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ARCR's English Language Magazine

January / February 2019

Published by ARCR Administración S.A. Apdo. 1191-1007 Centro Colón San José, Costa Rica (www.arcr.cr)

El Residente

**FIFTY YEARS AGO
IN COSTA RICA**



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This magazine has been published every two months since 1995 as the official communications media of ARCR Administration. Our organization provides service to thousands of foreigners who have chosen Costa Rica to reside for short periods or for permanent residence.

Since 1984 we have been offering reliable **services, information and advocacy** to Costa Rica's foreign residents. We have the experience and ability to help you with your residency application, immigration, business and financial management, real estate purchases and rentals, property management, insurance, pet importation and much more.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Happy New Year, Everyone!

As a follow-up to last year's cover theme, "Historic Costa Rica" this issue begins a year-long series on what it was like to live in Costa Rica fifty years ago. Interesting reading. When you compare then with now, you can see how much Costa Rica has changed, very quickly, and has earned the sobriquet "a developing nation." Our thanks go out to the author, Steve Johnson, for this captivating series.

As always, this issue contains some important information for residents and visitors. If you are concerned about the new tax laws and how they might affect you, be sure to read "Legal Update."

If you like to have a good night's sleep, "Design Wise" has information about something that can have a major effect on the quality of your sleep. For lighter reading, check out "Monteverde Moments" which tells how a previously upstanding resident of a small town bought a new vehicle and discovered he might have achieved the reputation of being a "narco." You can learn about stick bugs in Costa Rica in "Wild Side", if retiring here on a budget is possible in "On the Grid", or how people who pay big bucks to visit here sometimes spend more time looking at their email than they do enjoying the experience of meeting humpback whales up close and personal in "Paradise, We Have a Problem." And more!

All-in-all it's another great issue and I am confident that you will find something that is of interest and helpful to you. As always, your comments, good or bad, are always welcome. You can contact us by email at: service@arcr.net

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ACROSS THE BOARD

Notes and News from the Board of Directors

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP. Like to save money? Remember, keeping your membership current can reap you financial benefits such as the discounts you can get from being part of the ARCR group insurance plans for health, automobile, and home or condo insurance. And, save attorney fees by getting free advice about renewing driver's licenses or cedula. Another way to save colones is by taking advantage of the discounts merchants give when you present your free ARCR membership card. Then, there is the Costa Rica Corporation tax filing assistance program, plus other benefits too numerous to list. Renew your membership and ask at the office what other ways you can save your hard earned money.

RAILROAD CROSSING BARRIERS. Recently several Central Valley railroad grade crossings have had new, automatic safety arms installed. Do not get caught inside or underneath one; the fine is 53,000 colones plus damages, (fines can go as high as 200,000 Colones for a damaged arm) and as much as 2,000,000 colones for damage to an operating unit.

SCAM ALERT. Everyone should be aware that if someone calls you saying they are from your bank, hang up; bank personnel DO NOT telephone clients! A new variation of this scam has surfaced; persons calling saying they are from the Hacienda, the taxing authority for Costa Rica, and that they can "help you with a problem." One CRL member was recently fooled, and when the crook guided her through creating a factura electronica, using the victim's bank account access codes, all but USD 90 cents was removed from her bank account and transferred to an unknown third party. **DO NOT GIVE OUT PERSONAL ACCOUNT INFORMATION OVER THE**

PHONE UNLESS YOU INITIATED THE CALL TO THE INSTITUTION INVOLVED.

JOINING CAJA. In this column you were advised the the Caja was contacting some members to verify their data. Good News! The survey has been completed (for ARCR members) and ARCR can once again submit applications to the Caja for new members.

CREDIT CARD PURCHASES. A new Costa Rican tax law has been passed. Part of that law mandates merchants and service providers to offer customers the option of using a credit card for ANY purchase over 15,000 colones. Additionally, every business is obligated to provide a customer an electronic receipt for their purchases. For that reason you may be asked for your email address. For more information about other changes brought about by the new tax law, read "Legal Update" in this issue.

The Board of Directors wishes everyone a happy and prosperous 2019!



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From the left, back row, Earl Tomlinson, Allen Dickinson, Bob Brashears, Terry Renfer, Terry Wise. Front row, Mel Goldberg, Linda Leake, Martha Rollins.

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6 FIFTY YEARS AGO IN COSTA RICA

by Steve Johnson

Part 1: San José to Villa Neily



The following is the first of a series chronicling my life as a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica from 1968 to 1971. It is interesting to make the comparisons between what it was like then and what it is now. All the changes, some good, some bad, have brought the country to what it is today, fifty years later.

I and about 30 others, arrived in Costa Rica on a rainy Sunday evening in November of 1968; we were fresh out of college and had just completed three months of Peace Corps training in Puerto Rico. As we landed at El Coco Airport (now Juan Santamaria) there was a moment of silence after the wheels of the aircraft hit the tarmac with a jolt, then the Costa Rican passengers broke out into wild cheers and applause. I asked the man sitting next to me why they were cheering and, after making the sign of the cross and kissing the tiny crucifix that hung around his neck, he responded, “Señor, we are lucky we survived the landing. In Costa Rica, this is not always true.” Welcome to Costa Rica!

After disembarking we had dinner in the airport restaurant with the Peace Corps Director, Toby Orr, and the U.S. Ambassador, whose name escapes me. It was a small airport and seemed pretty empty; the only flights scheduled to arrive that night were our Pan Am flight from Miami and a LACSA flight from Guatemala City.

Later we were bused into San José where we were put up in a swanky hotel on Avenida Central. It was a dreary, drizzly evening and we should have just gone to bed, but we were excited to see what our home for the next two years looked like, so a bunch of us took a puddle-jumping stroll down Avenida Central and then over to the Parque Central. Having spent my two previous

summers in Mexico, I mistakenly assumed San José would be a miniature version of Mexico City with broad avenues, magnificent Spanish colonial churches, a vibrant night life, a strong Mesoamerican influence, and of course, some good Mexican food. I was mistaken. The streets were narrow, the stores and restaurants shuttered, the National Cathedral looked like it was constructed of wood painted to look like marble, and the closest Mexican restaurant to San José was in, well...Mexico. The central feature of the Parque Central was a strange-looking bandstand that resembled a giant black tarantula (it is still there today). Perhaps it was the weather, but San José had a dumpy, drab feel to it. If it had not been for the signs in Spanish I would have sworn it was a drizzly Sunday night in Des Moines, Iowa.

There did not seem to be any cars about and the few pedestrians we ran into were light-skinned and European looking (this was before the civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, which brought the influx of hundreds of thousands of Mestizo and indigenous refugees from those countries). We eventually found one little soda that was still open. They had a newspaper for sale with a curious name, the Tico Times, and it was in English. It was a goldmine of information about Costa Rica. I was still stuffed from dinner at the airport, but I noticed a drink on the menu called agua dulce, and ordered it. It was an insipid drink made of hot water and brown sugar; there was no cinnamon or any other spice added to make it more interesting. At the time agua dulce was the national drink of Costa Rica and the country had the highest per capita consumption of refined sugar in the world.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of roosters crowing (even in downtown San José), cars honking, and people

shouting. It was bright and sunny outside, the city was bustling and you could feel the energy. One thing I learned, Costa Ricans got up early and, being a morning person, I was going to fit right in. And of course, whether I liked San José or not was unimportant because I was going to be living farther away from the capital than any Peace Corps volunteer in the country – a place called La Cuesta, nestled among jungles, cattle ranches, and United Fruit banana plantations down on the Panamanian border. It sounded kind of exotic to me.

What was Costa Rica like? In those days it was not that easy to find out. I had been unable to locate any books about the country, not even travel guides, so before coming, I read and reread the article in Encyclopædia Britannica. On the flight down, Pan Am gave us each a small, eight-page pamphlet about the country and it was a little helpful, telling the basics; that the people spoke Spanish and were Roman Catholic, they grew coffee and bananas, were proud of their democratic traditions, and had one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America. It also said the population was a little more than a-million-and-a-half people and a volcano called Irazú had a major eruption five years before. We had heard through the grapevine that another volcano, Arenal, had erupted only a few months before our arrival, but it was in a remote part of the country and few people went there. On the second day I saw an Esso gas station and purchased a rudimentary roadmap. I wanted to see where Arenal Volcano was, but it was not on the map.

That was it; as for getting around and finding things, we were on our own. The chief attractions outside of San José were Poás and Irazú volcanoes, the beaches at Puntarenas and Playas del Coco, a spring-fed swimming pool near Alajuela called Ojo de Agua, and the basilica and ruins in Cartago. There was also a scenic train ride to Limón. Of course there were really a lot more things to see and do in Costa Rica, but the only way to find out about them was through word of mouth. At the time the national park system existed more in theory than in fact, and eco-tourism had not yet been invented. There were over 850 bird species in Costa Rica, but the only person who seemed to know anything about them was a reclusive gentleman down near San Isidro de El General named Alexander Skutch. He would later write a magnificent book about the birds of Costa Rica, but that was of no help back in 1968.

Before leaving for the campo we had a couple of days of orientation, plus a visit to the Casa Amarilla to meet President Trejos. We were told to shake his hand and say, "Encantado Señor Presidente," and the women were



warned he would kiss their cheeks. Few Americans lived in Costa Rica and even fewer visited, so the arrival of 30 some young American Peace Corps volunteers was a big deal. As I walked around San José, in between looking at the pretty girls, I noted that about half the cars were of the classic Toyota Land Cruiser type. I was told the government had classified them as agricultural machinery and they were therefore exempt from import duties, unlike the other cars (mostly American makes) which were heavily taxed. In 1968 Costa Rica had yet to experience its first traffic jam.

For breakfast each morning I went to a soda where I listened to the local news broadcast by one of the three major radio stations: Radio Columbia, Radio Reloj, and Radio Monumental. The news announcers spoke impeccable Spanish that was clear, distinct, and easy to understand, unlike the news on the television today. To my knowledge there was only one American fast-food restaurant in the country, and that was Kentucky Fried Chicken, on Paseo Colón as I recall. Today Costa Ricans pronounce it just the way we do, but back then it was “Kentooky Fried Cheeken.” Most families could not afford a television set and movie theaters were everywhere. The most popular American movies seemed to be westerns and Costa Ricans especially liked Clint Eastwood and Steve McQueen.

After a couple of nights at the fancy hotel on Avenida Central, we were moved

over to the informal Peace Corps budget hotel on Avenida Segunda, El Gran Hotel Centroamericano. There was nothing very grand about it, but it did have hot water and there was a television set in the lounge where you could watch the news and telenovelas from Mexico. The biggest brothel in the country, La Terraza Oriental, was on the other side of the avenue. I was warned to stay away from it, and I did, honest. The next morning at the crack of dawn we were scheduled to fly out of La Sabana Airport to our assigned villages, scattered in various nooks and crannies around the country, in single-engine Cessnas.

As dawn was breaking, I and three other Peace Corps volunteers arrived at La Sabana Airport. Mitch and Susan were going to Agua Buena and Joe was going to Sabalito, both villages located in the mountains near San Vito. I was going to La Cuesta, in the lowlands, on the Panamanian border.

The small Cessnas were waiting and the pilots liked to make their first takeoffs at the crack of dawn, in order to fit in as much flying as possible before the thermals (updrafts) began to form during mid-morning. There was too much air turbulence for small planes to fly during the afternoon, so by noon all planes that had not crashed were safely back on the dirt runway.

Jim Cusenza, our supervisor, had warned us that the airline that serviced southern Costa Rica had a terrible safety record. When we arrived at the counter he asked how many



passengers and how much luggage were going on our plane. As it turned out, the flight was full (five passengers), plus there was quite a bit of baggage, so Jim decided to play it safe and canceled our tickets; we got in Jim's car and he drove us over to the major airport (El Coco) near Alajuela to catch a LACSA flight to Golfito.

LACSA had a fleet of Douglas C-47s (the military version of a DC-3) that serviced major cities outside the Central Valley – places like Nicoya, Limón, San Isidro de El General, and Golfito. These planes had been used for military transport during World War II and LACSA had acquired them from the U.S. Air Force after the Korean War.

The flight took us southwest of Alajuela (over the current route of Highway 27), then over the mountains, coming out on the Pacific Coast somewhere between Tárcoles and what is now Jacó (in 1968 Jacó was a fishing village and the only way to get there was on horseback or by boat). We then flew over the banana port of Quepos, followed by some interesting jagged points that jutted out into the ocean. This, I learned, was the beach of Manuel Antonio. As we flew low over the shore my face was pressed against the window and I could make out no human beings, man-made structures, or roads; it was an uninhabited, wild coast. I promised myself I would go there someday.

