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# El Residente



Historic Costa Rica:

**La Hacienda Santa Rosa**



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

Since 1984 the ARCR has 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

Here's another issue jam-packed with important information and some new contributors' stories.

If you are a U.S. Citizen and subject to U.S. tax laws, be sure to read the Across the Board column to get an update on some important changes to tax reporting laws. Also included is the latest information about the Costa Rican law regarding fines for those who have overstayed their visas.

This issue contains the last installment of Carol McCool's saga about Finding My Way in Costa Rica, and debuts Steve Johnson's new series about the Pura Vida lifestyle. Bon Voyage Carol. And Welcome Steve. More good reading is Michael Miller's piece about Costa Rica's Art Museum and Marshall Cobb's tale about the Tránsito Dance that happens in Monteverde.

And there's much more — Wild Side, Legal Update, and Tony Johnson gives us some tips on dealing with arguments in Paradise, We Have a Problem. There is too much to list here, so kick back and dig in for some enjoyable reading and solid information about things going on in this tropical paradise.

El Residente.



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# ACROSS THE BOARD

## Notes and News from the Board of Directors

**OVERSTAYED VISAS.** The Costa Rica government announced that the provision of the 2010 Costa Rica Ley Migratorio, which allows the government to fine individuals leaving the country \$100 for each month they have overstayed their permitted time, was reinstated as of April 20, 2018. The fines are retroactive to March, 2010, when the law came into effect. The law further provides that if the individual does not pay the fine, they will be denied entry into the country for three times the amount of time they overstayed (one month overstay equals three months not being allowed back into Costa Rica, two months overstay equals six months, etc.).

**UPDATE.** The Directorate General of Immigration, who was supposed to start charging the above fine of \$100.00 per month for overstaying of Visas on April 20, has announced that the fine will be delayed; implementation of the law has been extended for 12 months. This extension will allow changes to Article 33 of Law 8764 to be made, clarifying and limiting the application of the fine only to those nonresidents who are in the country as tourists and who exceeded their legal stay in the country.

**TWO CHANGES TO U.S. TAX LAWS.** U.S. Tax and Accounting has informed ARCR that the Internal Revenue Service has announced two significant changes to U.S. tax law:

**1. Offshore Voluntary Disclosure Program.** The OVDP will end as of September 28, 2018. The IRS is encouraging qualified taxpayers who have unreported foreign accounts to use this opportunity to use the OVDP to come into compliance before its expiration. They note that if there is a replacement program, it may levy higher penalties than the current OVDP. Those taxpayers who need to disclose noncompliant and unreported foreign accounts and assets need to file before the September date to avoid potential criminal prosecution and minimizing otherwise applicable civil penalties, including the FBAR (Reports of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts) penalty.

**2. Deemed Repatriation of Retained Earnings of Foreign Corporations.** The old rule, which provided that the earnings of foreign corporations owned by U.S. shareholders were allowed to be left in the corporation, untaxed by the U.S. until those earnings were distributed to the shareholders in the form of dividends, has been changed.

The 2018 change says that all post-1986 retained earnings of foreign corporations are now deemed repatriated, i.e., distributed, and therefore required to be reported on the shareholder's 2017 income tax return.

To ease the impact of this change, an election can be made to pay the net tax over eight years. The election is due by the due date of the shareholder's 2017 income tax return (including extensions). The first of the eight installments was due by April

17th, 2018, for those shareholders that live in the U.S., or June 15th, 2018, for those shareholders that live outside of the U.S. If the election is not made, the entire tax must be paid with the 2017 tax return.

For assistance with either of these items, contact U.S. Tax and Accounting. Their advertisement may be found elsewhere in this issue.

**ADDITIONAL TAX NEWS.** Costa Rica and the United States have signed a new agreement for the exchange of tax information. The agreement facilitates the transparency standard established by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Both countries will exchange information with the purpose of determining, liquidating and collecting taxes, as well as charging and executing tax claims. It has not been announced if there were any changes to the original agreement enforced since 1991. For detailed information, contact your accountant or tax preparer. (Costa Rica currently maintains agreements for the exchange of tax information with several countries, including Argentina, Canada, Finland, France, Mexico, Norway, Honduras, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Denmark, Australia, and others.)

**CAJA INQUIRIES AND VERIFICATIONS.** Some ARCR members who are enrolled in the Caja/ARCR agreement may be contacted, either by phone or in person, by Caja inspectors. This is a normal process. There is nothing to be worried about. Please cooperate with them and provide the information requested, which may include:

- Cédula (residency card) information.
- Resolution (migración approval) information.
- Proof of income.

If you do not have this information handy, you can provide it within five business days. If you have any questions, need assistance, or further information, contact the ARCR office.

**AMAZON SHIPPING TO COSTA RICA.** Amazon has recently announced that they will now ship directly to purchasers in Costa Rica, instead of via a third-party forwarding service such as Aeropost, JetBox, etc. Before taking advantage of this, however, members should be aware that the parcels will be delivered to the Costa Rica Correo (Post Office). The addressee will receive a notice of the package's arrival and inform them that they must go to the Post Office and pay any duties and taxes before they can obtain the shipment.

**MAIL FORWARDING SERVICE.** A new mail forwarding service, exclusively for ARCR members, is expected to begin by July 2018. Watch for an announcement about how you can sign up for this new service in the next issue!

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by William Duckwall

## La Casona: The House at Hacienda Santa Rosa



*My first taste of La Casona came in a local Spanish class. For homework, we were to write a few sentences about each of four drawings. One of the drawings was of a weathered old building. It was unremarkable. I dutifully wrote my short paragraph, thoroughly insulting a major cultural icon of Costa Rica. Fortunately my instructor was more amused than offended by my ignorance. This is my shot at atonement.*

**O**n March 20, 1856, Costa Rican forces defeated a battalion of roughly 240 soldiers occupying La Casona. The invaders consisted of German, French, and U.S. soldiers, commanded by the Hungarian Colonel Schlessinger. This battalion was an advance force sent by William Walker to head off the Costa Rican forces. The battle lasted only 15 minutes, and marked the first significant military victory for the Republic of Costa Rica. Several strands of history led to this event.

**Costa Rica.** In 1821, Spanish colonial authority was overthrown in Mexico, and Central America found itself suddenly independent. At that time Costa Rica

governance was concentrated at the town level; the four power centers were Cartago, Heredia, San José, and Alajuela. Cartago and Heredia favored annexation into the Mexican empire; San José and Alajuela were opposed, favoring instead an independent republic. The dispute was settled by a two-week civil war, culminating in the battle of Ochomogo in 1823. Cartago was defeated, and the capital was moved to San José.

From 1823 to 1848, Costa Rica participated in the effort to establish a Central American federal republic, sending funds and representatives to the distant congress in El Salvador. In 1835 local rivalries broke out in a second civil

war. This time San José defeated the alliance of the other three cities and consolidated its position once and for all as the center of power. By that time, coffee had transformed the economy and, in 1838, Braulio Carrillo Colina was elected to his second four-year term as president. He strengthened central government and privatized formerly communal lands, favoring the wealthy coffee growers. In 1841 he declared himself to be president for life.

The brief civil wars fought in Costa Rica were minor skirmishes compared to the rest of Central America. The violence spilled over in April 1842, when General Francisco Morazán, whose rebel army in Guatemala had been defeated and driven out, disembarked in Costa Rica. Braulio Carrillo was forced into exile in El Salvador, where he was killed in 1845, and Morazán was designated provisional Head of State and tried to use Costa Rica as a staging ground for unifying Central America. In September, the populace of San José rose in open revolt and overthrew him. Morazán was executed by firing squad in the southwest corner of what is now the Central Park of San José.

