leaping into the air, powered by their large wingspans, somersaulting and landing back in the water with a large splash. One, two, three..eventually I lost count. The show carried on for

about 10 minutes when finally we were ready to jump in and hopefully see these animals performing for us beneath the waves.

We dropped down and soon found ourselves between the pinnacles, in the mire that belonged to the huge schools of fish that hung on the edges, as if guarding the entrance to a place where only the privileged are allowed. The walls were volcanic rock, encrusted with a multitude of corals and sponges, with bright pinky-orange sea fans. The schools parted as we slowly made our way around

one of the pinnacles and headed to the other end of the channel. As we came around the eastern pinnacle, Surgeonfish, a never-ending school, appearing from nowhere, more and more as if sent by the devil to chase us out of his domain, surrounded us. The school must have grown to close to 300 and still they danced around us, parting as we swam through to view what lay beyond. White-tip Reef Sharks appeared, parting the Surgeonfish in rapid swishes, and then disappeared. Leather Basses showed their faces here and there, Creole Fish danced around and above us. Amoca Jacks, Bigeye Jacks and Parrotfish darted around in search of that mouthful of food. Eventually, I looked at my buddy and shrugged, acknowledging her disbelief, as we just did not know where to look next. It was a show beyond all expectations, a sight that I had never seen before.

We dived the site again the following day. Unfortunately, this time, the channel between the pinnacles had been encompassed by a thermo cline, which resulted in the whole area being a green pea-soup colour and a waste of time trying to penetrate. However, the schools of Surgeonfish were still around, dancing between rocks, the White-tips were again patrolling for their share of the fiesta. Slowly, however, things got worse around the pinnacles so I

decided to move out into the blue. As we moved out we were greeted by a school of Bigeye Jacks that circled around and, once they were happy that we were no threat, moved off. My buddy signaled she was going up. I decided to hang for a couple more minutes, adamant that something else was to happen. It was not two minutes later, from the green depths appeared what I had been waiting for. A squadron of about 20 Lesser Devil Rays, the ones that had so amazingly performed for us the day before, flying wingtip to wingtip, appeared, moving effortlessly, slowly surfacing, glided along for a short while and then disappeared. It was a spectacle I will never forget. I had tried to fin to catch up with them and take some pictures, but never got within 20 meters. Only when I turned around and found my buddy was about 100 meters behind me, did I realize how hard I had finned but had got nowhere.

That afternoon, after a nice long surface interval on the island, with a wholesome lunch, we dived a site known as Los Arcos, or The Arches, a formation in the rocks that forms a perfect arch. Also packed with fish, taking refuge in the arch from the current, only moving out when approached. After taking some photos of the arch, my buddy called me to come see something. I could see in the urgency that she called it must



Two white-tipped reefsharks searching for food. Nikon D100, Light&Motion Titan D100, Sea & Sea strobes, Nikon 16mm f2.8 fisheye, 1/60s – f8

be something good. We went around a large rock and there taking refuge, in the shadow of a large rock, was a Jewfish (the size of a Volkswagen beetle), with juvenile Golden Jacks circling around it. We circled around slowly, aware of the large eye watching us. The animal seemed unperturbed. Only after a couple of photos did it move and begin circling the rock. We followed in fascination and once we had gone right around the rock, it decided it had had enough and moved off. We left it swimming in a northerly direction, guided by its smaller companions. The dive site

was totally different from that of El Bajo del Diablo, as the volcanic rock was dotted around like little islands, and each little island had it's own activities. The rocks would extend from the sandy bottom to just below the surface, a distance of about 15m. We came across one of these rocky islands to discover two white-tip reef sharks lying on the sands. Attempting to slowly glide closer for that perfect shot, it was not too be. These sharks were not having it! Off they went in search of another quiet resting place. Besides the sharks, the rocks housed Leather Bass, frantic

Blunthead Triggerfish, darting from one point to another biting of pieces from the rocks, and small schools of King Angelfish. After another action packed dive we surfaced, only to be met by a large, loosely formed school of Palometa's, showing off their yellow elongated dorsal and pectoral fins as if they were courting us on the way to the surface.

It was our last trip back from our playing fields, and with the island growing smaller in our wake,

I realized that we had just witnessed one of the best diving adventures that we had been on. We had dived with the devil and survived, and Lawson had been right, Isla del Cano, and specifically, El Bajo del Diablo, was indeed the best diving on the Rich Coast, known as Costa Rica.

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Fact file

Getting There

The easiest route, and the one we took is, via Miami, to San Jose, on American Airlines or Delta. From San Jose, there are two local airlines that fly to Drake Bay. Nature's Air flies to a small town called Palma Sur, from there you go by boat (about 2 hours ride) to your hotel. SANSA flies to Palma Sur, as well as direct to Drake Bay. Your hotel then organizes transport from the airport in Drake Bay to your hotel. Flights cost in the region of about \$170 return.

Keep in mind that internal flights, luggage weight restrictions are limited to 12.5kg per person.

Accommodation

There are numerous accommodation options, ranging in prices:

1. Pirate's Cove – www.piratecovecostrica.com
2. Jinetes da Osa – www.costaricadiving.com
3. Drake Bay Wilderness Lodge – www.drakebay.com
4. La Paloma Lodge – www.lapalomalodge.com