Disc Golf Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a country filled with rainforests, dormant volcanoes, and stunning beaches. It provides the perfect location for adventure seeking activities such as rafting, zip lining, sport fishing, rappelling, and hiking. So prominent is Costa Rica as the place to visit for adventurers that nearly half (46%) of all tourists in Costa Rica participate in some form of eco-tourism. Due to the influx of adventure-seeking tourists, Costa Rica has committed to preserving their rainforest by declaring nearly 25% of the country national parks and preservation areas. Based on the strong emphasis on outdoor activity you would think that at this point disc golf would be firmly rooted as a more laid back alternative to the high adrenaline activities that the country is known for, but that has not been the case.

Disc golf has formally been in Costa Rica since 2009 when Aaron Mast installed a 9-hole course with homemade baskets at his residence in Guanacaste. Unfortunately, when Aaron left Costa Rica in 2013 this course left with him. Then came the short-lived object courses in Villa
Paz and Pura Vida DGC in the central valley region. Fast forward to 2014 and disc golf is reborn in Costa Rica with the installation of the initial 9 holes at The Permaculture Country Club (PCC) of Costa Rica at St. Michael’s Sustainable Community by Justin Dolan.

Justin, originally from Atlanta, GA, moved to Costa Rica in 2010 with the vision of creating a self-sustaining community focused on working in and with nature. He built greenhouses and raised gardens, purchased cattle, and constructed an aqua phonics system using tilapia as environmentally friendly fertilizer. After creating the gardens, Justin then began dividing the property up into lots to sell to those interested in living in the eco-village. He also built the pool, fountains, and rental properties for those interested in a more temporary stay. It was through a client, Don Bainbridge, that Justin first heard about disc golf nearly 4 years after moving to Costa Rica. Don, an avid disc golfer, brought a practice basket down to demonstrate the game to Justin and bought Justin his first discs for Christmas in 2013 and from that moment on Justin was hooked.

Despite never having played a course, Justin took on the task of building one on his 99.5 acre property. Wanting to create a solid design that both the newer player and more experienced player alike would enjoy, Justin took to the internet researching course design, tee types, baskets, etc.
After pricing baskets from various manufacturers it became clear that shipping costs would more than double the price no matter who he ordered from, so Justin came up with a more creative solution. He printed the target specifications from the PDGA website and brought them to a local welder who handmade the baskets for the initial 9 holes. Justin then designed and installed the course in May of 2014 through the gardens and the rainforest, up steep hills into the pastures and back
down into the jungle creating a disc golf oasis in an area dominated by sports such as soccer and cycling. Justin’s hope was that this would be a sport and course that others would want to come and play.

I first contacted Justin about coming to play the course at PCC in early January of 2015. I was intrigued by the idea of sustainable agriculture and an eco-village and excited about playing disc golf in a Spanish-speaking country. Having minored in Spanish in college and made previous trips to Peru, Puerto Rico, and Nicaragua the course was a combination of my two interests: Hispanic culture and disc golf. After e-mailing back and forth with Justin it became clear that what he and the course at PCC needed was a fresh set of eyes from someone who has played a fair number of courses and has some experience in course design to make improvements and help with the expansion of the course and the club. It was then that I applied for the Marco Polo grant from the PDGA and sought donations from various individuals and disc golf manufacturers to help jump start disc golf in Costa Rica. Innova was gracious enough to donate a box of various items including discs for the club. Not long after hearing back from Innova I learned that the grant for
the course had been approved by the Board of Directors and our project was set.

I arrived in Costa Rica on February 4 and began work on February 5. After playing a morning round and familiarizing myself with the course, we began the project around lunchtime with the help of Nelson, a local farmer. The first thing we did was make the posts for the tee signs from oak and blackwood trees on site and then installed them at each of the first 9 holes. We had 18 aluminum signs done by Design to Impress in Fountain Inn, SC which I brought with me on my trip down. On February 5th I redesigned holes 4, 5, and 6 and we adjusted the positions of some
of the other tee pads. Justin spent the day cleaning up some of the problem areas on the course, flattening out tee pads, and trimming some of the branches. On February 6 Nelson and I built and installed two benches on the course in the most needed areas, behind hole 2’s tee pad and between hole 5’s basket and the tee pad for hole 6. The next day, I did some clearing work on hole 4, one of the holes located in the rainforest, trimming some branches and bushes along the fairway. I then spent the afternoon carving stairs into the hillside leading from hole 4’s basket to hole 5’s tee pad. On February 8\textsuperscript{th} we used some scrap wood leftover from a previous project at the gardens to make the ‘Next Tee’ signs and improve course navigation. I painted each one and we made some posts for the areas where there was not a tree available on which to place the sign. Justin spent the afternoon painting the baskets yellow in order to increase visibility. On February 9\textsuperscript{th} we spent the morning playing a round and doing course maintenance along the way such as clearing the fairways of debris and sticking the vinyl numbers on the baskets. That afternoon we looked at some of the areas and talked through the hole design for the second 9 holes. The plan is for the next few holes to follow the creek, run through the rainforest and then wrap back around through the Eco-village finishing near the start of the course in the centrally located gardens. On February 10\textsuperscript{th}, my last full day in Costa Rica, the club members came out for their weekly league which is every Tuesday at 1:00 pm. Everyone was very positive about the course improvements and excited about the expansion of the course. Everyone had a great time playing the new layout and the round went smoothly with the exception of a mishap that began with a wasp nest in a palm tree and ended with a disc on fire.
In a country filled with plenty of outdoor activities, we feel secure in the continued growth of disc golf. We printed and distributed Spanish pamphlets provided by the PDGA explaining disc golf and will continue to use those as a resource to promote disc golf education. We will be using the remaining money in the budget to have 3 more baskets built and have begun fundraising for the course by selling stamped discs to visitors. Our future plans include: Installing 1-2 more courses on site at PCC, inviting local schools and churches to bring groups to come learn about disc golf and play the course, and scouting out potential sites for future courses.
On behalf of St. Michael’s Sustainable Community and The Costa Rica Disc Golf Asociación I want to thank the PDGA for awarding us the Marco Polo Grant. This project would not have been possible without your generous support. I would also like to thank Innova, Design to Impress, The Firecracker at Fountain Inn, and Moosejaw for their assistance with this project.

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