By 1848, the hope for a Central American Federation had evaporated and Costa Rica became the independent Republic of Costa Rica. A year later, Juan Rafael Mora Porras became the second president, a position he held for ten years, through most of 1859. It was Juan Mora who became alarmed by forces assembled in Nicaragua by William Walker.

**William Walker.** William Walker was a product of his era. He was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1824. He graduated from college there and then studied medicine in Pennsylvania, with further studies abroad in Europe. By age 25, he had practiced medicine (Philadelphia, Nashville), studied law (New Orleans), and finally turned to journalism. He moved to San Francisco, where he was an editor for the *San Francisco Herald*. The man was assertive, if not pugnacious; he was fined for contempt of court and was later wounded in a duel. Walker fell in love with a young woman from New Orleans. They

were engaged, and traveled back to her home, where she succumbed to yellow fever and perished. After that tragedy he seemed to feel that his destiny held some greater (riskier) plan.

Walker went to Sonora, Mexico, where he joined with Gaston de Boulbon, a French adventurer, who intended to attain independence for Sonora, following the example of Texas. This was short-lived; Boulbon surrendered to the Mexican army. Somewhere in this (mis)adventure, William Walker became Colonel Walker.

Walker still wanted to “liberate” Sonora, and found financial backing from Californians hostile to Mexico,

and Southerners who saw the possibility of adding Sonora to the U.S. as another slave state, a cause that Walker fervently supported. Offering land and \$4 per day to enlistees, he put together a force of 45 men and arrived by boat at Cape San Lucas, Baja California, in October 1853. They captured the town of La Paz and held an election which, unsurprisingly, elected William Walker president. Two months later they annexed the state of Sonora (only on paper; they had not actually set foot there) and declared themselves to be the new Republic of Sonora. Reinforcements arrived from San Francisco, but many of them deserted Walker as they marched, intending to occupy Sonora. By the time they crossed the Colorado River, disease, desertion, and

hostile forces (both Indian and Mexican) had reduced Walker's group to fewer than 50 men. He was forced to retreat and headed to the California border, which he crossed with his remaining men, now numbering 34. In California, he surrendered to the U.S. army in May 1854.

He was paroled, on the condition that he appear before the court in San Francisco; that court acquitted Walker of the charge of breaking the neutrality laws and he returned to editing — this time for the *San Francisco Commercial*, which was owned by one Byron Cole.

**Meanwhile, in Nicaragua.** A disputed election had led to a lengthy civil war between the two candidates — Castellón vs. Chamorro. An American, Byron Cole,







came to Castellon with a proposal to supply 300 colonists subject to military duty (thus skirting the neutrality laws of the U.S.). The stories of the adventures of William Walker, the editor of Cole's newspaper, moved Cole to make this proposal, with Walker in mind. Castellon jumped at the opportunity. Authorities in San Francisco approved the formal agreement — although everyone knew full well what Walker's intentions likely were.

Walker set sail in May 1855 with 56 men. By June he had become a Colonel in Nicaragua, in command of his troops, known as the "American Phalanx," now grown to 165 men by the addition of local forces. By November Walker had taken possession of the city of Granada. Recruiters back in the U.S., mostly in California and the South, supplied a steady stream of adventurers to bolster Walker's forces. Walker was effectively in command of the army of Nicaragua, and largely in control of the government. This raised the ire of nearly everyone, including notably Juan Rafael Mora, the President of Costa Rica, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, who had enjoyed control of the trans-isthmus route in southern Nicaragua.

**Battle of Hacienda Santa Rosa.** On February 27, 1856, Juan Mora declared

war on Nicaragua (i.e. William Walker), and called on Costa Ricans to take up arms. On March 4, the President and his brother, General José Joaquín Mora Porras, headed north with 9,000 troops (or fewer — accounts differ). They were joined in Liberia on March 12 by a battalion organized by General José Cañas. When Walker heard of the troop movements, he dispatched 240 men under Colonel Schlessinger to head them off. Schlessinger and his men arrived at La Casona de la Hacienda Santa Rosa on March 19, 1856.





On March 20, the larger force of Costa Ricans arrived and surrounded the Casona. Fighting broke out at four in the afternoon. Costa Rican Captain José María Gutiérrez had orders to keep his men on the hill behind the house to cut off any escape, but he saw the vicious battle being fought below and brought his men down to assist. He lost his life in the fighting and the main body of Schlessinger's forces escaped (with Schlessinger leading the pack). The fighting was over in fifteen minutes; the house was left largely intact.

The Costa Rican forces went on into Nicaragua where they eventually met Walker's army in the city of Rivas on April 11. This is the famous battle where the drummer, Juan Santamaría, set fire to the thatched roof of the building where Walker's forces were concentrated. Santamaría was killed but Walker's men scattered, eventually retreating to Granada. Juan Santamaría is celebrated as a Costa Rican national hero with a museum in Alajuela, statues in that city and in San José; and the main airport of Costa Rica bears his name.

It was a Pyrrhic victory for Costa Rica. The soldiers returned home, bringing with them cholera from the death and destruction in Rivas. The ensuing epidemic wiped out roughly 10 percent of the population. Eventually (December, 1856), Walker was surrounded in Granada by soldiers from Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. His troops were forced to retreat, but spent two weeks leveling the city as they departed, leaving the inscription "Aquí Fue Granada" (Here Was Granada). No one in Nicaragua has forgotten this act. In May 1857, Walker surrendered to the U.S. Navy and was brought back to the U.S. where he was (inexplicably) greeted as a hero.

Later he made one more attempt at greatness in Central America, landing in Honduras. He fell into the custody of the British Navy, who handed him over to Honduran authorities. He was promptly executed by firing squad in September 1860.

### Visiting La Casona de la Hacienda Santa Rosa Today.

The old farmhouse stands in Parque Nacional Santa Rosa. The foundation, stone stairways,

and stone corrals are original. In 1895 the house was largely demolished and rebuilt. In 2001 poachers burned part of the building in retaliation against the park rangers, after which a national campaign quickly raised roughly \$500,000 in donations, and La Casona was rebuilt. The house is now open daily, with exhibits detailing the history of the area — not only the battle in 1856 — but also the history of the hacienda and its residents, especially the *sabaneros*, the cowboys who drove cattle from Guanacaste to market near Alajuela.

The park is quite large; it encompasses and protects the largest remaining swath of tropical dry forest in the world and is, therefore, of great interest to biologists and birders. I visited in mid-March with my wife Janet, and we can attest to the dry aspect. It happened to be very windy when we were there, which I understand is unusual. The wind made the 90° weather feel much cooler, even comfortable.

Access is easy — La Casona is about 33 kilometers north of Liberia on Highway 1, and then eight kilometers west on route 913. The turn to the west is well marked as the entrance to Parque Nacional Santa Rosa. The road is mostly gravel, but very good gravel, and takes you immediately into the otherworldly dry forest.

Touring the grounds of La Casona can take anywhere from a half-hour to a few hours, depending on your level of interest (and diligence in reading the posters detailing the life and history of the hacienda). Behind the house is



a hill, with memorials to the Costa Ricans who lost their lives in the battles here. The top of the hill also happens to offer an outstanding view of the volcanoes to the east.

There is an excellent nature trail which starts in the parking lot of the Casona. It is named Sendero Indio Desnudo — the Naked Indian Path. This name stems from the gumbo-limbo trees found there, locally known as indio desnudo. In somewhat more politically correct parlance, the trees are known elsewhere as tourist trees, so-called for their peeling bark, resembling a sunburned tourist. Whichever name you like, the smooth bark left under the flaking reddish outer bark is bright green, which is characteristic of neither Indians nor of tourists (from this planet, anyway). The green would seem to allow photosynthesis, even when the trees shed their leaves during the dry season. The peeling bark is a widespread strategy for shedding epiphytes (bromeliads, etc.), though that seems to be less of an issue in the dry forest. The trail starts off paved, and halfway through you can optionally veer off on an unpaved branch which leads back to the Casona; the paved branch eventually ends on the entrance road. Along the unpaved trail are petroglyphs, as well as a bat cave where a seasonal stream flows under the trail.

