

By GEORGE ROBERTSON, M.D.

When we booked the tour to Costa Rica the first thing I packed was my snorkeling gear. I just knew after having such a good time on other trips that the Pacific waters would be beckoning me to see beautiful fish and underwater sites.

Our 120- passenger sailing boat was equipped for water sports but when I took my dive equipment down to get into the water, I was informed that the snorkel could not be used -- someone had an injury on a prior trip and they were afraid for us to use it.

OK, I thought, I'd just take it along on my next beach outing and get to experience the warm waters offshore. Wrong again, since the heavy seas and chop had reduced the visibility of the water so much that I couldn't see the bottom even though I was only waist-deep.

I didn't give up though and even took my equipment with me on a mountain birdwatching hike. Everyone laughed at me but on the route was a beautiful clear lake where we stopped to identify some ducks and saw a beautiful red and black Vermillion flycatcher so lovely I could have watched it all day. Actually that is what I did because when I tried to snorkel in the lake I was told that I couldn't since it was the drinking water supply for the village below.

Still not completely stymied, I carried my dive gear on a hike to the Cordova rainforest excursion. After our guide carefully looked into the waist-deep clear water, we forded a stream for a walk through the jungle where we saw Three Toed Sloths, Whiteface Capuchin Monkeys, and Howler Monkeys in the gigantic trees.

When we returned to the beach, hot and tired from the hike through the virgin forest growth, I thought that this would be my opportunity to cool off in the river we had just crossed in a little calm water pool at the edge of the ocean. But when I started putting on my snorkel and mask the guide told me I couldn't swim there because there were crocodiles in the water. Mind you, it was the same river we had just waded across to get to the jungle trail. Now we knew why he was looking so carefully in the water the first time.

Editor's Note: George Robertson is a physician with Family Medical Associates, PC, in Lebanon.