We landed briefly at the airport in Palmar Sur. As the plane sat on the tarmac in the blinding sun surrounded by bright green banana plants, it was so hot the pilot kept the engines running and the co-pilot opened the door just behind the propellers and the rear door, thus turning the inside of the aircraft into a wind tunnel.

The flight approached Golfito from the Golfo Dulce side. The United Fruit Company had chosen this location for its port because it was basically a rock cliff that plunged straight into the bay, requiring no dredging to accommodate ocean-going vessels. This left only a long, narrow strip of land that ran along the base of the cliff for the port facilities. We flew straight for the cliff and, as we got closer and closer, I was sure we were going to crash into it. Then, at the last instant the pilot banked the plane sharply to port and in less than ten seconds we had set down on the tarmac. The flight had been an adventure from start to finish.

From Golfito we caught a rusty "chicken bus" to Villa Neily. Immediately after leaving the runway we went through La Zona Americana, an area of spacious bungalows provided for the United Fruit managers'



families, surrounded by beautifully manicured lawns and gardens. After that we passed the banana shipping facilities and then the grungy Pueblo Civil. It was a scene right out of *The Night of the Iguana*.

When we reached Villa Neily we had lunch in a restaurant called La Soda Rex. It featured swinging saloon doors and curtained booths, presumably to conceal the identities of couples who were having romantic encounters. At that time Villa Neily was a wild frontier town where the banana plantation workers spent their paychecks and blew off steam. The main street was a quagmire of stinking black mud, the weather was hot and steamy, and fly-covered dogs and drunks lined the shady spots on the sidewalks.



Black vultures looked down on the scene from the rusty rooftops, presumably waiting for someone to die. The police chief, dressed up like a western gunslinger, strutted up and down the sidewalk wearing a white plastic cowboy hat, a silver badge on his shirt, cowboy boots, and a pair of six-shooters on his hips.

After Mitch, Susan, and Joe caught their bus up to San Vito, I stood on the sidewalk by myself waiting for a bus to take me to the Panamanian border. Now that I was alone the hookers took notice. They swaggered along the sidewalk smacking bubblegum, swinging long beaded necklaces. As they passed they blew kisses, made obscene gestures and called me Papito. I shifted my weight from foot to foot and looked, unflinching, straight ahead. After that the lottery salesmen took a pass at me. I was a hard sell. I asked passersby if they knew when the bus left for Paso Canoas, but no one seemed to know. Back in 1968 buses were called cazadoras (huntresses) and they drove around town picking up passengers, and rather than leaving on a fixed schedule, they left when they were full.

Eventually a beat-up old Blue Bird school bus pulled up and stopped in front of me. The driver turned the engine off. I looked in the door at the person slouched in the driver's seat. He was the spitting image of James Dean, complete with the ducktail haircut, cowboy hat, toothpick sticking out from between his lips, and a pack of cigarettes rolled up into the sleeve of his white T-shirt. "La Cuesta?" I asked hesitantly. He gave a slight nod and then pulled his hat over his face and took a nap. After an hour the cazadora was getting full. Finally someone

shouted from the back of the bus, "Cuando se va este basurero?" James Dean pushed his cowboy hat up and shouted back, "Hasta que se llena de mierda." Everybody laughed.

Eventually he started the engine with a roar and a cloud of black smoke and we plowed through the mud and then up onto the gravel Pan American Highway, heading southeast towards Panama. The terrain was flat as we drove past rice and banana plantations and cattle ranches. About every five minutes we stopped at a pulperia with horses tied to hitching posts in front. Our bus was the only vehicle on the highway that afternoon, and we jerked along, dodging potholes for about twelve miles until we reached Paso Canoas and the border. At the border there was a bar, a brothel, a grocery store, and three or four shops

that sold perfumes, cheap jewelry, Japanese cameras, whiskey (presumably contraband), Toshiba radios, and the like.

I went into a panic. It seemed as if the bus was going to go into Panama, something I had no intention of doing. When a border guard got on the bus to look us over and check documents I blurted out that I needed to get off because I was going to La Cuesta, not Panama. He told me to calm down, La Cuesta was on the border and everyone going there got checked at Paso Canoas as a matter of routine. When he asked me what my business was in La Cuesta and I told him I was the new Peace Corps volunteer, he smiled and shook my hand, and said, "Welcome. They know you are coming. The whole town will be waiting for you when you get off the bus."

My heart sank. I had wanted to join the Peace Corps ever since President Kennedy announced its creation, when I was a sophomore in high school, and now I was suddenly ready to chicken out. The whole village will be waiting for me, I thought. I hope I will not be a disappointment. And I prayed that La Cuesta was nothing like Villa Neily!

Next: Onward into Paradise.

Steve Johnson arrived in Costa Rica in 1968. He later met his wife near Golfito, where she was teaching first grade in his village. In 1970 they married and moved to the United States. He never got over his love of Costa Rica and its people, so when he retired in 2009 the couple returned here to pursue their lifelong passion for gardening and birding. Besides writing, he enjoys digging holes, washing dishes, and splitting firewood. You can contact him at: johnsos05@yahoo.com

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by **Katya De Lusía**

Beware of The Dog... Sitter

Part of life for expats living in Costa Rica is finding people to care for their homes and pets when they travel. Often this can be more difficult than one imagines.

Homeowners without pets might decide to leave their place alone and unattended, and sometimes this can result in coming home to a nasty surprise, like an emptied out house, fallen tree damage to the structure after a storm, or, even more catastrophic, in a more rural area people have returned to find squatters making themselves at home.

One way people avoid those problems is to take advantage of people who offer to pet or house sit, without charge, as a way to get a free place to live while visiting Costa Rica. Unfortunately this can sometimes be a bad decision and the owners return to discover, "You get what you pay for."

Occasionally those offering to take care of your home and/or pets have references, but often they are not from this country, and it's difficult to thoroughly check up on their reputation and history. Many of the vacationer/sitters have not been to Costa Rica before and arrive to find they don't speak Spanish, and worse, don't have any idea how to solve the problems that can arise.

Here in Costa Rica, Murphy's Law can be a common occurrence; "Whatever can go wrong will go wrong..." and that always seems to happen when it is the most inconvenient, when you are away from your home on a vacation. There have been instances where people have had to cut their vacations short because the sitter they had depended on had to leave early: They felt too isolated in rural areas, didn't like being confined to an everyday



responsibility, or had their own plans change for personal reasons. There have even been some cases where the sitter simply up and disappeared without notice.

Some well-meaning house sitters don't realize that they are obligating themselves to a full time job, and when you combine that with the care of your beloved pet it becomes an even bigger responsibility. Others don't know or understand the "peculiarities" of living in Costa Rica. In one case a sitter wanted to visit the beaches and left the house

empty for several days. Luckily she took the owners dog with her, but returned to find the place had been broken into. Other owners came home to find the sitter they thought had been watching their home was gone, and many of their valuable items had left with them...who had left the country. Then there have been occasions like the single man who was "employed" as a sitter. He seemed really nice and sounded responsible, but one night he brought home a local girl he'd met at a bar. The house was later robbed by her professional thief boyfriend.

There are some people who hire their maids or gardeners to live in their home while they're gone. This can be a good option; they usually charge less than a professional house sitter and, if they worked for the home owner a long time, it can work out. However, there can be disasters; the gardener of one owner invited his family to use the pool and things got broken by rampaging children. Another person's maid had her boyfriend move in. Costa Ricans are usually very good with their own pets, but few indulge them like many gringos do, so your precious one might not get the pampering they are used to.

My experiences have taught me to be very prepared for whatever might happen. Once, one of the dogs I was caring for stuck her nose through a fence to bark at a wandering pit bull. The pit bull bit into her snout and she needed several stitches. I had to pay for the treatment because the owner had not made any prior arrangements with their veterinarian. Another time, on a rural farm which I could only reach on an ATV, the electrical transformer blew. The owner had a freezer full of food and, unfortunately, it was a weekend. Fortunately I speak fluent Spanish and after making up a story that I was on a respirator and would die if my machine didn't get turned back on, they came and repaired it. (I didn't consider it lying...just creative storytelling to get something done.) If I had not spoken Spanish it might have taken days or weeks before they arrived.

Most of the house sitters who reside in Costa Rica usually charge a fee and have reliable local references who can attest to the person's track record. Also, this is a very small country and the word gets around pretty quickly if your sitter isn't what they claim to be.

There are several steps one should take to do their diligence before contracting with a pet/house sitter. The most important is to thoroughly check the person out. And, be sure to provide your sitter with the vet arrangements, friend contacts, and handyman names and phone numbers. Also, make sure the sitter has electric, water, and internet bill

numbers, and complete contact information, especially if they are responsible for paying the utility bills for you

Keep in mind that some sitters are very tidy, but some are not. Normally in-depth house cleaning is not in their job description. For that people usually continue paying their maids (or they may lose them to other jobs). Is the sitter a driver? Sometimes home owners allow their sitter to use their vehicle, especially if the home's location is in an outlying area. But be sure to check their driving references if you haven't used the sitter before.

Last, it is very important that the sitter have your out-of-country contact information. And, if they don't speak Spanish, make sure they have information for reaching a translator.

When you do find a reliable sitter; one who is honest, responsible, and treats your pets as family, be sure to hold on to them. They are a blessing.

Katya De Luisa is an artist and free-lance writer residing in Costa Rica since 1980. She has been a professional pet/house sitter since the 1990s and can be reached via email at: deluisa@yahoo.com



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By Allen Dickinson

How'd You Get Here?

Twelve years and some days ago I arrived in Costa Rica. With two suitcases and a laptop, I began a new adventure in my life. It wasn't my first.

From time-to-time I have been asked the question we've all heard, "What brought you to Costa Rica?" Despite multiple attempts to discover the answer, I have never come up with one I felt was totally satisfactory, except one; now and again I have a genetic predisposition to be somewhere else.

My theory is that all of us who have transplanted ourselves here have at least some of a similar gene in us – you know – the one that nags inside wanting to know, what's on the other side of the mountain, etc. I call it the "Adventure Gene" and believe that some, like me, are endowed more strongly than others.

I came by mine naturally. By all accounts the members of my family on both sides have been wanderers. According to my mother, a life-long member of the DAR, and normally a very reliable source, some of our early progenitors arrived on the Virginia coast in the 1600s. That was a pretty phenomenal feat, considering that they had to spend months on leaky wooden boats going to a place they had never seen, and likely from which they could never return. It must have taken a pretty strong urge to travel!

And, that side of the family never quite quit their explorations; after generations of working their way west and ending up in Washington State, my mother and her parents moved, perhaps nomadically from the Northwest U.S., to Canada, and Alaska, multiple times.

The lineage on my father's side isn't quite as clear, but I do know his forebears also worked their way across the country, ending up spread throughout Colorado, California, and Washington State. There are stories that another branch ended up in the South, but I don't know for sure. And there's another family tale that involves some ancestral connection to Buffalo Bill Cody, but I'm not totally clear on that story either.

The important thing is that, apparently, I inherited a double dose of the genes my forebears shared that made them explorers.

My travels began (after a childhood living in six different locations in three different states) at the age of 17, when I

joined the U.S. Navy. Over the following 23 years I lived in eight U.S. states and visited 30 different ports in over 20 different countries. After I retired from the military and "settled down" I stayed in one place for the next 24 years... and was uncomfortable for most of the last 20; I had a deep seated undercurrent of a feeling of a need to "move" – to go somewhere – anywhere – just go. (I sorta did. In those 24 years I lived at eight different addresses...all in the same city.)

Then, in 2006, the opportunity arrived; the world and my personal situation coincided with my needs and abilities. But where to go? I would have loved to return to Italy, where I had lived for three and a half years, but in the more than 20 years since my departure, life in that country had gotten quite expensive. Besides, I wanted to be warm, consistently warm, and believe it or not, Italy can get quite cold in the winter. So, I looked south.

A friend had moved to Belize and loved it. It ranked high on my list. And that's where things get fuzzy. Somewhere, somehow, my focus shifted from Belize to Costa Rica – and here I am.

It was the right choice; I knew it within the first hour of getting off the plane for my first exploratory trip here. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest I had developed an affinity for "green," and the trees, jungle, and lush foliage of Costa Rica greeted me like an old friend. And it was warm! I knew I was in the right place.