There is a spacious campground, with some spectacular trees; indeed the trees in this dry forest area are worth a look from artists and photographers, as well as biologists. There is also a cafeteria. It caters to the resident staff, and it is possible to have meals there, with a reservation, but as a walk-in tourist you are limited to drinks and ice cream.

There is also a gravel road that normally one could take all the way to the beach. It has that particular Central America Zen — in the wet season it is impassable, and in the dry season it is passable, but it will destroy your car. As it turns out, hurricane Nate totally demolished the road and, until the landslides are cleared, the road is impassible, period. This is unfortunate as the beach is said to be pristine and a primo surfing destination, as documented by the crew of the surf movie, “Endless Summer II,” who crash-landed their charter plane there. That remains an access option, though one can also get to those beaches (Playa Naranjo, Peña Bruja, Ollie’s Beach) by boat from beaches to the south (try Playa del Coco).

The dry season is December through April. Rainfall in a wet season month averages about eight inches, which mostly comes as afternoon showers. By late March, the daily high temperature often exceeds 100°. The park is open for day



use from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The historical museum — i.e. the Casona itself — closes for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The park adjoins the Guanacaste National Park east of Highway 1, thus protecting an area from ocean to rain forest at the continental divide, providing living space for wide-ranging animals, like jaguars.

This park may well be one of the least-visited of the national parks in Costa Rica. I’m not sure I would recommend it for a lengthy stay to anyone but a dedicated desert camper, but it is an easy day trip if you are in Guanacaste; it is less than an hour away from Liberia. With its ties to the rich history of Costa Rica (everyone who wants to invade passes through), stunning, unique trees, and, by chartered boat, outstanding surfing and SCUBA diving; it is a great destination.

*William is a retired engineer who lives in Guapiles with his wife Janet. He has varied interests — Costa Rican birds and orchids — and writes a little now and then. He can be reached at: [bduckwall@mac.com](mailto:bduckwall@mac.com)*



by Shelagh Duncan

## Simple Ways to Make Your Home a Happier Place

I know, we tell ourselves “We live in paradise — what’s there not to be happy about?” But sometimes we think our life in this tropical paradise isn’t as idyllic as we anticipated, which in turn, makes us feel guilty. And that just makes things worse. Perhaps we can turn this around and make our home a happier place to be, so we, in turn, will feel happier. Can this be possible? If you believe that our homes are an extension of who we are, we have somewhere to start.

What we do within the space we call home — both inside and out — shapes our mood, affects our productivity, and influences our outlook on life. The colors we paint our walls, the textures of the fabric we use, and even the artwork on our walls, can all influence how we feel. But without redoing our interior design and buying all new furniture, what other options are there?

Scientific studies have shown that we can have an impact on our happiness by adjusting the tiny little habits and routines that constitute our daily lives. When we do, we are, in fact, somewhat in control of our outlook on life — without having to move or redecorate! It’s amazing how a few tweaks to our daily habits can become a catalyst for meaningful, positive change. Here are a few simple and inexpensive things you can do every day to feel happier at home.

1. Make your bed. “When I was researching my book on happiness,” says author Gretchen Rubin “this was the number one most impactful change

that people brought up over and over.” Turns out, people are happier when everyday tasks in their lives are completed. So, given it only takes 30 seconds, making the bed could lend a small sense of accomplishment at the very start of every day.

2. Bring every room back to “ready.” This great trick is found in Marilyn Paul’s clever book, “It’s Hard to Make a Difference When You Can’t Find Your Keys.” It’s a fact, clutter causes stress; order creates a haven from it. This mood-boosting routine is simple; take about three minutes to bring each room back to “ready” before you leave. (Unless you have a toddler, or a partner who likes to simulate a scene from one of the disaster movies, three minutes should be enough.) Make sure your mirrors are clean and shiny too. This small detail can have a big impact — mirrors reflect the world as you see it.
3. Include sentimental items into the decor around your home. One reason that experiences (and memories of those experiences) make us happier than material things is due to the entire cycle of enjoyment that experiences provide: planning the experience, looking forward to it, enjoying it, and then remembering it. Making your home a gallery of sentimental items may be a bit too much, but have at least one meaningful item in each room.
4. Accessories. Using home accessories that work with the color or feel of a room will make that room look more complete and finished. Finding a new throw pillow in just the right color or pattern will give you instant pleasure, and continue to do so each time you see it. Keep an eye open for opportunities to give your home — and you — a little boost.
5. Have comfortable furniture. If you cannot enjoy relaxing at home because your chair, sofa, or mattress is uncomfortable, then maybe it is your body, not your mind, telling you it is unhappy. Treat yourself to one comfy chair, at least, especially if you like to read or watch TV. As we spend about a third of our lives in bed, the mattress rates pretty high too.





Keep an eye out for sales or promotions, and grab the opportunity to upgrade yours and get a good night's sleep. Your back will thank you!

6. Smell your way to a better mood. Our sense of smell is always on duty. Each breath floods our smell receptors with information about the environment we live in. There are smells of Pleasure, Awareness, Danger, Sexual Attraction; we are capable of recognizing approximately 10,000 different odors, and each one has the power to influence our moods and behavior. How does the aroma of fresh coffee or baked bread make you feel? Yeah, me too! Use this important sense as therapy by burning incense in your home to add another layer of well-being. The smells of vanilla and lavender have been directly linked with the production of endorphins in our brain, as has chocolate. Change up the aromas — try two or three of your favorites and each day you can enjoy selecting which one to use.
7. Spend a few minutes each day connecting with something greater than yourself. Whatever your spiritual beliefs or non-beliefs may be, studies show

that connecting to a higher power is correlated with happiness. Just stepping back to realize that we are part of an enormous universe can put some perspective on your annoyance with the neighbors' ever-barking dogs, or the painfully slow (or non-existent!) Internet connection. Before bed, spend a few minutes taking a walk outside to gaze up at the stars and take a few deep breaths — feel the stillness and wonder at the enormity of what you see. If spirituality is really not your thing, create a home spa: light some candles, soak in a hot bath, delve into a good book — are you feeling better yet?

There are no magic potions for happiness; we have to take some responsibility for taking care of that ourselves. I hope these simple ideas will help.

Until next time...

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by Allen Dickinson

## Why Ticos Don't Drive Convertibles

*If you are looking for an upbeat story, skip this one. But, if you want some important health information, this is the place.*

Why aren't there more convertibles in Costa Rica? It would seem like Costa Rica is the ideal climate for owning a convertible; lots of sun and mild temperatures year-round — perfect for cruising with the top down. However, I've noticed there are very few topless cars here, and wondered why. I recently found out.

A couple of weeks before writing this, I was diagnosed with a melanoma (a skin cancer) on my back, near my shoulder. This came as a surprise, not just because I can't see the spot and never noticed it, but because I have always had "tough skin." Yes, I am fair-skinned, red-haired and blue-eyed, but throughout my life I almost never suffered from sunburn like one would expect for someone like me — I just tanned. In fact, I could often outlast my darker-complexioned friends before turning red, all without the benefit of sunscreen or other lotions.

I had been informed by my wife that the nearly one-inch wide spot was something that needed to be looked at, so I sought out a dermatologist. I had great luck; through a recommendation from a friend, I found Dra. Torres Morales at the Lindora Medical Center, which is affiliated with Hospital Metropolitano in San José, located in Pozos, a "suburb" of Santa Ana, where I live.

