

May 2010

## Costa Rica | Conde Nast Traveler Shoot



Costa Rica is one of those destinations that constantly pops up in conversations around the world. These international, well-travelled, slightly bohemian friends point to the same area, The Central Pacific Coast and especially, around Playa Santa Teresa. Many of them having first visited the region over ten years ago, bought property and built houses, boutique hotels and restaurants.

I finally had an assignment to shoot in Costa Rica in February this year, with Conde Nast Traveler USA. It was for the May fashion issue (coming out this month), with the brilliant fashion director Mark Connolly. We have worked on many shoots and I love his creative imagination and enthusiasm. He is a mix of Dianna Vreeland and Robert Downey Jr ... Eccentric, playful and we always have an adventure.

Mark was inspired by the spring summer 2010 runway shows of Rodart and Alexander McQueen and wanted to do a shoot based on 'An action warrior rainforest princess with a cyber twist'. Personally, it sounded like Mad Max meets a female Mogli from Jungle book. He envisioned the model zip lining across the rainforest canopy in haute couture, and thought I'd be the perfect photographer for the job.



I'd been longing to go to Costa Rica so I was definitely on board. The photo crew flew into San Jose and then drove to Vista Del Golfo an action park with a small boutique hotel (no frills) near Miramar, above Puntarenas (2 hour drive from San Jose).

Vista Del Golfo is high in the rainforest, where you can zip line over eleven waterfalls, ride horses or ATV's depending on your revs. A lovely German Couple and great local staff run it. The rooms are simple and the pool area is a great place to take some down time from all the action.

Our first day was location scouting the areas and zip lining down the 30 lines to get us used to the process for the following days shoot. We all felt exhilarated and especially the longer ropes where the speed accelerates to double. Flying over waterfalls, suspended hundreds of feet above this magnificent landscape is something we must all do in our lifetime. It's the closest thing to flying.



The second day was the hardest and most fulfilling. We started with an early morning shot of the horses and our action model Nanda, in the shallow river. The light was beautiful and there is something majestic about the movement of the horses in this shot. It really added a peaceful, reflective element to the overall shoot, which balanced the action shots.

Fully harnesses we zip lined down with the guides carrying flash gear, cameras and clothes to be able to shoot high on the canopy. There are no paths or roads and we needed to carry it all. Nanda the model was fearless and remarkable.

She would change into one of Mark's creations, high up in the trees on tiny platforms, (as all the charming guides turned away) and then she'd spring into action. We shot her flying high on the zip-lines, in the waterfalls and on a huge log that had fallen across the river.

After an exhausting but exhilarating day one, we returned to the restaurant area for a celebratory glass of wine, under the huge fig tree who's branches extended out like a protective shelter.

As the sun set over the sea and the islands in the distance, the sky turned orange, red and purple. At night a symphony of rainforest critters had begun. A warm breeze softly brushed-over our skin like a warm wave. We all sat in silence floating, warm and cosy. We were experiencing a spiritual connection with nature under this huge old fig tree. For a moment our souls got a renewed euphoric perspective on life. It's amazing what sunsets can do for the soul.



Day two was spent photographing Nanda in the rainforest with a single white horse.... On the tracks, nestled in the base of a tree with sinewy roots that resembled human ligaments. The final sunset shot was Nanda sitting perched like an exotic bird with her colourful feather Mohawk designed by Mark. We sat watching this magnificent view of the Gulf as the light changed to orange and purple hues. What a perfect last shot to finish on.

We all sat mesmerised at the brilliance of Mother Nature, and this perfect canvas she was painting.

This trip was one of my favourite shoots of all times. It was unique, fun and challenging and we felt we had done something never none before in fashion. Mark is a one of a kind and it's always an honour and a fantastic journey working with him.

The guides were sweet and caring and the entire crew walked away feeling fulfilled creatively and spiritually. ....That's a first for a fashion shoot!

In these 5 days we all fell in love with Costa Rica. I decided to return with my family for Easter break and also visit the costal area of Santa Teresa where all my bohemian friends ahead homes, restaurants and boutiques.