I could go into all the pluses of why living here is right for me (I could also give you a laundry list of the negatives) but this is it, what could be the last stop on my personal adventure. I still have a strong desire to "go" from time-to-time, but it's not as strong as it was in my younger days and it quickly passes. Mostly.

I have a home here and a family that doesn't understand my inner urges and that has no desire to go see strange places. And, my age has had some impact too. But, what I do have are a lot of memories of the places and people and things I have seen and experienced. So, when the urge hits me, I relax and reminisce...it's sorta like taking a short trip.

I still don't know exactly "how" I got here, except that it was in answer to some inner drive, a wanderlust I have been following all my life; my "Adventure Gene" has served me well.

WILD SIDE

15

Stick Around!

Costa Rica, lush with plants, vegetation, insects, and animals, is always a major draw for tourists. And among the many creatures you will, without a doubt, from time-to-time encounter is a...well...a living stick!?

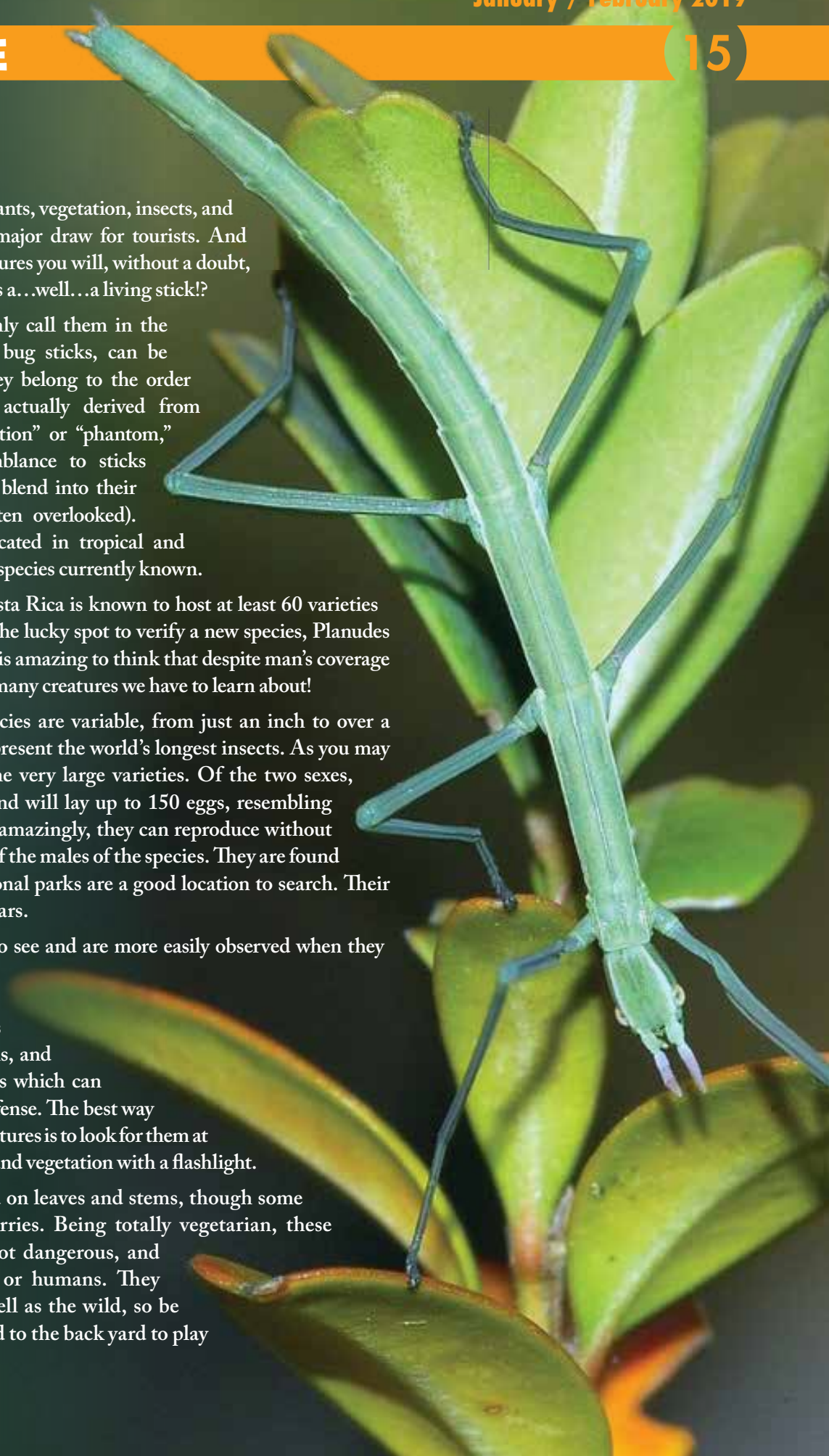
Stick bugs, or as we commonly call them in the Americas, walking sticks or bug sticks, can be found all over the world. They belong to the order Phasmatodea (the name is actually derived from ancient Greek for an “apparition” or “phantom,” possibly because their resemblance to sticks or leaves, which makes them blend into their surroundings, and so are often overlooked). They are most commonly located in tropical and temperate regions, with 3,000 species currently known.

Well, perhaps even 3,001. Costa Rica is known to host at least 60 varieties of these insects and has been the lucky spot to verify a new species, *Planudes asperus*, within this decade. It is amazing to think that despite man’s coverage of the planet, there are still so many creatures we have to learn about!

The sizes of the different species are variable, from just an inch to over a foot (!) in length, and they represent the world’s longest insects. As you may imagine, Costa Rica has some very large varieties. Of the two sexes, the females are the largest, and will lay up to 150 eggs, resembling brown seeds, at a time. Also, amazingly, they can reproduce without the need for the involvement of the males of the species. They are found throughout the country; national parks are a good location to search. Their lifespan is about one to two years.

Stick bugs are quite difficult to see and are more easily observed when they move across light colored walls or fences. Their colors range from numerous shades of browns and blacks to greens, and have many interesting features which can aid their camouflage or self defense. The best way to actually encounter these creatures is to look for them at night, searching under plants and vegetation with a flashlight.

These insects most often feed on leaves and stems, though some will occasionally dine on berries. Being totally vegetarian, these wild-looking creatures are not dangerous, and do not bite other creatures or humans. They inhabit populated areas as well as the wild, so be careful the next time you head to the backyard to play fetch with the dog.



16 FROM THE EMBASSIES



Ask ACS

I've seen some videos about beach safety at Juan Santamaria airport. What do I need to know?

Costa Rica boasts world-famous beaches, but many have dangerous rip currents with neither lifeguards nor warning signs. Even strong swimmers should exercise extreme caution when swimming in the ocean. Surf can be unpredictable and rogue waves have the ability to knock you down and drag you out where it is very difficult to swim. Do not swim while drinking, and never go swimming alone.

If you are caught in a rip current the most important thing to remember is to remain calm and keep yourself afloat. Signal for help to your friends or family on shore so they can notify a lifeguard or reach emergency responders via calling 911. You can read more about rip currents here: <https://www.weather.gov/safety/ripcurrent>

I would like to take my Costa Rican wife and kids to visit my family in the U.S. It's their first time traveling. We aren't interested in moving back to Texas, but want to have the option of travel for short periods of time. What do we need to bring to her interview?

We encourage you and your family to read more about the general requirements for non-immigrant visas on our website, <http://cr.usembassy.gov/visas>. In the case of tourist visas, we ask to see proof of ties to a permanent residence abroad, so any documentation you can bring to support those ties would be useful in making a final determination in your family's visa application.

If your children are minors, you may wish to attend the interview with your family. In those cases the Consular Officer in charge of your case will likely ask to see proof

of relationship, such as official birth certificates for all minor children, and a marriage certificate for you and your wife. If you are a Costa Rican legal resident, the Consular Officer may also ask to see your permanent resident ID, in addition to your U.S. passport.

Don't forget before you go to get an exit permit for your children! Dual citizen and Costa Rican children must have a permiso de salida to depart Costa Rica. You and your wife can register for this with Costa Rican Immigration. More information can be found here: <http://www.migracion.co.cr>

I think somebody stole my bags! How do I file a police report?

Whether you got pick pocketed on the bus or the monkeys at the beach in Manuel Antonio took off with your fancy new camera (the Consul has seen it happen!), filing a police report, in Spanish a denuncia, is important.

Costa Rica has 911 for reporting emergencies and crimes in progress. But in order to report a crime after the fact, the victim must notify the Costa Rican investigative police, also known as the Organismo de Investigación Judicial, or OIJ. These law enforcement officers are charged with investigating crimes and gathering evidence under Costa Rican law.

Present yourself in person at the closest OIJ office to where the crime occurred. You can find a list under "oficinas" at: www.poder-judicial.go.cr/oij/. The tourist police, a specialized corps of officers, can also take a report for you in the following locations: Tamarindo, Flamingo, Puerto Viejo, Guiones, Dominical, and El Coco.

Upon arrival, let the attending clerk know you wish to file a denuncia. An officer on duty will then walk you through the form. If you do not speak Spanish, you may wish to bring a friend with you to help translate if the officer does not speak English. Try to be as detailed as possible; if you are the victim of a crime no detail is too small to help the investigators! After you complete your statement and provide your identification the officer will review the statement with you.

If you are satisfied, you can sign off on it and request a copy for your records. If your case requires follow-up you will also be provided a case number so you may request updates. If you are the victim of a serious crime and would

like the Embassy to assist you with follow up on your existing case, our staff will need that number to make an inquiry on your behalf.

And as always - enroll in STEP!

A smart way to maintain your emergency contact information is to enroll with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Your information is stored securely and enables us to keep you updated on safety and security concerns and contact you in an emergency. You can enroll at <http://STEP.state.gov>.

Still have questions or want to know more? Visit our web site at cr.usembassy.gov, where you can find this article with some embedded handy links with more information. You can also contact us via phone at +506 2519-2000 or by email at ACSSanJose@state.gov. Pura vida!



Trouble in Paradise?

Hardly a week goes by without a story in the Costa Rican press about tourists becoming victims of crime or accidents. There have been high profile homicides and social media tells us petty crime is on the increase.

Many of us, therefore, become a sounding board for friends and relatives planning a trip. *"Is it safe? – What should I watch out for?"*

While we, as residents, normally feel more comfortable with the situation, we have the advantage of local knowledge and, often, language skills. Our visitors may not. They will stand out as tourists and could be more vulnerable.

Each country issues its own advice to their citizens. The UK advice is here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica> we update it at least every three months and more frequently when something of note happens.

The "Safety and Security" section mentions high-profile events that have affected tourists including, sadly, some homicides and serious assaults. It goes on to talk about the more common "petty crime" (although it doesn't feel "petty" when it happens to us!).

The most frequent cases we see in the Embassy are people who have had backpacks (and the passports within) stolen, either from luggage racks in buses or from parked hire cars.

We know the Costa Rican authorities are very motivated to try to tackle these issues. We meet with them regularly and keep them informed of what is troubling our citizens. We were encouraged to hear that Costa Rica will be spending a million dollars more per year in prevention work. There is a new mobile phone application for tourists in development and a renewed focus on tourist safety.

So what can we tell our friends and relatives when they ask? We can't guarantee that they won't have problems here – nobody can. But, we can point them to the advice which says, *"You should maintain at least the same level of personal security awareness as in the UK,"* suggest they check the advice for things that might affect them, and stay alert.

Thankfully, at the moment, we can still say, *"Most visits are trouble-free..."*



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by Shelagh Duncan

Sweet Dreams? Selecting the Right Mattress

Did you know that humans are the only species who purposely delay sleep? (Could it be that we are sleeping on an uncomfortable mattress...?)

Some fascinating things about sleep:

- Humans need to sleep about 30% of their lives – cats more than 50%, but giraffes and elephants less than 10%!
- More than 60% of North Americans do not experience a good night's sleep.
- 12% of people now dream entirely in black and white. Prior to the introduction of color TV it was closer to 85%.
- Most of us are sleeping on a mattress long after it has lost its ability to provide our body with the comfort and support it needs for rest and regeneration.

Okay, I admit there are no statistics to back up the last one, but I think you will agree that sleeping well is of prime importance in allowing us to enjoy life and feel well; a comfortable mattress and a clear mind are key factors. And, did you know that, while asleep, each person on average moves sixty to seventy times a night – with a dozen or more full turns? Considering a third of your life is spent on your mattress, it is certainly important to

have one that is comfortable, and that will help you get the sleep and rest your body needs.