Dra. Torres, a very kind and compassionate lady dermatologist, who is fluent in English, examined the spot and told me I needed to have the growth excised — immediately — and we set a date. She then proceeded to look over the rest of my body and found about 30 other precancerous spots (dry/crusty, hard, bumps that didn't bleed when scratched.) Those she quickly froze with an almost painless spray treatment of liquid nitrogen. When she was finished she assured me that those were nothing to worry about, at least not today, but they should be watched.

Six days later she operated and removed the offending spot from my back. The procedure only took a few small injections of a local anesthetic, which I barely felt, and I napped through the short process. (What else could I

do? I was face down on a well-padded table without my glasses.) Twenty minutes later, after a few stitches and a bandage, she was finished. Dra. Torres happily informed me that she had "gotten it all" and I was free to leave. But, before I left, I took a few minutes to talk to this nice lady and ask her a few questions about who she was and why I had ended up on her table.

Dr. Torres is a 39-year-old Tica, married with one child. She got her medical degree from UCI Med here in Costa Rica, and did her dermatology training in Barcelona, Spain. She's been practicing for nine years.

I asked why the melanoma on my back, and the other precancerous spots on my legs, arms, and back, had begun to manifest themselves only about six-months ago.

"It's the subtropical sun here in Costa Rica" she said. "People don't realize how strong the sun is."

"But I spend most of my time under cover, indoors, or in a car, and I'm usually fully clothed. Many of the places you found haven't seen direct sunlight in more than twenty years! How could that be?"

"Yes, but the sun's rays are much more intense here" Dra. Torres replied. "People forget that the sunlight comes in through the windows in our homes and cars, and it penetrates our clothes. Ticos are susceptible to the sun too, but it's more pronounced for North Americans and Europeans because they have spent much of their lives where the sun isn't as strong. Some, in fact, worship the warmth and spend much more time outside enjoying it. Skin cancer is often the price they pay."

"Well then, what should we expats do to minimize the risks?" I asked.

"Everyone should use a sunscreen, SPF 50+ is good, and limit their direct exposure to the sun as much as possible. Window tinting on car windows is good, and it does more to protect the skin than it does for security. There is also sun-resistant clothing; long sleeve shirts that are

designed to limit the effects of the sun, which people can buy for outdoor use. But, most importantly, when they discover those strange, new, hard little bumps, they should see a dermatologist. In fact, as you age, seeing one regularly isn't a bad idea. We know what to look for."

I asked a few more questions and was on my way. I am now cancer-free, confirmed by a later pathology report, and I am undergoing follow-up examinations.

After consideration, I have decided to not alter my lifestyle by moving into a cave, wearing an Abaya, and only driving after sunset; that's not why I moved here. But I AM going to see my dermatologist regularly. And I'm not buying a convertible, something Ticos already knew.



## RAY HAGIST

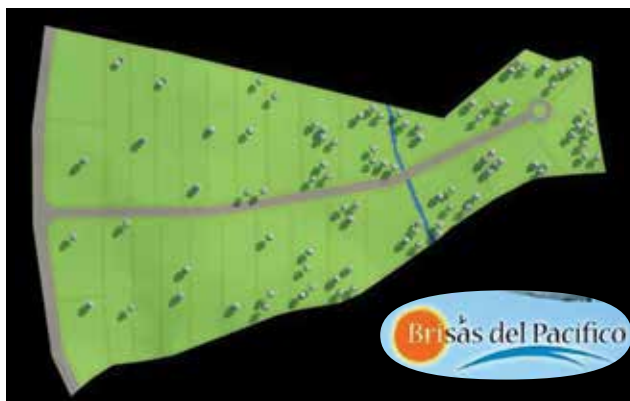


ARCR regrets to inform members of the passing of Ray Hagist on April 11, 2018. Mr. Hagist, who was originally from Wisconsin, moved to Costa Rica over 20 years ago. He was a member of the Wine Club of Costa Rica and, since 2002, the owner of All Costa Rica Travel. A long time member of ARCR, he had served on the Board of Directors since 2016. He is survived by his wife, Patricia Cedeno, and two children. He will be missed.

**Rest in Peace.**



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## ARCR'S **COSTA RICA** SEMINAR

Join us on the **last Thursday and Friday of any month** (except December) in San José to find out more about what it is like to live in Costa Rica and how to go about getting things done here. We invite professionals from each field to share their knowledge and expertise with you. Hear what they have to say and ask them the questions for which you have not found answers.

### **SUBJECTS COVERED IN THE SEMINARS**

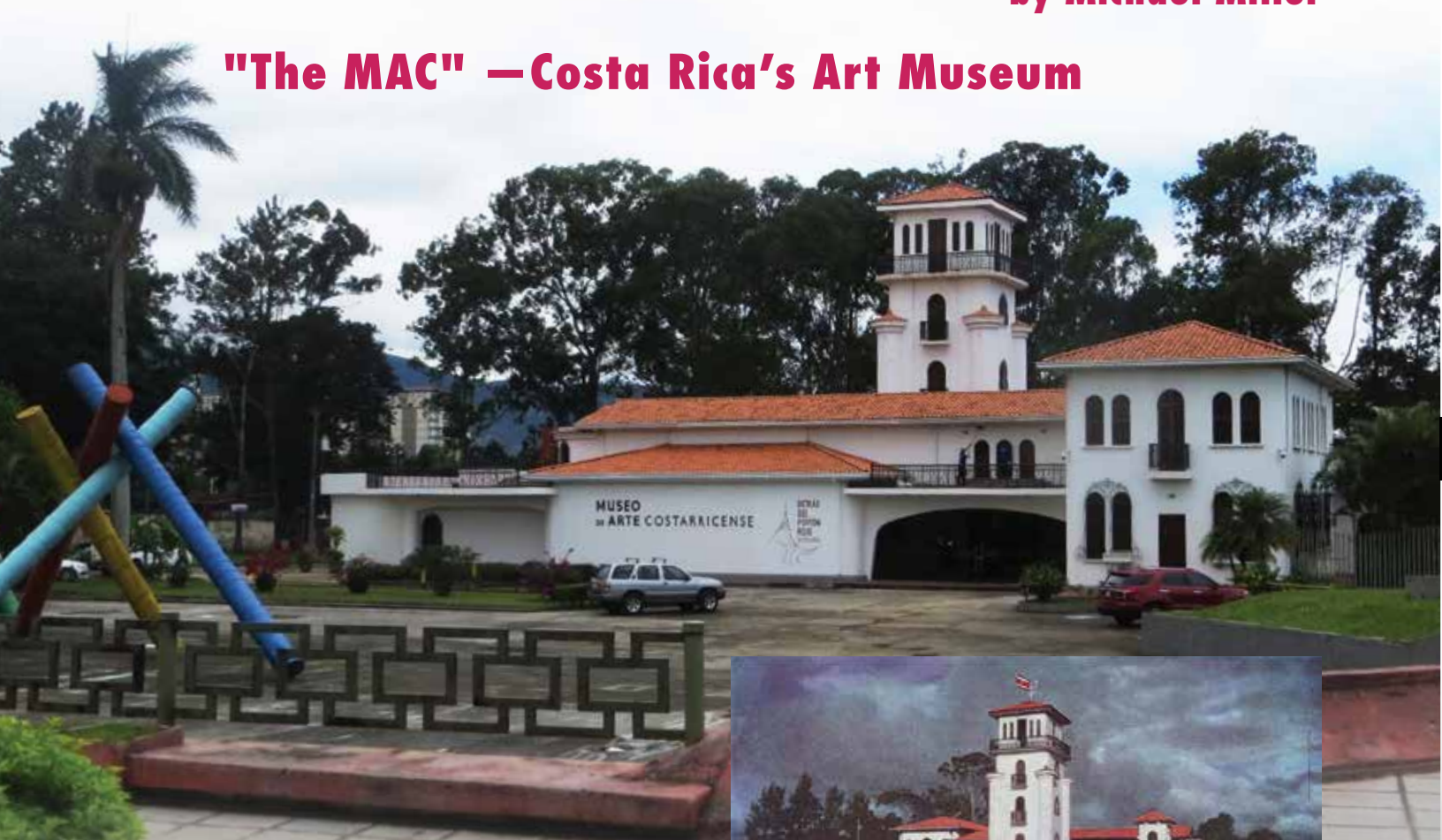
Costa Rican Laws and Regulations - Health System in Costa Rica - Buying, Selling or Renting Real Estate - Title Guarantee - Costa Rican Culture - Technology, Communications and the Internet in Costa Rica - Banking in Costa Rica - Moving and Customs - Insurance in Costa Rica - Living in Costa Rica

For more information on seminar dates and to reserve your seat, visit the ARCR web site at [www.arcr.net](http://www.arcr.net), or send an email to [info@arcr.net](mailto:info@arcr.net), or contact the office by telephone at **2220-0055** or **4052-4052**.

## 16 THE VIEW FROM DOWNTOWN

by Michael Miller

### "The MAC" — Costa Rica's Art Museum



One of the reasons I enjoy living in downtown San José is that it is a city filled with art. Much of the art is in places where you would expect to see it: at the National Theatre, the Metropolitan Cathedral, and in the city's parks. In addition, there are galleries and art shops, such as Galería Namu, which specialize in art from Costa Rica's indigenous tribes.

Then there is Costa Rica's national art museum. In Spanish, it is Museo de Arte Costarricense, commonly called "The MAC." It is actually a bit outside of the central downtown area of San José, at the eastern end of Sabana Park, and is well worth a visit.

The first "object of art" that you will discover when you visit The MAC can be seen as you approach the museum; it is the art-deco style building itself, which is a piece of history. Sabana Park was the site of Costa Rica's first international airport. The building that is now the art museum was the main passenger terminal for the airport during the 1940s and 1950s.



This colorized photo from the 1940s shows a passenger plane arriving at the stylish terminal building at La Sabana Airport.

If you go online, you can find some fascinating old photographs, and even some videos, from the days when this beautiful building was used as the airport's terminal. As you look at these old photos it is fun to imagine what life was like in the pre-jet era when visitors from all over the Americas arrived at San José's La Sabana Airport. You will see men in business suits, women in dresses and hats, and well-behaved children emerging from the propeller-driven airplanes. As they deplaned, the visitors' first impression of this beautiful country was the stylish terminal building.





Examples of paintings from "The Muralist Movement" are part of the works that can be seen in the Costa Rican Museum of Art.

In 1963, when President John F. Kennedy visited Costa Rica, Air Force One landed at the new airport in Alajuela. From there the president took a helicopter to the former terminal at the La Sabana Airport where he spoke to reporters and a crowd of over 100,000 cheering Ticos.

Today, the area where the airplanes used to arrive is a garden of statues featuring works from a variety of Costa Rican sculptors. The most famous of those is Jorge Jiménez Deredia, who created the popular statue of Pope John Paul II that now stands at the Metropolitan Cathedral in downtown San José.

Once inside the Costa Rican Museum of Art you will see a rich variety of artistic works, including: oil paintings, water colors, pencil sketches, mobiles, architectural plans, and much more. The museum has a collection of over 7,000 pieces, most of which are works from Costa Rican artists from the 19th and 20th centuries. It is the largest collection of Costa Rican art in the world. There are also works from other artists, most of them from other Latin American countries.

It is very unlikely that you will ever see the entire collection. That's

because the museum has the space to display only a couple of hundred works of art at one time. The displays are usually changed every three or four months, which means that you can visit several times a year and always discover something new.



The painting called "Domingueando" by Tomas Povedano, is one of the most popular images in Costa Rica. It depicts a family dressed in their Sunday clothes, traveling by oxcart. Originally from Spain, Don Povedano came to Costa Rica late in his life and taught popular art classes at the University of Costa Rica.

There are some works that are almost always on display. These include some large pieces from what is called "The Muralist Movement." These paintings are not really murals (they are oil paintings on canvas), but they depict scenes that have some political or cultural significance.

One of the most famous paintings, Domingueando, is from an earlier era. It was painted by Tomás Povedano, a Spanish artist who lived, painted, and taught in Costa Rica late in his life. The painting depicts a rural family dressed in their Sunday best, traveling down a country road by oxcart. We don't know where they are going, perhaps to church or to visit friends, but for many Costa Ricans this popular scene evokes nostalgia for a simpler and easier time.

No matter what wonderful pieces of art are on display, there is one that will always be at the museum, because it is part of the building. It



The Golden Room (El Salon Dorado) was once the Diplomatic Lounge at the passenger terminal at La Sabana Airport. The room has an amazing bas-relief that covers all four walls and depicts the history of Costa Rica.

is The Golden Room (El Salon Dorado) and it gets the most reaction from visitors. It is easy to see why because it is simply stunning.

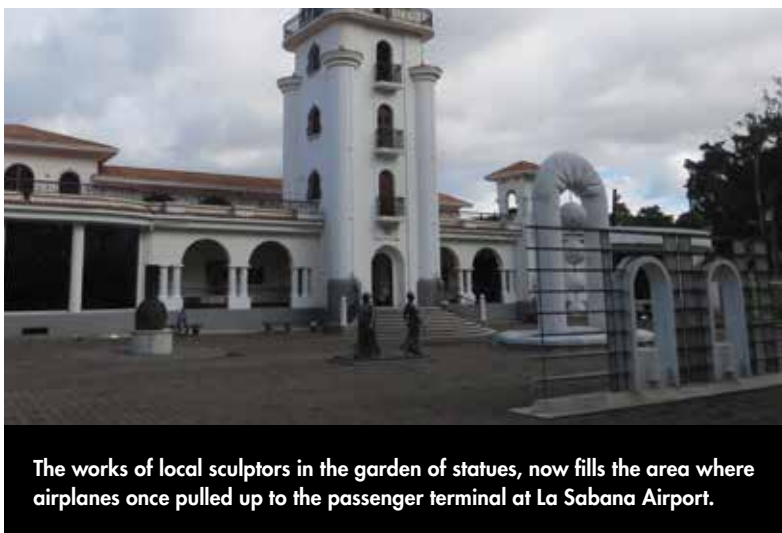
The Golden Room is on the second floor of the museum in what was originally the Diplomat Lounge, when the building was the passenger terminal for the international airport. The room contains a massive bas-relief that covers the entirety of all four walls, from the three-foot-high wainscoting to the ceiling. This beautiful work of

art, which depicts the history of Costa Rica in images, is best viewed by walking clockwise around the room. It begins with scenes of pre-Columbian Indian villages and, further on, shows the discovery of Costa Rica by Columbus, and early colonial scenes. Then, as you move around the room, it depicts Costa Rican history to the early 20th century. (The work was created in 1939-40.)

The bas-relief is the work of sculptor Louis Féron, a native of France who lived in Costa Rica for about ten years. He carved the images in stucco which he then coated with a layer of bronze. It is truly remarkable.

I have often said that San José is a city full of surprises. The management of the Costa Rican Museum of Art has been doing its best to add to those surprises. In recent years, recognizing that not everyone has time to get to the museum, they have tried to go to the people by setting up temporary displays of some of its works outside the museum.