I am not a sleep therapist, but I do know a thing or two about mattresses; first and foremost, if you are sleeping on one that is seven to ten years old, it probably needs replacing. How do you know if it is time for replacement? Do you wake up with stiffness, numbness, or aches and

Mattress Support

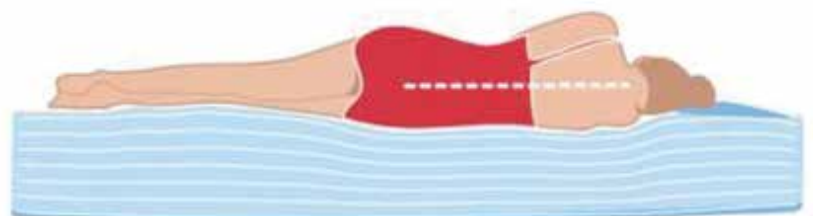
TOO SOFT



TOO HARD



CORRECT SUPPORT & SPINAL ALIGNMENT



JUST RIGHT

pains? Do you sleep better somewhere other than on your own bed, such as a hotel or friend's guest room? All these are indications that it's time for a change.

Shopping for a new mattress is not quite as much fun as shopping for a new TV, plus we don't always have the selection of familiar brands here that we would back home, but choosing a suitable mattress is not exactly rocket science. Mattresses are designed, not just made, and they have features incorporated into their designs for different body and sleeping types that you should be aware of before you go looking.

To select the correct mattress, first think about how you like to sleep: on your side, your back or stomach. (Firmer mattresses are recommended for all stomach and some back sleepers. Softer mattresses are better for side sleepers, and medium mattresses are recommended for most back sleepers.) When you know that, you are half-way there. A padded top layer will give added comfort and the coiled spring core provides the support you need. Other than that, think about if you prefer an inner spring or a foam mattress, and then consider the price.

All but the cheapest range of mattresses will probably be fine for most people. I suggest getting the best mattress you can afford. Generally, when choosing a new mattress, there are five factors to consider:

Comfort: There are two main types of mattresses, inner spring or foam (memory foam, latex, or regular foam), and within these types there are a variety of features for individual preferences. If you prefer inner spring, consider if regular or plush pillow top is best for you; also the type and quantity of coils. Comfort is highly subjective, and can be complicated by the possibility of two people sharing the same mattress. One restless sleeper may well disturb the other, so go for a mattress with individually pocketed coils: there will be much

less transfer of movement across the mattress. King-size beds offer the best of both worlds – instead of one king mattress, each sleeper can opt to use a twin (individual) mattress for their specific requirements and comfort preferences, for example when one partner is much heavier than the other.

Support: In which position do you usually sleep? Do you have back issues? Heavier bodies will need more support.

Price: Set a realistic budget. Is this an investment piece, or a “just for now” purchase?

Durability: Is the brand reliable, with good product information and a guarantee?

Size: Back home we are used to standardized bed sizes; every King, Queen, or Twin mattress will fit the equivalent size bed – not so in Costa Rica! Check carefully before you buy. For example, the king mattress here is about 79" x 79", in the US it is 76" x 80". Just ensure the new mattress will fit your bed – and vice versa!

Some other mattress information that you may want to include in your mattress purchase deliberations:

- Memory Foam was developed by NASA (like many other great things) and adapted for commercial use. It softens and conforms to the sleeper in response to



body heat and weight. It can relieve pressure on painful joints, but, as with all synthetic foam mattresses, will usually feel warmer than a regular, inner spring one. (Latex foam, not synthetic latex, is one of the best, and lets the body breathe naturally while offering decent support. And, it is not as hot as other foam because it is natural.)

- With inner spring models, a higher coil count usually means longer life and more support – which is not the same as firmness.
- Consider the humidity factor where you live, do not buy a mattress that has been sitting around in the store for ages. Order a new one.
- When you buy a new mattress, get new pillows and mattress protector.

Tips on care for your new mattress:

- Vacuum your mattress regularly, to protect it from mold and bugs.
- Mattresses last longer if they are turned and rotated regularly – every three months. (Every two weeks for the first six months is recommended) .

- Use a washable mattress protector to prolong the life of your mattress, and wash it often.
- Avoid sitting on the edge of a mattress.

Pillows and sheets are the other components for an ideal sleeping environment. Lumpy or musty smelling pillows should go. Allergies will have you snuffling or snoring all night, and who can sleep well with an uncomfortable pillow? Choose a good, hypoallergenic pillow.

With sheets, buy the best you can afford. Many people don't know this, but bamboo sheets are one of the best options to keep you feeling dry, comfortable, and cool at night! And, as a bonus, they also have natural properties that will not allow mold and bacteria to grow! Genuine bamboo sheets are not inexpensive, but I guarantee you will never regret buying them.

Sweet dreams!

Shelagh Duncan has been working in the interior design field for over 30 years and can be found at ROYAL PALM INTERIORS in Uvita. She can be reached at 506-2743-8323, or email her at: royalpalminteriors@gmail.com

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For all your Real Estate needs

by Rómulo Pacheco

Is the New Tax Law Going to Affect EXPATS?

Costa Rica has a new tax law, and expats, naturally, have some questions about how it will affect them. Here are some of the highlights of the new law:

SALES TAX

The sales tax is changed to an Aggregated Value Tax. This means that all the services you may have received from doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, barber shops, etc. will, starting July 2019, be taxed with the so called IVA tax. For example, if you used to pay 5,000 colones for a haircut, starting in July it will cost you 13% more.

INCOME TAX

First, what does not change: 1) The rate of the tax on companies (remains at 30%) and, 2) The interest gained on checking or savings accounts will not change. Worldwide income (that income expats may earn in another country) will not be taxed by Costa Rica. Expats that do not work in the country, or do not generate income in Costa Rica via a business or investment, do not have to pay an income tax.

A form of "global income tax" was included in the new law. Under the new law, tax on global income comes into play when there are different sources of income (all in Costa Rica or generated by work in Costa Rica). The new law specifies that, instead of declaring the separate income amounts individually, they must be bundled together and taxed as one amount. There is a chance that this will cause the tax declarer to have a higher income tax bracket, which will increase their total tax liability.

Another increase is to the percentage of taxes to be paid on higher salaries (it goes from 15% to 20%, and 25% in the higher sections.) The new law does, however, lower the tax rates on small industry PYMES but raises it on Coops and Solidarism Associations.

BONDS AND SECURITIES

Another change is that the tax on bonds and securities increases. For example, proceeds from an investment in a certificate of deposit, which under the old law paid 8% income tax, will now be taxed at 15%.

CAPITAL GAINS

The law creates a new 15% tax on capital gains. If, under the old law, you bought a lot for one-million colones, and then sold it for two-million, you would pay no tax on the profit (unless you are in the business of selling lots, of course). Under the new law, the seller will pay 150 thousand colones (15%) of the one-million colones profit as a capital gains tax. Note, however, that an exception is made in the case where the property being sold is the seller's primary residence, even if it is in the name of a company or an inheritance.

The new law considers lottery prizes as capital gains and they will be taxed at 15%.

These are the main ways in which the new law could affect expats, and the information given here, in my opinion, addresses some of the most important aspects of the law. There is, of course, much more to the new law, and if you think that it might have an effect on you, you might want to obtain a copy of the law and read it. Take your time to inform yourself and be patient; this is something we all are going to have to bear with.

If you have any questions or need a consultation, please don't hesitate to contact my office and I will gladly answer your questions or set an appointment for a private conference.

Rómulo Pacheco

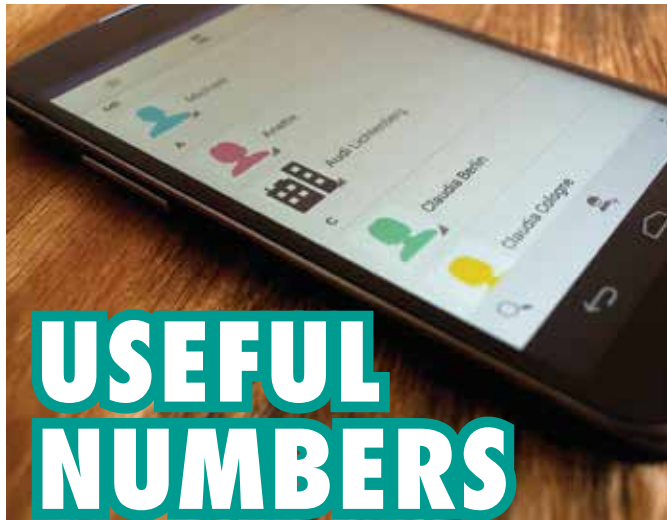
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Fraud prevention Department: (506) 2519-2117

Duty Officer (after business hours): (506) 2519-2000
(Dial zero and ask for the Duty officer)

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Phone: (506) 2258 2025

Address: Edificio Centro Colón, Paseo Colón, Provincia de San José, San José

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Website: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica

Email: costarica.consulate@fco.gov.uk

Canadian Embassy

Phone: (506) 2242 4400

Address: Sabana Sur, Edificio Oficentro Ejecutivo, atrás de la Contraloría, San José, 1007, Provincia de San José, San José

Hours: 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Web site: <https://travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-assistance>

Email: sos@international.gc.ca

Emergency phone: +1 613 996 8885 (call collect where available)

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CONFUSED BY THE METRIC SYSTEM?

Need to know how to convert common measurements used in Costa Rica to Customary US Standard measurements? Use the handy conversion chart below!

(These are APPROXIMATE factors, NOT EXACT.)

Milliliters × .034 = Fluid Ounces

Kilograms × 2.205 = Pounds

Millimeters × .039 = Inches

Meters × 3.28 = Feet

Square Meters × 10.764 = Square Feet

Square meters × 10,000 = Hectares

Hectares × 2.47 = Acres

Kilometers × .62 = Miles

Centigrade × 1.8 + 32 = Fahrenheit

Liters × .264 = Gallons

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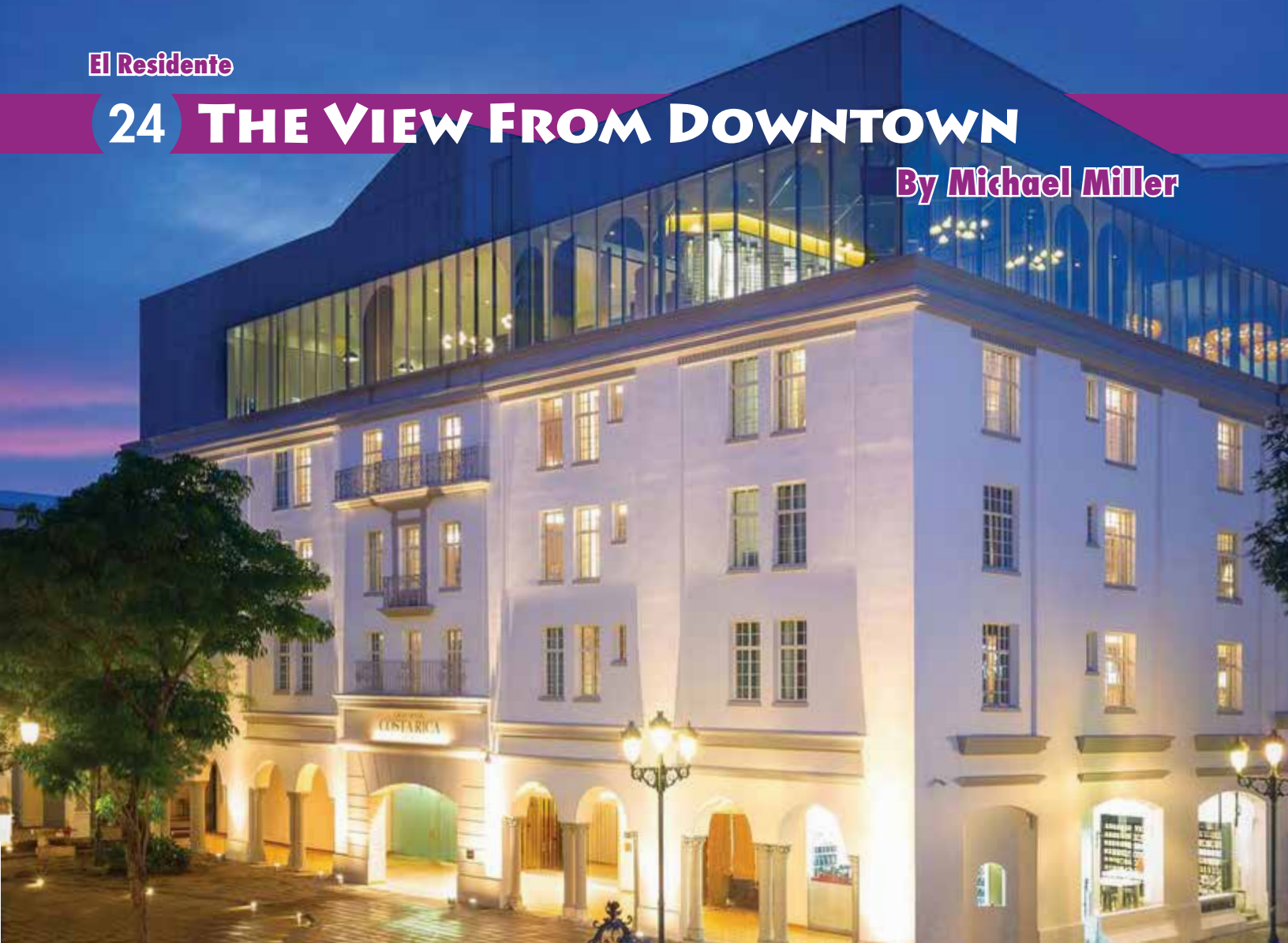
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PASSPORT



24 THE VIEW FROM DOWNTOWN

By Michael Miller



Glowing at night, the newly renovated Gran Hotel Costa Rica features a new restaurant and bar on its 5th floor.

A “Clean Well-Lighted Place” for a Drink

In my travels, I have been fortunate enough to have enjoyed adult beverages at some of the world’s most renowned drinking establishments. I have sipped a Pimms Cup at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, where I sat under the same overhead fan where Ernest Hemingway, Somerset Maugham, and Rudyard Kipling had sat in earlier eras. I have watched the Pacific surf with an old-vine Zinfandel at the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego, California, and I have savored a snifter of cognac at the stately Plaza Hotel in New York City.

I now live in Costa Rica and as I reflect on those rich old memories, a question comes to mind, does downtown San José offer such a civilized refuge? One where a person can indulge in an early-evening cocktail? Well, let me offer three places which are worth considering.

Gran Hotel Costa Rica

This past summer the historic Gran Hotel Costa Rica completed an extensive top-to-bottom renovation. One of the key changes they made was to the top floor, which now holds the check-in lobby, some nice comfortable seating areas, and an elegant bar and restaurant.

If you are not familiar with the Gran Hotel, it sits on the Plaza de la Cultura in the center of downtown San José, just a few steps from the National Theatre of Costa Rica. Originally built in 1930, the hotel is now recognized as an historical architectural monument. Since its beginning, the Gran Hotel has been an important part of Costa Rica’s history. It has even named a suite after its most famous guest, U.S. President John F. Kennedy.



The new bar atop the Gran Hotel Costa Rica features chic lighting and elegant fixtures, while preserving the historic tile floor.



25 January / February 2019

Tables near the windows in the luxurious new bar on the top floor of the Gran Hotel Costa Rica give patrons a sweeping view of the Plaza de la Cultura, the National Theatre of Costa Rica and all the way to the mountains south of San José.

Today, when you take the new glass elevator to the top floor, you can't help but be impressed by the sleek modern elegance of the check-in lobby, and of course, by the stunning views. As soon as you arrive on the top floor you are almost compelled to walk to the windows and take in the sweeping view of the Plaza, the National Theatre, and all the way to the mountains that rise up south of the city.

The bar features chic lighting and fixtures hanging from the ceiling that go surprisingly well with the original tile floor, which has been carefully preserved. There are tables at the windows that allow you to watch the comings and goings on the Plaza and at the Theatre below, and there is a grand piano, which I was told, is played on Wednesdays during Happy Hour.

The only criticism that I have heard about the bar is that it should have been created as a more intimate space; it is wide open with the rest of the top floor and has all the warmth of a convention center. Be that as it may, I think it is one of the most memorable places to have a cocktail or a glass of wine in downtown San José.

Hotel El Presidente

Another downtown hotel that has recently been renovated is El Presidente, about two blocks east of the Gran Hotel on the corner of Avenida Central and Calle 7. It is one of the major downtown hotels and, although the El Presidente does not have the storied past of the Gran Hotel, it still has plenty of history.

The new modern art exterior to the Hotel El Presidente gives it a whimsical facelift on an otherwise traditional corner of Avenida Central.





Azotea at Hotel El Presidente flows outside to an open-air seating area. The tables and lush vegetation create a memorable place for an early-evening cocktail.

Overlooking the confusing elevator issue, the second problem is much more bothersome to me; the glass of wine I ordered arrived with a mere two fingers of liquid in the glass. (There appears to be a worrisome trend among some upscale restaurants and cocktail lounges to see how little wine they can give to their patrons.) It is a shame, since Azotea could be a favorite drinking spot without this issue.

La Esquina de Buenos Aires

Perhaps the best well-stocked bar in town is in the venerable Argentinian restaurant, La Esquina de Buenos Aires, located on the corner of Avenida 6 and Calle 11. There you will find a wide selection of scotch and bourbon whiskeys, vodka, gin, brandy, and of

From the outside, the renovation has made two very noticeable changes. The first is the modern-art paint job that gives its exterior an almost graffiti-like appearance. The second is that they have inexplicably moved the main entrance of the hotel from Avenida Central around the corner and down the street on Calle 7.

On the fourth floor of the hotel there is an inviting bar and boca lounge called Azotea. The room is warm and comfortable and the back bar has a very polished, classy appeal to it. The area opens up to a roof-top section of open air seating that is just delightful. Even though it does not have commanding views, it is a great place to enjoy a beverage or two (weather permitting).

Although I really like the beauty and the feel of Azotea, and the welcoming attention of the staff, I found two problems with it. The first is that, even though bar is only four stories up, you will need to find and take two separate elevators to reach it.

course, some of the very fine sipping-quality rums that come from this part of the world.

Then there is their wine list, which is nothing short of amazing. There are several pages of wine offerings, mostly from Argentina and Chile, plus some selections from Spain and Italy. There is also a good assortment of wines by the glass, including a very drinkable house wine.

The reason most people go to La Esquina de Buenos Aires is for its food. Widely known for its Argentinian

One of the most popular restaurants in San José is La Esquina de Buenos Aires, featuring Argentinian beef and other excellent dishes.





With only eight seats, the bar at La Esquina de Buenos Aires can be tight and crowded on a busy night. But that is part of its charm as you will almost always meet interesting people here.

beef, it also has good seafood dishes. And, since Buenos Aires has a very sizable Italian population, it also has some great pasta dishes on the menu.

If you are looking for intimacy, this is the place. Maybe too much so, as the bar is very private ...and a small one at that. Tightly wedged near one wall, it has only eight seats and there is no lounge seating area; this bar is unfortunately not suitable for a party of two or three couples. However, most of the times I have been to La Esquina I have gone solo or with just one friend and enjoyed sitting at the bar for a drink; even enjoying a dinner there. In fact, since La Esquina is such a popular place, I always meet some interesting people sitting next to me.

If you are reading this you are probably past the age where you use the word “party” as a verb. There comes a time in life when we choose one or two comfortable establishments to share a drink with friends and, like Hemingway, we all search for that “clean well-lighted place.”

I enjoy each of the three places mentioned here, even though I recognize that each has its advantages and drawbacks. They are part of what gives downtown San José so much character. They are all part of “The Real San José.”

But, what about the Holiday Inn? Since the Holiday Inn is the tallest and the most prominent high-rise building in downtown San José, several people have asked me, “What about the Holiday Inn? Surely the restaurant at the top of the hotel must be a great place to enjoy the scenery and have a cocktail or two?” One would think.

The Holiday Inn does have an upscale, and quite expensive, restaurant on their 17th floor called El Mirador, and the views are amazing. Looking north you can see all the way to Heredia. To the west you can see the National Stadium and on to the international airport. And looking south, the entire downtown area spreads out before you.

But, as inconceivable as it sounds, the restaurant doesn't have a bar! In fairness, the hotel has a bar on its mezzanine

level, and there is a Fiesta Casino with a full bar on the ground floor, but none at the top where one would expect it. To me, this is an unbelievably wasted opportunity. A properly run bar with good lounge seating, its view out over the sprawling Central Valley and maybe a piano player during Happy Hour, could be extremely popular. It could be the most memorable place to have a drink in downtown San José. Disappointing.

*Michael Miller is the author of the first and only guide book that focuses on downtown San José, Costa Rica. Titled *The Real San José*, paperback copies are available for sale at the ARCR Office. An electronic version of *The Real San José* is available at Amazon/Kindle.*

Your questions and comments are always welcomed. You may contact Michael directly by email at: therealsanjose@gmail.com. You can see other stories he's written at his website: TheRealSanJose.com

Editor's Note: We regret to inform readers that this will be the final View From Downtown article for an indefinite period; Michael is taking some time off to pursue other interests.



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Encuentranos en
las Páginas Amarillas de Costa Rica

by Ivo Henfling

Can You Retire in Costa Rica on \$1,500 a Month?

Retirees on U.S. Social Security, or Canadians on the Canada Pension Plan, seem to be attracted to moving to Costa Rica. (I too hate cold winters!) I receive lots of emails from retirees in those two countries asking if they could live in Costa Rica on \$1,500 per month. Their biggest issue is that many don't have any life savings, are living on their pensions, and are looking for a warmer and cheaper place to retire.

So, can those people move to, and live on, \$1,500 a month in Costa Rica? The answer is: Yes, and No. It depends on many things.

Truth be told, living in Costa Rica is not so cheap anymore, so what it costs you to live depends on your requirements and your lifestyle. I know a lot of Ticos who live on less than U.S. \$800 per month, but they usually have lower expectations of their day-to-day necessities than most expats do. Therefore, to determine the correct answer for you, it is very important that you do the homework to determine how much your expenses for getting here will be, and what the cost of living here will be, before you move.

The quick answer is that if you are a single person and you work hard at finding ways to save money, you can probably live on that amount without any hardship, BUT, keep in mind that moving to Costa Rica is not the same thing as moving to Corpus Christi or Saskatchewan; moving to another country can be a costly affair, unless you don't have any belongings. Here are a few of the many issues to consider before you make the decision that moving is right for you.

The move

The cost of the move is something many do not take into account. If you don't have any belongings, if you just hop on a flight and buy new underwear when you get here, you need to remember that every item you need after getting off the plane, and didn't bring, will cost you. And the cost of many of those items may surprise you; the prices in Costa Rica can be the same, and often more, than they are back home.

Usually, however, it's not that simple. Most people have things they need or want to bring with them. So the key to what it costs to establish yourself here depends on what you feel you must bring with you. If it is going to be more than a suitcase or two, you need to determine what those additional items will cost to transport. In the extreme, bringing some or all of your household goods and belongings can run into thousands of dollars (including the import taxes you will have to pay.) So be very careful about what you decide to bring or not bring.

Senior citizens

For older retirees, having proper health care can be quite important. U.S. Medicare does NOT pay for health needs outside the U.S. Costa Rica has some of the finest hospitals and medical care in Latin America, and they are much less expensive than private care back home, but they still aren't cheap, and without insurance it's, "pay-as-you-go."

So what about getting some health insurance? There are two types: The first is the kind you purchase from an insurer. Granted, the health insurance you can purchase here is much cheaper than commercial insurance in North America, but it still costs money. (A few North American insurance companies will pay for treatment outside their home areas. Check with your insurer.)

The second option is the Caja (CCSS - the Costa Rican social security system). It isn't free either, but the monthly payments can be significantly lower. However, new laws allow only those who have applied for, or have been granted residency, to join the Caja. (When you apply to become a resident you MUST join the Caja; it is mandatory.) However, don't expect the Caja to be as prompt in dealing with minor ailments as the private hospitals - it has been known that getting treatment, even for a serious illness, through the Caja, can sometimes take months. It's not the best, but it functions, if you have plenty of patience and very little money.

Location

Housing in urban locations is much more expensive, particularly in the Central Valley, than in rural locations.

Come visit before you make a final commitment. Travel around and don't stick to the gringo areas. Ask others who are already here for advice and find out which locations offer the amenities you favor at the lowest cost. There are great areas 20 or 30 minutes from San José or the beaches. And if you are on a tight budget, stay away from the areas close to a beach, they're the most expensive.

If you want to rent when you first arrive (a strongly advised strategy for the first year) look for cheap rental housing on Spanish language web sites, like casa.todobusco.com. Or, there are some other great places to ask around for cheap housing, like the local central market, the local grocery store, and the farmers' markets. To rent more upscale and gringo style housing, you can go to costarica.craigslist.org or contact us.