A couple of years ago they set up a display of giant women's shoes in the Plaza de la Cultura in downtown San José. And when I say "giant shoes," I am not joking. These huge, plastic, high-heel shoes stood over six-feet-tall. Each



The works of local sculptors in the garden of statues, now fills the area where airplanes once pulled up to the passenger terminal at La Sabana Airport.



was decorated by a local artist and featured the logo of a corporate sponsor. The whimsical display was a huge hit, especially with women and girls of all ages, who posed for pictures in front of the shoes they liked.



An art exhibit of Giant Shoes at the Plaza de la Cultura in downtown San José was extremely popular, especially with women and girls of all ages who posed in front of the shoes that they liked



“The MAC,” is one of the great treasures of San José. To visit it in Sabana Park, just west of downtown, go to the nearest cross streets, Calle 42 and Paseo Colon. You can see it from there. It is open from Tuesday through Sunday from 9 AM to 4 PM, closed on Mondays. And here is the best part; it is absolutely free! Bring your kids and your grandkids. This has to be one of the best deals in Costa Rica.

*Michael Miller is the author of the first and only guide book that focuses on Downtown San José, titled: The Real San José. Paperback copies of The Real San José are available at the office of the Association of Residents of Costa Rica and at Galería Namu. An electronic version is available at Amazon/Kindle. You can see other stories that Michael has written about downtown San José by visiting his website: [TheRealSanJose.com](http://TheRealSanJose.com)*

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Address: Vía 104, Calle 98, San José

Hours: 8AM–4:30PM

American Citizens Services: (506) 2519-2590

Fraud prevention Department: (506) 2519-2117

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

## United Kingdom Embassy

Phone: (506) 2258 2025

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

Hours: 8AM–12PM, 12:30–4PM

Website: [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica)

Email: [costarica.consulate@fco.gov.uk](mailto: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: 7:30AM–4PM

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

Email: [sos@international.gc.ca](mailto:sos@international.gc.ca)

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

## French Embassy

Phone: (506) 2234 4167

Address: A022, San José, Curridabat

Hours: 7:30AM–12:00PM

Email: [ambafrer@gmail.com](mailto:ambafrer@gmail.com)

## Spanish Embassy

Phone: (506) 2222 1933

Address: Calle 32, San José

Hours: 8 AM–4AM

Email: [emb.sanjose@maec.es](mailto:emb.sanjose@maec.es)

Emergency assistance: (506) 6050 9853

## Venezuelan Embassy

Phone: (506) 2220-3704, 2220-3708

Address: San Pedro, Los Yoses, 50 metros antes de finalizar la avenida 10.

Email: [embv.crsjo@mppre.gob.ve](mailto:embv.crsjo@mppre.gob.ve) and [embavenezuelacostarica@gmail.com](mailto:embavenezuelacostarica@gmail.com)

Hours: 9:00AM–12:30PM, 1:30–3:30PM.

## 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

Want a pocket version of some of the above conversion formulas?

Ask for one at the ARCR Reception Desk. It's FREE!

**ARCR: (506) 2220-0055**



## Places of interest

1. Parque Vargas
2. Parque Biosaludable
3. Parque Asís Esna
4. Parque Cariari de Limón
5. Muelle
6. Anfiteatro de Limón
7. Biblioteca Pública de Limón
8. Mercado Municipal / BAC SJ / Banco Nacional
9. Estación de Trenes
10. Playa Bonita
11. Estadio Big Boy (Baseball)
12. Estadio Nuevo de Limón
13. Plaza de fútbol de Corales
14. Estadio Juan Gobán
15. Colegio Deportivo de Limón
16. Escuela Proyecto Pacuare

17. Escuela Líder Los Corales
18. Escuela Barrio Limoncito
19. Escuela Santa Eduvigis
20. Escuela Olympia Trejos
21. Centro Educ. San Marcos
22. Centro Educ. Bilingüe del Caribe
23. Colegio Técnico Profesional
24. Caribbean High School
25. Municipalidad de Limón
26. Cementerio Municipal
27. Cementerio de Limón
28. Correos de Costa Rica
29. Tribunales de Justicia
30. Universidad de Costa Rica
31. TEC Limón
32. ULICORI
33. Univ. Castro Carazo

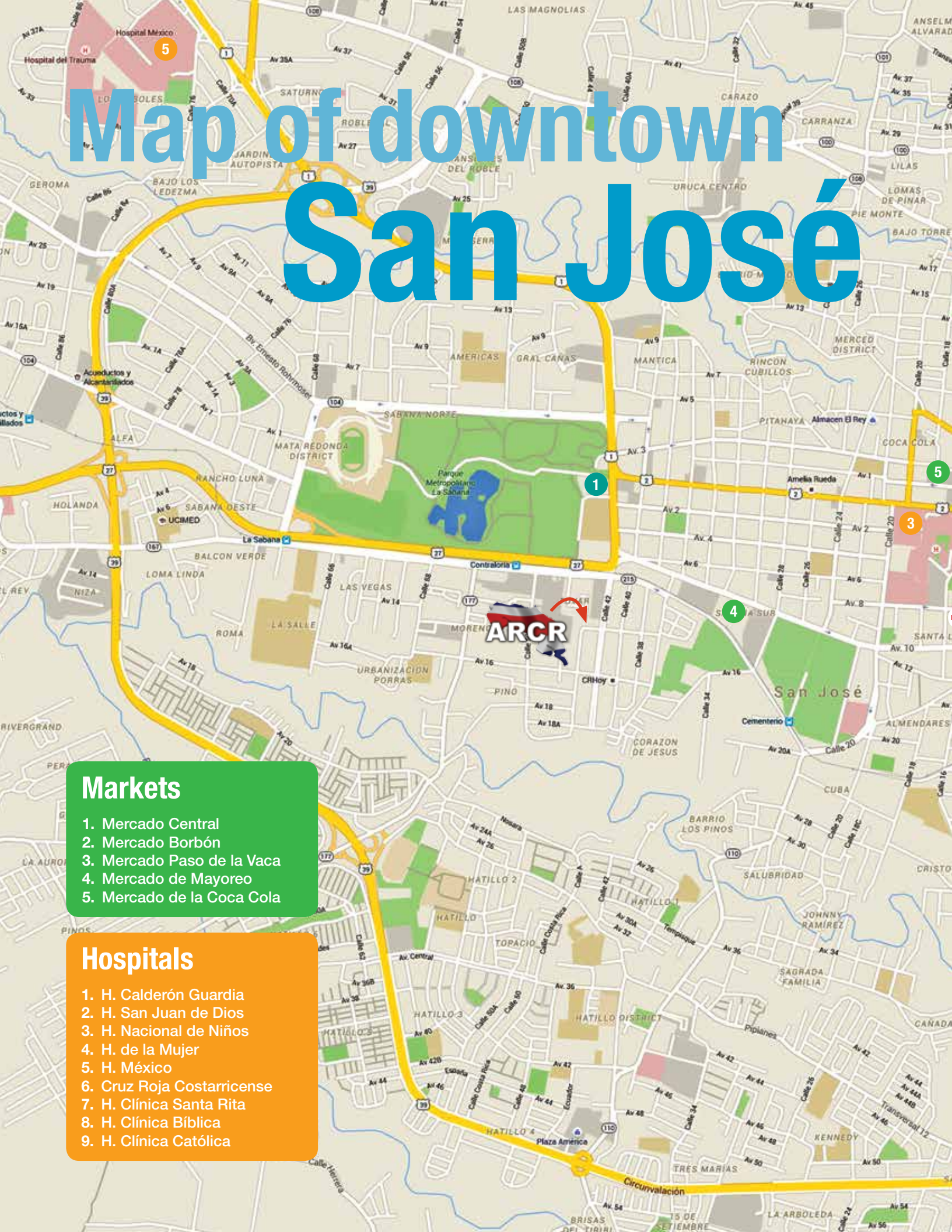
34. Universidad Santa Lucía
35. INA
36. IMAS
37. OIJ
38. Migración y Extranjería
39. INS
40. Administración Tributaria
41. ICE
42. Sucursal CCSS
43. Hospital Dr. Tony Facio
44. Banco de Alimentos de CR
45. Catedral Sagrado Corazón de Jesús
46. Iglesia de Pueblo Nuevo
47. Iglesia de Pacuare
48. Terminal de autobuses
49. BCR (ATM)
50. Gasolinera