If you are inclined to purchase, there are many real estate agents available who can show you listings. But be cautious, many do not speak English, and most of those don't cover low budget areas. Of course, I suggest that you contact us; we do speak English and cover some of the lower budget outlying areas such as Grecia and Naranjo.

Regardless, if you can't find a suitable real estate agent, at least make sure you hire a reliable attorney before you put your money in the wrong place.

Utilities

Electricity rates are low in Costa Rica (as compared to most other North American areas) but to live frugally you can save money by using as little as possible during peak hours, 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Water is still affordable in Costa Rica and there are many ways of being efficient in using it.

If you want TV, check which cable company offers the best internet and cable TV packages in the area you're going to live. If you must have English language broadcasts, some channels are broadcast in SAP. However, if you want U.S. channels (ABC, CBS, and NBC) they are NOT available on the Costa Rican cable services.

Food

To save money on food, adjust to the local food and eat what Ticos eat; lots of fruits and veggies, rice and beans, and the products produced locally and in Central America. Foods prepared and shipped from the U.S. are much more expensive.

If you want to buy groceries cheaply, do NOT buy them in the pulperia (the mom and pop store in the neighborhood) or at a convenience store. Everything is more expensive in those small stores. Almost every town has a farmers' market every weekend, and you'll be surprised how much cheaper the vegetables and fruits are there compared to the grocery store.

If you insist on buying your groceries in a supermarket, shop in the cheaper ones like Pali and Maxi Pali. The décor won't be much to look at, but the prices are better than the up-scale big box U.S. style markets. And if you like to save by buying in bulk, PriceSmart is such a chain. (They do, however, charge for membership.) For cheap places for almost anything else, like household goods and some limited groceries, there are the El Rey and Pequeño Mundo stores.

Clothing

If you can afford to travel, buy your clothing in an outlet mall in Florida. It's much cheaper and the quality is better. One alternative is the Ropa Americana stores here, which are located all over. These stores import bulk lots of close-outs, out of season, or unsold inventory clothing, disposed of by the big U.S. stores and chains. Again, the presentation may not be the most attractive, but the prices can be phenomenal. Just make sure that the items you select are in good condition; it's happened that damaged or soiled items have gotten mixed in with the "good stuff."

Transportation

Oh sure, it's nice to have your own vehicle sitting outside waiting for you when you need it. But because every vehicle in Costa Rica has to be imported, and the import taxes are some of the highest in Central America, prices for vehicles, even those twenty years old, are very high; you can expect to pay at least double what the same vehicle would go for in North America. Add to that the fact that gasoline/diesel is much more expensive in Costa Rica, and it begins to make sense to just hop on the bus. Costa Rica has an excellent bus system that goes to even the most remote places; it will take you anywhere and everywhere. And enjoy the ride! You'll meet some very nice people along the way.

Residency

As I mentioned earlier, to join the Caja you must apply to become a legal resident of Costa Rica. There are several advantages to being a resident, but for whatever reason you


apply, keep in mind that the application process can cost several thousand dollars and take up to a year to be completed. Something many people don't take into consideration is that until they have applied for residency, they must travel out of the country every 90 days. And the advice for finding an honest, experienced, reliable attorney, mentioned earlier, is VERY important when it comes to applying for residency. Ask around, get referrals, and be selective.

Language

One last tip; you probably know that the lingua franca of Costa Rica is Spanish. You will find it a huge help to learn as much Spanish as you can before you move.


So, to answer the question, yes a person can live in Costa Rica on \$1,500 per month. But unless they are financially "comfortable," they may need to be prepared to change their lifestyle some. Maybe a lot.

Ivo Henfling, a Dutch expat who has lived in Costa Rica since 1980, founded the American-European Real Estate Group back in 1999. It was the first functioning MLS with affiliate agents from coast to coast. He is also the broker/owner of Go Dutch Realty and can be reached at (506) 2289-5125 / 8834-4515 or at: ivo@american-european.net



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32 MONTEVERDE MOMENTS

by Marshall Cobb

The Monteverde Narco

It looks even more ominous when clean, which is why it's dirty.

“Remind me, my mechanic friend down in Santa Ana asked, “What have you replaced on this thing?”

The thing he referred to was my old Hyundai Galloper, known with malice, not affection, as the Malloper. I started ticking off items, using my fingers to count along. Once I had completed a lap through all ten digits and the count was healthily into the teens he waved me off.

“I got it,” he said. “Everything.”

Yes, in the less than three years I’d had the misfortune to call the Malloper mine I had indeed repaired and replaced just about every electrical and mechanical component. Some twice. These improvements occasionally helped for a short while, but ultimately the new part aggravated all of the older ones around it – one of which would soon quit out of indignation.

The Malloper has now spent the better part of two months in the parking lot of my friend the mechanic’s shop in Santa Ana – a “se vende” sign in the window. It has, unfortunately,

gathered more dust than interest in that largely upscale community. I refused to sell it up here on the mountain as: 1) I don’t want to put this cursed car in the hands of anyone I know and, more importantly, 2) I never want to see it again.

My mechanic friend has, thus far, politely refrained from mentioning this extended parking situation. If the Malloper – being sold “as-is” in the most strenuous use of that term – fails to find a new home, I suspect that we will chop it up for parts (since most are new) and then set fire to what remains.

So, you might ask, “If the Malloper is gone, what am I driving around the mean streets of the Monte Verde district these days?” I’ll tell you, and you’ll be surprised, I still am; it’s a sinister looking, black as sin, king-size Chevrolet Avalanche pickup. With dark tinted windows.

I have gone from a situation where people, assuming I was uninsured and had perhaps just escaped from a state facility of some kind, veered out of the way of my Malloper, to a whole new vibe; people now jump out of my way because they fear that, behind all of the chrome and dark tinting,

my Avalanche and I might be packing heat. I might be, in fact... a Narco!

When my same mechanic friend told me a couple of months ago about a gringo leaving the country that needed to sell three fancy cars in just a few weeks, I admit that I had I liked the sound of that potential deal. For once, I would be on the winning side; the side with time, patience, and the ability to walk away.

When I first received pictures of the Chevy Avalanche I chuckled. "No," I said to my friend, "that's not exactly the look I'm trying to cultivate."

"But you said you wanted a truck. The rear seat on this thing folds down and the panels covering the back can be removed. It's like a truck and an SUV had a baby."

"Yeah," I answered, "But it's also got 20" chrome rims, and a leather interior, and you can't even see through the tinted windows."

My friend persisted. "You've been complaining about cars since you got to Costa Rica. This thing only has 75,000 kilometers (not miles) on it and my shop has been taking care of it for the past six years. It's mint. You're not going to find a better vehicle."

"But I just don't think I'll look good with all the big gold chains I'll have to wear around my neck."

"Come take a look at it when you're in town. The guy's driver will bring it over."

"You see!" I exclaimed. "This is the kind of car that comes with a driver. I don't have a driver. I don't even have a personal assistant or a masseuse. If I bought it I'd have to get my back waxed and wear authentic fútbol jerseys just to ride around in it."

"We'll cross those bridges when we have to – just come check it out."

I did and, I am slightly embarrassed to admit, liked it. What I liked most was that the motor started when you turned the key and, more importantly, nothing fell off when you turned a corner. The negotiations ensued. They were brief. They were in my favor, and I sheepishly told my bride about our potential new car.

"Will that fit in the driveway?" she asked.

"Of course," I said, now a little unsure.

The rest of the negotiations took place from afar and I arranged to pick up the Avalanche on the same day my family was to return to Costa Rica via the San José airport. I felt fairly confident that something significant would go wrong

with this plan – which involved driving my Malloper down to Santa Ana, meeting the sellers at a bank, successfully wiring money AND, most importantly, making it to the airport in time to get my family.

Pura Vida did its level best to throw large wrenches in the plan (the fact that the seller's passport had a slight conflict with the name on the registration caused havoc, as did the precise order in which the various names were placed on the cashier's check I had to get when we discovered that the seller's bank wouldn't accept a wire). But I persevered and, eventually, found myself with the keys to a car I'd sat in for all of five minutes.

I raced to the airport, enjoying the fact that I could see over the traffic in which I was solidly stuck, and eventually picked up my family. The heavens unleashed rain, and darkness fell on the already midnight windows. From the backseat came a cry of triumph.

"Daddy, it has a TV!"

I narrowed my gaze as motorcycles cut in and around me. "No, it doesn't."

I did not dare take my eyes from the road but was sorely tempted by the noises of plastic things being opened and shut behind me.

"Yep, there's a TV right here!"

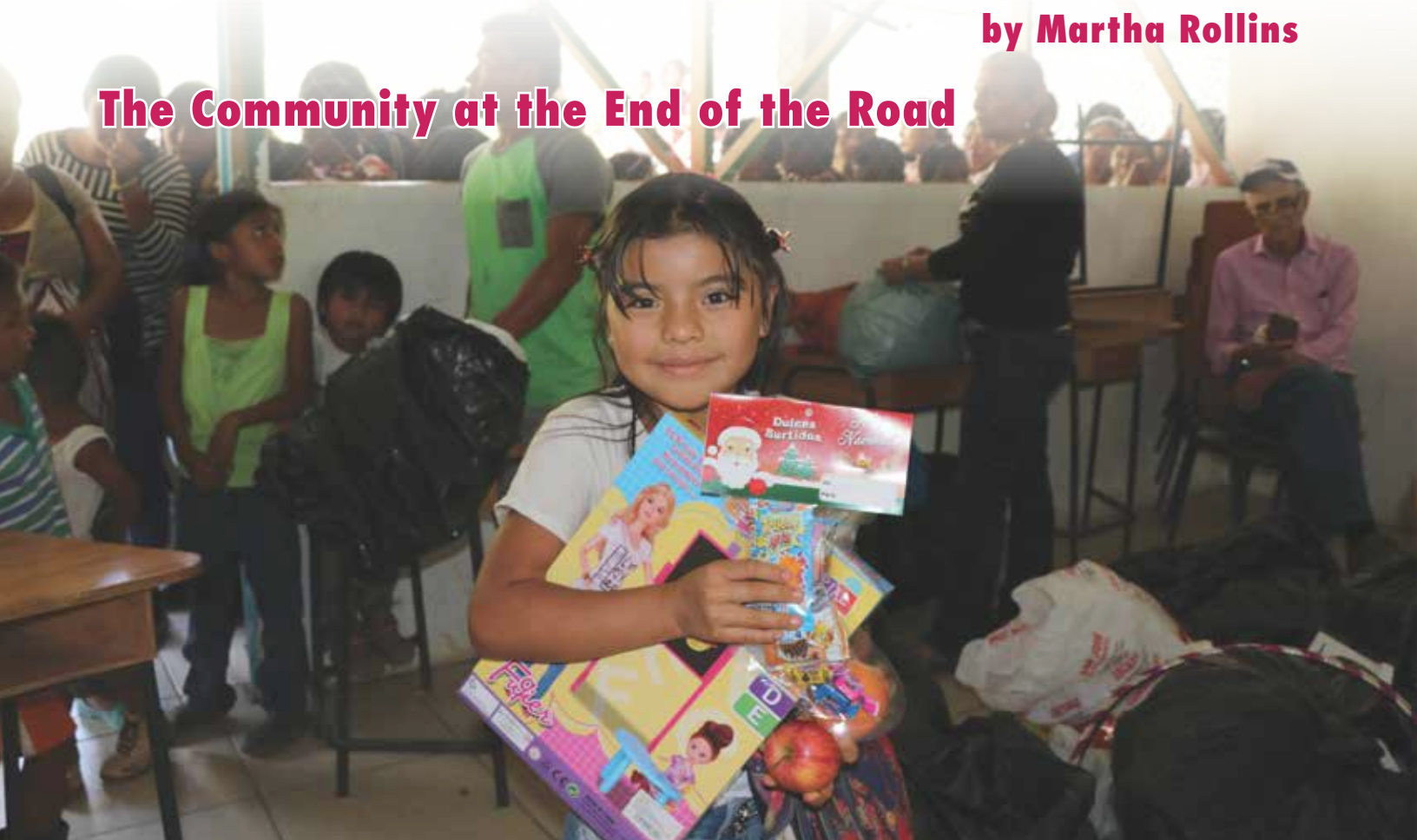
I risked a look back and, sure enough, a small television screen folded down from the roof. As Things #1 and #2 did a seated, belted victory dance regarding the fact that every future car trip was now a double-feature, I tried to think through how many blocks away from the bank I'd now have to park; the bank keeps shutting down my account access because they already think I'm a Narco. The Avalanche was likely going to get me deported.

The unhappy thoughts were eventually drowned out by the power of the V-8 engine. I did have one last moment of panic when I thought I would need a chainsaw – or a blowtorch – to get the beast down our driveway, but soon found I had at least two inches to spare. As I squeezed past the trees I thought it might not be all bad if I banged it up a bit. A few dents and scrapes might take the high out of my high profile.

Or, then again, they might just make me look like the worst of all options; a failed Narco.

Editor's Note: Since this writing the Malloper has been sold.

You can read more about Marshall's life in the Monteverde community by going to: www.marshall-cobb.com

(34) MAKING A DIFFERENCE**by Martha Rollins****The Community at the End of the Road**

It was exactly ten years ago when I made my first trip to a small isolated community at the end of the only road into the Simiriñak Indigenous Territory, on the banks of beautiful but wild Rio Pacuare. That trip was documented in the ARCR magazine *El Residente*. At that time this Cabécar community had no electricity, no internet, no running water, and very little food. The schools had very few school supplies and no text books. A few horses riddled with ticks fed in what now is a modern soccer field. Many governmental and corporate donors as well as individuals have helped us to focus a spot light on this community; ICE provided electricity and internet, while MEP provided computers and training for teachers and children. The number of children in school has more than doubled and the kitchen has been modernized. ARCR and Post 10 of the American Legion have supported the project consistently with donations and publicity.

On Saturday December 15, 2018, over 170 Cabécar people gathered to meet our team at Escuela Paso Marcos, the school I first visited ten years ago to deliver

books for the children. This community includes the Simiriñak and Paso Marcos indigenous groups who live in the Talamanca mountain range beyond Turrialba. The fiesta was held to celebrate the formation of a new association and the construction of a new gathering place, built by members of the community, with our help by paying for cement for the center's floor. Some Cabécar families walked for more than five hours through the uninhabited mountains to attend. We were welcomed by Richard Segura, a long time friend and leader of the new association at Paso Marcos, Proyet Pacoci, and Albin Anibal Mayorga, the director of Escuela Paso Marcos.

This visit was financed by donations from the Association of Residents of Costa Rica (ARCR) and Post 10 of the American Legion. Team members included: Terry Wise, ARCR Board member and member of Post 10, my husband Roger Rollins, a board member of Post 10, and Terry Renfer, the President of the Board of Directors of ARCR. Also in the group was Anita Salazar, a veteran of prior trips, and her two young nieces, 13 year-old Angelica

Salazar Mora, and 21 year-old Diana Gonzales Chicaiza, as well as Juan José Benavides (Trino) a singer and guitar player. Two medical doctors, Dr. Andres Garcia and Dra. Mariam Soto met us in Turrialba. Also included in the team were two indigenous Cabécar leaders and friends, Gamaliel Molina Diaz (Gama) who is from a different Cabécar community in the Talamanca Mountains closer to Limón, and Betty Vargas Fernández, niece of former indigenous advisor to MEP and for seven years the Directora de Escuela Sikua Ditsö in Simiriñak.

The trip began early; we departed San José at 5:30 a.m. and headed to Turrialba. We soon arrived at our staging location, the Wagelia Hotel, where we left our overnight luggage. After breakfast in a soda on the outskirts of town, we set off for Simiriñak and Paso Marcos in a 4x4 SUV and two pickup trucks.

We were fortunate to have beautiful weather on this trip, and the road, which ends at Paso Marcos, is much improved since the first trip ten years ago. At that time we hiked for four hours on footpaths with two heavily loaded pack horses, crossing the Rio Pacuare on a rope bridge while fording the horses after first unloading them, then reloading them up again on the other side. Nowadays, since ICE brought equipment in a few years ago to wire the school for electricity and provide internet service, the road is much improved.

After arriving at the school everyone feasted on delicious arroz con pollo, frijoles molido, chips, and té frio. The food was supplied by our team and prepared by the



Five orphans

school cook, a smiling indigenous woman who giggled mightily when teased about catching a gringo husband with her good cooking!

After the meal Trino entertained the waiting line of families with children while the two doctors set up shop in a classroom, which also contained gifts we had brought along for the children.

When they were ready, the doctors began examining each child. They saw a total of just under 100 children, which included 72 students, plus babies and young people not in school. Illnesses diagnosed included ear aches, sore throats, parasites, and asthma, as well as dental problems. Diana kept records as the doctors wrote out prescriptions to be filled by the CAJA. After each examination was complete, Betty distributed an orange and an apple to each child. We had brought the fresh fruit at the request of the community.

Richard, our host, then distributed the gifts that the wonderful staff at ARCR had purchased for the children, along with baseball caps donated by Post 10 member George Sellers. The gifts we brought had been selected for age and gender for 72 students and we were counting



The School Cook



Fresh fruit is a special treat.

them with some trepidation because of a larger number of children than we had anticipated. We were relieved when we uncovered a bag marked “Extras” and knew that we had enough gifts for all the children. Thank you ARCR staff!

After each child had received their gift, Angelina helped me pose each child for a photo.

An additional delight was that we had a wonderful follow up to four years of support for five orphans who live nine hours away, by foot. Terry Wise and our indigenous pre-school teacher friend, Yesmi Chaves, had arranged for them to be brought down to the fiesta by motorcycle. The doctors were able to examine them and arrange for treatment for asthma and parasites. It was such a pleasure to finally meet these lovely self-sufficient young people!

In the late afternoon we reversed our trek and returned to the hotel in Turrialba. It was a tired team who laughed and discussed our experiences over dinner, and again at breakfast the next morning, before departure for San José. All team members, including the two young girls and our admirable hard working doctors, want to be a part of any return trip. Gama has made firm plans with other Cabécar leaders for sports competitions, using traditional indigenous games, to be held next year between the different groups. It will be another fiesta to look forward to at Paso Marcos, our lovely isolated community at the end of the road!

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GUANACASTE... FROM A HAMMOCK (37)

by Geoff Hull



It's Summer!

The wet season ended with the last rains in November and, like a light switch being flicked on, summer arrives in Costa Rica in the same manner as an unexpected guest; suddenly, and planning on staying a little too long.

Within a week of the end of the rainy season the ground turns arid, cracks appear in the earth, and many species of jungle plant life go into a protective, dormant stage during the oncoming heat. Dust permeates everything, billowing up from the dirt roads with every passing truck, car, and rental quad, and the clouds of silt turn the coastal green jungle to brown, coating the chairs and wooden dining tables at each soda along the roads.

It may be hot and dry here, but in the northern climes it is cold and wet. As a result, seemingly overnight, our little fishing village of Playa Sámara turns into a tourist town bustling with fugitives from bad weather. The surf schools along the beach suddenly fill with pearly white students eager to ride the warm waves. Restaurants, hotels, and fishing charters swell with clients. The tourists, arriving in droves from around the world, sporting the latest in safari clothes for their Central American adventure, showing the usual telltale signs of those not acclimated to this often harsh environment; profuse sweat, bright pink sunburns, and spotted, swollen red insect bites. They stumble along our uneven sidewalks, wide-eyed, while exploring this wonderful and picturesque little town.

The crowds seem to grow every year, as do the number of new shops and eateries. No doubt, Sámara is now a vacation destination. To avoid the heat and crowds, I try to do my shopping and surfing as early in the day as possible so I can return to our quiet little sanctuary outside of town. We have named our chunk of paradise Dulce Refugio.

Like the arrival of the tourists, the heat and dryness brings out the wildlife in the area. Birds, coatis, snakes, and many other jungle critters come out from their homes in search of water (and mates) this time of year. Even the bees hover by leaky water taps.

One day recently, as I drove to town in my beat-up old truck, a trip which was supposed to be just another routine drive, I got a taste of the effects of the change of seasons.

I had dropped my wife off at the place where the horses she cares for are stabled, and was casually cruising down a flat dirt road toward town. As I drive I notice a hitchhiker walking up my windshield. To my amusement (and distraction) it is a large grasshopper. He's directly in my line of sight and is trying to cling to the windshield. I accelerate, curious as to what speed will eventually launch him from before my eyes, and find he's still there at 30 mph. Impressive grip! At about that point, our seven-week-old puppy, Ava, wakes up and starts walking across my lap, distracting me further. I glance down at the dog and when I look up again, on the road in front of me, is an old, dinosaur-sized iguana staring me down. He is a beautiful bright blue and orange and is looking for love in the middle of my path. I swerve, skid, grab the puppy, and then suddenly feel something alive and squirming on my ankle. A sudden sensory overload occurs, or as my jet-fighter pilot uncle used to say, "It felt like a sudden rush of urine to the brain, and my eyes didn't know what to focus on for my safety!"

I nearly spun the truck sideways into a ditch, trying to avoid the iguana, save the tenacious grasshopper, and protect the squirming puppy in my lap. After a panicky moment, and when I have everything under control and can look down, I find a harmless gecko that apparently lives in the hidden parts of my truck, now clinging to my leg. The gyrations of avoiding the iguana et al. must have caused it to bounce and land on me.

Yes, it is summer and the flocks of tourists aren't the only thing the hot weather has brought out, all of which requires my closer attention to what is going on around me.

No creatures were harmed in this fiasco, but I needed a cold Imperial to soothe my nerves afterwards. They didn't teach this stuff in driving school!

Enjoy your summer folks, drive safely, and hydrate. It's gonna be a hot one!

Geoff Hull is a retired fire service Captain and Paramedic from California. He and his family have lived in Playa Sámara since he retired in 2010. He spends his days beach-bumming, surfing, gardening, and wrestling his memoirs into a future book. Read excerpts from them at: www.fireflashbacks.wordpress.com

(38) PARADISE, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

by Tony Johnson

Are You Really in Costa Rica?



It's been said that we travel not simply to move to new places, but to be moved by those places; moved visually, emotionally, spiritually, and otherworldly by the wonders and surprises of our destinations. When we are not so moved, the destination may not have lived up to our expectations...or our expectations were excessive and we gave it no chance to fulfill.

Maybe we were not really "present" in our dream location; we were distracted, occupied with other things, and we missed the wonders we had hoped for. Our body was present, but our mind was focused on worries and concerns and that took us, essentially, elsewhere. The lesson here is that our attitudes and emotions can keep us from fully enjoying our surroundings and our life.

An example: About six years ago, our niece was baptized in an old, high-arching, ornate, "smells and bells" Catholic church. It was a beautiful ceremony conducted by a priest in satin vestments, utilizing plenty of Holy Water. There were

several baptisms being conducted that day and families were lined up to ensure that their newest and cutest was eligible for a place in Heaven. Ahead of us was a very large family giving their blessing and welcome to their new member. One of the adults was determined to record every detail of the initiation sacrament and was circling the baptismal font and his family with a video recorder, seeming to film everyone and everything. And, he almost never looked **DIRECTLY** at the ceremony, viewing it only through the camera lens. The first time he'd actually witness the whole event would probably be when he watched his recording.

He definitely gave his people a memorable gift, but in the process he denied himself the direct experience. He would see it later, but secondhand, because he was not fully present as the event actually occurred.

Some of us experience Costa Rica that way, secondhand, filtered through our mental and emotional distractions. We "see" the country rather like we "listen" to a car radio that we vaguely hear in the background. As we think or

converse we may be only partially aware of what's right in front of us, a country we made a lot of effort and paid a lot of money to move to. Our dream location may be in the background of our awareness while we are elsewhere.

Many of us live our entire lives that way, not just in our experience of Costa Rica, but everything about our lives is lived from a distance, uninvolved. Now that the miracles of modern technology give us the world at our fingertips, we may be even more distracted than ever before. We can be IN Costa Rica and ON the vast Google library simultaneously. And fully present in neither.

Near where I live is the Costa Ballena, where magnificent humpback whales come to breed and give birth. Every year there are whale watching parties that go out onto the water to enable people to get close to the whales and their calves. Amazingly, I've seen tourists on their I-phones as whales surface near the boat. Are emails what they really came to see?

Distracted, lost in thought, is how many of us experience our world. I'm no exception; like that baptismal videographer, as a semi-serious still photographer I'm constantly on the lookout for a great picture. And when I concentrate on the photographs that I might find, I'm not always fully present. I'm trying to change that, to establish the habit of just look, just see, just feel, just hear; don't think about it.