# Map of downtown Limón





# Map of downtown San José



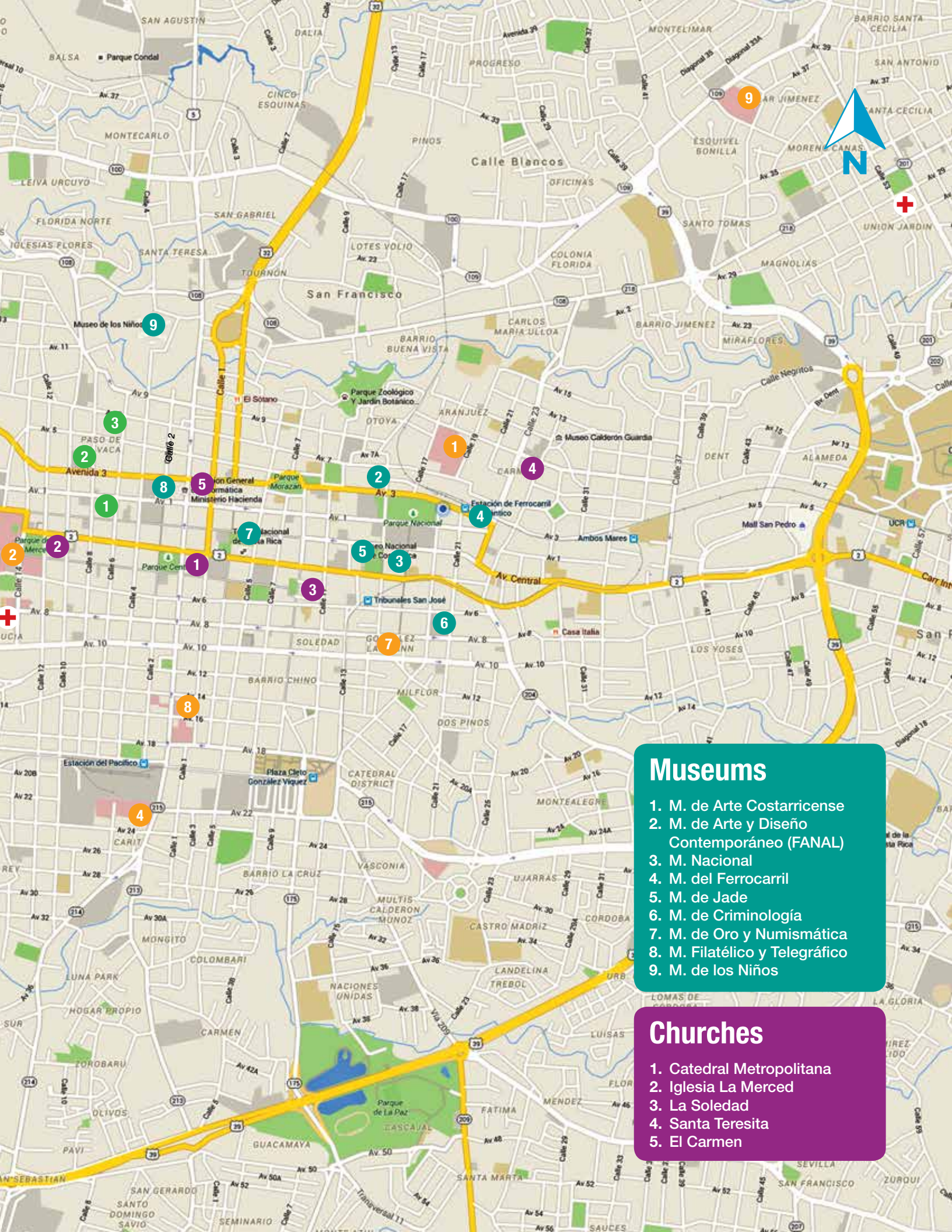
## Markets

1. Mercado Central
2. Mercado Borbón
3. Mercado Paso de la Vaca
4. Mercado de Mayoreo
5. Mercado de la Coca Cola

## Hospitals

1. H. Calderón Guardia
2. H. San Juan de Dios
3. H. Nacional de Niños
4. H. de la Mujer
5. H. México
6. Cruz Roja Costarricense
7. H. Clínica Santa Rita
8. H. Clínica Bíblica
9. H. Clínica Católica





## Museums

1. M. de Arte Costarricense
2. M. de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo (FANAL)
3. M. Nacional
4. M. del Ferrocarril
5. M. de Jade
6. M. de Criminología
7. M. de Oro y Numismática
8. M. Filatélico y Telegráfico
9. M. de los Niños

## Churches

1. Catedral Metropolitana
2. Iglesia La Merced
3. La Soledad
4. Santa Teresita
5. El Carmen





### Places of interest

1. Paseo de los Turistas
2. Muelle de Cruceros
3. Muelle Turístico ICT
4. Parque Marino del Pacífico
5. Antiteatro Cultural
6. Antigua Capitanía del Puerto
7. Faro de Puntarenas
8. Ferrys Naviera Tambor
9. Parque Central
10. Parque Lobo
11. Parque Mora y Cañas
12. Parque El Cocal
13. Parque Victoria
14. Casa de la Cultura
15. Mercado Municipal
16. Estadio "Lito" Pérez

17. Tourist Info Center
18. Escuela El Carmen
19. Escuela Nuestra Señora de  
Sión
20. Colegio Científico de CR
21. UCR
22. UNED
23. Univ. Hispanoamericana
24. Univ. Castro Carazo
25. Univ. Técnica Nacional
26. INA
27. Clínica San Rafael
28. Estación de Bomberos
29. Sucursal CCSS
30. Municipalidad
31. Correos de Costa Rica
32. INS
33. Juzgado de Tránsito
34. TSE
35. ICE
36. Estación de Biología Marina
37. Migración y Extranjería
38. Shopping Mall
39. Catedral de Puntarenas
40. Terminal de buses San José
41. Banco Popular
42. Banco de Costa Rica
43. Banco Nacional
44. BAC San José
45. Gasolinera

# Map of Puntarenas





*The U.S. Embassy in San José sees quite a few lost and stolen passports requests, often during holiday travel when there is an increased incidence of petty crime. We encourage you to safeguard your passport when traveling: never leave bags unattended, even in a locked car; keep your passport locked in a safe when not in use; maintain a copy of the photo and biometric page of your most recent passport, as well as the page featuring your entry stamp into Costa Rica, for your records.*

### **What Should a U.S. Citizen Do if his/her Passport is Lost or Stolen Abroad?**

You will have to replace the passport before returning to the United States. If you wish to report the loss of your passport, you may file a notification online at [www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/lost-stolen.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/lost-stolen.html), or you may do so in person at the U.S. Embassy when you apply for a replacement.

If you do not have immediate travel needs, make an appointment to ensure we are ready and available to assist you when you arrive. You can find more information on passports and our appointment system by visiting <https://cr.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/passports/>.

The forms required for all passport services are free of charge and are available both online at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) and in hard copy at the Consular section in San José. You can print and fill out your application in advance to streamline your visit.