What a shame it is to not fully experience those gorgeous, glorious sunsets in Costa Rica; those sunsets that we dreamed of witnessing. Try taking in the view without judgment (which distances us from the experience). Don't allow yourself to slip into a, "Yesterday's sunset was so much better," perspective, rather than see the fullness of the beauty in front of you. Concentrate on the brilliant ball, the wisps of clouds with varying shades of red, pink, purple, and orange. The faint, cooling breeze, the sounds of kiskadees, parrots, oropendolas, and geckos. Look at the changing greens of the forest as the fading sunlight hits the trees at different angles. Focus on all that is happening in the here and now.

It's not helpful to think, "Why bother? If you've seen one sunset, you've seen them all." No, you haven't. They're all subtly different, even though composed of the same elements. And they're all worth our full attention. If we've come to take them for granted we miss not just the typical sunsets, but the exceptionally spectacular ones too.

I've been teaching myself to look for the unusual in the usual. Except during a heavy rain, sunsets are daily events, and they are something to be grateful for, rather than blown off for the Nightly News. I try to remember how fortunate I am to experience both Nature's Light Show and be alive

in this wondrous world; to set aside my worries for a few minutes to concentrate on what makes this place, this Pure Life, so wonderful.

We each came to Costa Rica for many things: for the next chapter in our lives, for adventure, for escape, for novelty. To be in a place where we can revive and freshen up our life, to be moved, and to finally find contentment and happiness... and peace. Aren't those the kind of things we came here for?

But if we live our lives from a distance, we may have trouble actually locating and accessing those goals.

But many of us don't know how to access those treasures, thinking they're "out there" when they're actually already here, within us.

Imagine, just for a moment, your consciousness as a closed gallon jar of clear water with a layer of sand on the bottom and a small, pretty, tropical fish swimming inside. Shake up that jar and what do you see? Not much. You have not only disturbed the fish's life, but there is no more clear water, just a swirling liquid filled with rotating grains of sand. And, you can no longer see the fish.

Our mind can be like that; on a constant "spin cycle" as our ideas, feelings, thoughts, memories, worries, and concerns go round and round and round. When we are like that it is no wonder we are often "wired," "revved up," "jittery," unable to calm down and be at ease.

Our consciousness can be like the shaken jar, muddy, unclear. Our agitated mental activity keeps us aroused, unhappy, and distant from nature. If we can allow our thoughts and feelings to settle, and only calm, peaceful awareness remains, we see the world more clearly. Setting aside our concerns can allow us to be fully immersed in that sunset, and that cannot only give us a deeper sunset experience but also a deeper, calmer sense of being.

Costa Rica may not FEEL the way we expected. It may feel "stirred up" because WE are stirred up! We may have imported more than our household goods, we may have also brought our frustrations, disappointments, pessimism, negativity, resentments and our unhappiness, to our new home. And then, unknowingly, we impose our feelings on our environment, and then blame IT for failing to deliver what we think it should.

You've certainly met those who would complain about Heaven, no? And you've certainly met those who complain about Costa Rica's roads, or how hard it is to get some things, or how "unreliable" Ticos are, or any number of other things. When their mind is focused on their complaints, how likely is it for them to fully take in the marvels all around them?

How can both be true? How can both peace and turmoil exist within us? Our peace, like those ignored sunsets, can be obscured by our life concerns. By focusing on nature we can slow down the rapid cycling of thoughts and discover the peace within us. The glories of nature can take us out of our worries...IF we concentrate on our actual current environment and not on past mistakes and future risks.

If we turn off our mind, let the “sand” of our thoughts settle, and ease into the tranquility of pure awareness where we are content; if we can stop wondering what’s next, we can go to where we’re not desiring something else, something more, we can allow our self to go to that place where the present is good enough and the beauty of the here and now is what is important.

A key source of our unhappiness is an attitude of never being satisfied, always wanting more. So we are rarely fully present in our experiences, even the best ones. Typically when we step out of the current experience, imagining the “next, better, more,” we miss the benefits of the now. And we often repeat the same sense of discontent and anticipate something better in whatever next experience we encounter.

Does that happen to you? A sense of discontent, disappointment? Are you caught in the mindset where, “THIS is never good enough,” loop where only the NEXT something will satisfy? Have you noticed how when that is the perspective, nothing ever measures up? And how there is never a feeling of contentedness?

Some will take umbrage at the very idea of content, saying, “How could I possibly be content in this defective, deficient flawed world, so filled with injustice, unfairness, and imperfection? I must DO something to make it better.”

Can you avoid imposing your social discontent on nature? Like looking at a “standard,” unexceptional sunset, and knowing that even if it wasn’t the most perfect sunset ever, it was still beautiful. Learn to look for the beauty present, not the shortfalls.

Tony Johnson is a retired university mental health psychologist. He lives in Ojochal and is learning to be fully present and content with the local rainforest and ocean. He can be contacted for consultations at: johnson.tony4536@gmail.com

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► **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Groups meet daily throughout the country; times and places change frequently. Schedules for AA meetings and their locations can be found at: www.costaricaaaa.com.

► **Al-Anon Meetings**

English language Al-Anon meetings are open to anyone whose life has been/is affected by someone else's problem with alcohol. Al-anon meeting information can be found at: <http://www.costaricaaaa.com/category/al-anon/>.

► **American Legion Post 10-Escazú**

Meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 11AM at the Casa de España in Sabana Norte. Casa de España has an elevator so the building is handicap accessible. If you wish to attend please call 4034-0788, email: commander@alcr10.org or visit our website at www.alcr10.org. If you need directions, call Terry Wise at 8893-4021.

► **American Legion Post 12-Golfito**

Meetings are held 4 p.m. 1st Tuesday every month at Banana Bay Marina. The Golfito GOVETS have been helping Southern Costa Rica for over 20 years. Contact Pat O'Connell at: walkergold@yahoo.com or 8919-8947, or Mel Goldberg at 8870-6756.

► **American Legion Auxiliary**

The Legion Auxiliary meets the second Saturday of each month, at 1300 hours in Moravia. Contact Doris Murillo 2240-2947.

► **Bird Watching Club**

The Birding Club of Costa Rica sponsors monthly trips to observe local and migrant birds in various areas of the country. For more information, please visit our website: www.birdingclubcr.org

► **Canadian Club**

The Canadian Club welcomes everyone to join us for our monthly luncheons, and at our special annual events, like our Canada Day Celebration, no passport required. There is no fee or dues to pay, just sign up with your email address and we will keep you informed of Canadian Events. For information visit our website: www.canadianclubcr.com or email Pat at: canadianclubcr@yahoo.com to sign up.

► **Costa Ballena Women's Network**

Costa Ballena Women's Network (CBWN) started in Ojochal with a handful of expat ladies almost 10 years ago. Our focus is networking, community, business, and social activities as well as offering an opportunity to meet new people. Monthly lunch meetings are held the 3rd Saturday of each month at various restaurants with guest speakers talking on interesting topics. For more information please contact: cbwn00@gmail.com and see our FB page - www.facebook.com/CostaBallenaWomensNetwork

► **Costa Rica Writers Group**

Published authors and writers; newbies, and wanna-bes make up this group, dedicated to helping and improving all authors' work, with resources for publishing, printing, editing, cover design; every aspect of the writing process. Third Thursday, January through November, Henry's Beach Café, Escazú, 11:00 a.m. Contact: bbrashears0@gmail.com, 8684-2526. Facebook page: Costa Rica Writers Group

► **Democrats Abroad**

Democrats Abroad meets on the last Saturday of every month at Casa LTG (Little Theatre Group). Contact Nelleke Bruyn, 8614-2622, e-mail: cr.democratsabroad@yahoo.com. Join Democrats Abroad at: www.democratsabroad.org. Register to vote absentee at: VoteFromAbroad.org

► **First Friday Lunch**

Each month ARCR sponsors a "First Friday Lunch." All are invited to join ARCR Officers and others for an informal lunch and BS session. There is no RSVP or agenda, just food and meeting new and old friends. Attendees are responsible for their own food and drink expenses. The FFL takes place at 12:00 PM on the first Friday of the month. Gatherings are at the Chinese restaurant, Mariscos Vivo, located behind the Mas x Menos grocery store (located across from the Nissan Dealer) and not far from Hotel Autentico (the former Hotel Torremolinos, where the ARCR Seminars are held).

► **Little Theatre Group**

LTG is the oldest continuously running English-language theatre in Central or South America and currently puts on a minimum of four productions a year. The group's monthly social meetings are held in the theatre

on the first Monday of the month from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and everyone is welcome. Membership: Student C2,500, Adult C5,000, Family C8,000. For more information Call the LTG Box Office 8858-1446 or www.littletheatregrup.org

► Marine Corps League

Meets the 2nd Saturday of the month at 11AM at the Tap House at City Place in Santa Ana. We are looking for new members. Former Marines and Navy Corpsmen can be regular members. All other service members are welcome to join as associate members. For information call Andy Pucek at 8721 6636 or email andy@marinecorpsleaguecr.com

► Newcomers Club

Newcomers Club of Costa Rica (for women) meets the first Tuesday of every month, September through May. Contact: 2588-0937, email us at: costaricaporo@yahoo.com or visit our website at: www.newcomersclubofcostarica.com

► PC Club of Costa Rica

The PC Club meets the third Saturday of each month; social, coffee, doughnuts at 8:30 a.m. The meeting starts at 9 and ends at 11 a.m. Guests are allowed one free month before joining. Meetings are held at the Pan American school in Belén. For information call Dick Sandlin at 2416-8493, email him at d_sandlin@email.com or visit our website at: www.pcclub.net

► Pérez Zeledón International Women's Club

PZIWC was formed in November 2009 to promote friendship between English speaking women in Pérez Zeledón and, through friendship, to make positive contributions to our local community. The PZWIC meets for luncheons on the SECOND Tuesday of the month, hosts Walkers Day on the THIRD Tuesday of the month, and has a Games Day (board and card games) on the FOURTH Tuesday of each month. Event sites change frequently, so call or check our website for locations. More information can be obtained from Jane Gregson at 8899-6859 or Cathy Carrolan at 8384-8281, or email to: pzwomansclub@gmail.com. Please visit our website at: www.pzwomansclub.org

► Professional Women's Network

PWN provides its members with opportunities to network with other professional women with the goal of aiding

personal and professional development of entrepreneurs, students, and professionals. PWN sponsors service and outreach programs to "give back" to the community. The meeting charge is 4,000 colones for visitors, members 3,000. Membership fee is 12,000 colones and includes listing in the business directory, if desired. Meetings schedules vary. For info on the speaker for the month and to register, call Helen at 2280-4362. Location: Tin Jo Restaurant in San José, Calle 11, Av. 6-8. Or email us at: pwn.costarica@gmail.com.

PWN website is www.pwn-cr.com

► Radio Control Sailing Club

Meets at Sabana Park Lake. For information write Walter Bibb at: wwbbsurf40@yahoo.com

► Wine Club of Costa Rica

The wine club usually meets at 1 p.m. on the last Sunday of each month. Join us to tantalize your taste buds and expand your education. For more information on upcoming events please contact us at 2279-8927.

► Women's Club of Costa Rica

The Women's Club of Costa Rica is the oldest, continuously operating, philanthropic organization for English-speaking women in Costa Rica. The Club is focused on serving community needs in Costa Rica, particularly on children's needs. Along with its philanthropic fundraising activities, WCCR also hosts regular lunches, teas and many special interest groups. Guests are welcome and further information and a calendar of planned events can be found at: www.wccr.org

► Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Open to men too. Meetings in English in Heredia, Spanish in San Jose, and English/Spanish in San Ramon. We work on peace and human rights issues. Call Mitzi, 2433-7078 or write us at: peacewomen@gmail.com

"Club members should review the contact information for their clubs and make sure it is up to date. Send any changes or corrections to: service@arcr.net, Subject line; El Residente."

BUSINESS DIRECTORY (43)

Important dates in Costa Rica:

January 24-25
ARCR Seminar
for expats.
Location TBA

February 14
Valentines Day

February 21-22
ARCR Seminar
for expats.
Location TBA

Funniest One Liners

"I asked my North Korean friend how it was there, he said he couldn't complain."

"Women spend more time wondering what men are thinking than men spend thinking."

"My girlfriend is always stealing my t-shirts and sweaters... But if I take one of her dresses, suddenly 'We need to talk'."

"To this day, the boy that used to bully me at school still takes my lunch money. On the plus side, he makes great Subway sandwiches."

"Behind every angry woman is a man who has absolutely no idea what he did wrong."

"My dream woman has a special combination of inner and outer beauty and is, most importantly, too naive to know she's way out of my league."



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