If you have concerns or questions before your visit, or cannot find a suitable time on our schedule to visit us, you can always reach out to our staff at the U.S. Embassy in San José via phone at +506 2519-2590 or email at [ACSSanJosé@state.gov](mailto:ACSSanJosé@state.gov). We will make every effort to assist you quickly.

### **What Do I Need to Replace my Lost or Stolen Passport?**

The following list identifies a number of documents/items you should take with you to the embassy. Even if you are unable to present all of the documents, the consular staff will do their best to assist you to replace your passport. Please provide:

- A passport photo. You can also have your 2 inch-by-2 inch passport photo taken at our premises. The cost

of a set of passport photos at the Embassy's photo booth is 1,000 colones.

- Identification (valid driver's license, expired passport etc).
- Evidence of U.S. citizenship (birth certificate, photocopy of your missing passport).
- Travel Itinerary (airline tickets) if traveling urgently.
- Police Report, if available.
- [DS-11 Application for Passport](#) and [DS-64 Statement Regarding a Lost or Stolen Passport](#).
- Execution fee, paid in cash or via major credit card, in either dollars or colones.

### **How Long is a Replacement Passport Valid?**

If you have urgent travel plans, we can issue a limited-validity, emergency passport on site to quickly allow you to return to the U.S. or continue on your trip. Make sure you notify the interviewing officer of your ongoing travel plans to ensure we issue a document with sufficient validity! After you complete your travel, and within one calendar year, you may be eligible to receive a full-validity passport in the United States or at an Embassy or Consulate abroad for no additional cost.

Complicating factors, such as multiple lost/stolen passports or borrowing money from the State Department to fund your trip home, may cause you to receive a limited passport. The interviewing officer will discuss these circumstances with you at the time of your interview if this is the case.

### **Are Fees Charged to Replace Lost/Stolen Passports Abroad?**

Passport fees are collected from applicants for replacement passports. Applicants unable to pay the fee will be asked to provide names of persons they feel would be able to assist them financially. See our information about Financial Assistance to U.S. citizens abroad and Sending Money Overseas to U.S. citizen in an emergency on [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) for more information.

A full schedule of passport fees can be found online at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). A regular passport renewal currently costs \$110, and an emergency passport costs \$145.

### **Can the U.S. Embassy Issue a Replacement Passport on a Weekend or Holiday?**

The U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica cannot issue a replacement passport on a weekend or holiday. If you have an emergency need to travel or have been the victim of a serious crime, you can contact the after-hours duty officer for advice or assistance to learn what resources are available to you.



### Bumps in the road...

Sometimes a feature of life here are the actual bumps in the road we are driving along. But we will all also encounter problems and difficulties as “Residents in Paradise.” Health issues, pensions that once seemed adequate and now are being chipped away by inflation, bereavement, and isolation.

The Consular Section of the British Embassy is here to be a point of contact for British visitors and residents with the U.K. Government, which means we are often approached to try to guide people as they confront these sorts of issues. We don't have a specific budget for this, or government funds to disburse directly, but we have had some experience in putting people in touch with organizations that can help.

One of the wonderful things about the U.K. is the extent to which people rally round to help each other, forming charities and volunteer organizations. Many people who run into difficulties have links to the military, either as veterans or as their families, and there are many ways in

which these groups can help. Among these are the Army Benevolent Fund (private soldier to sergeant-major), The Officer's Association (Lieutenant and above) and similar Royal Navy and Royal Air Force Charities. There are many others. Veterans and their families in Costa Rica have already received help in this way.

For those with no military links there are often special interest charities that can be approached. For example, Elizabeth Finn Care/Turn2Us accepts enquiries from retired professional people ranging from librarians to chefs to midwives and many, many others. No matter what a person's background, there is probably an organization dedicated to helping those in difficulty.

Sometimes the person sees their best option as returning to the U.K., and we can often help to facilitate this by putting people in touch with health providers, Social Services, and housing organisations.

So if you, or someone you know, are starting to struggle with the practicalities of life in Costa Rica, there is often help available. And, as your Consulate, although we may not always have the answer ourselves, we usually know somebody who does. It can start with an email. Our contact details are in the Useful Numbers section of this magazine!

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## Into the Light of a Dark Night

Much of my life I had assumed, incorrectly, that blackbirds were all of a type. I had a picture in my mind of a small bird, black as pitch. Totally wrong of course. As I have continued to learn more about the life upon our planet, the more I realized how little I knew all along. For the remainder of my days when I hear Paul McCartney's song "Blackbird singing in the dead of night" I will no longer have the same imagery running through my thoughts, but a much more vivid picture.

This little country is host to several different kinds of blackbirds, and they are a species I truly love due to the stark contrasts of colors that can be observed across the species. Brilliant reds or yellows marked against that dark black stand out so beautifully that it truly draws my attention whenever I witness it.

The new world has about 26 kinds of blackbirds and at least four types can be encountered in Costa Rica. They belong to the family of Icteridae, and are a mid-sized bird, usually between six and nine inches tall. Most likely many of the various species will be spotted, or heard, by their melodic whistling, in the lowland areas of the country such as Guanacaste or Palo Verde.

The more common northern species that visit include the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) with its unmistakable red shoulders, who may be found breeding in the Guanacaste areas from April through August, or even later. Within large groups you may also see the Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) mingled in with larger flocks; it is a casual winter visitor in the northwestern lowlands. Additionally, the Melodious Blackbird, the only entirely black member, is known to be an occasional visitor northwest of Puntarenas and likely other lowland areas.

My personal favorite is the spectacular Red-breasted Blackbird for its absolutely striking plumage. This



species (*Leistes militaris*) is actually found in the northernmost portion of its range here, and spreads down as far as northern Argentina. Locally known as the Tordo Pechirrojo, you may be likely to encounter this charmer in the Golfo Dulce region and maybe even the Central Valley. First seen in 1974, its area continues to slowly expand. This stark little fellow may often be seen perched on a fence post, calling out to passersby with its soft meadowlark style voice.

The next time you are visiting the lowland areas in the country, watch for a flash of red and black, or yellow and black, out there amongst the bushes, to enjoy the beauty of these little marvels... or perhaps listen carefully for soft singing in the dead of night.

by Ivo Henfling

## Made the Wrong Investment Building a House? Suck it Up!

Who said building your own home in Costa Rica is easy? It's twice as hard if you don't know the culture or don't speak the language. Even if you have had some construction experience in your home country, you will be surprised how easy it is to waste your hard earned money here.

Having been in the real estate business for over 25 years, I've seen my share of drama. I have done a few remodels, for myself and for clients over the years, and I'm fluent in Spanish, so the language was never my problem. But, finding professional, reliable, and honest people in the construction trade is just plain difficult in Costa Rica.

### It can take years to sell.

Once your dream home is built and you have lived in it a few years, you may unfortunately find that, for personal reasons, you need to sell it. So, based on your construction costs, you decide on a fair price and put it on the market ... and nothing happens. People look, but don't buy. Why is that?

There are many reasons, but the biggest mistake is asking too much money. Often, the reason for setting the price too high is because the owner paid too much to build it in the first place.

### Stop the bleeding!

Let's look at a few things that could be the reason the construction costs were higher than they should have been. Here are some guidelines that will stop most of the bleeding, before it begins:

**Soil samples:** The first thing to do, before you buy the land to build on, is spend \$500 - \$1,000 on soil samples. Then you will know if you need soil replacement or if the property is ready for a landslide. Maybe the property you've chosen is bad; are you're going to build on bad fill, or is the property on a fault line? How do you know? I can assure you neither the seller nor the real estate agent will tell you.

I've seen cases where homes have had structural damages right after the purchase, when the first heavy rains started. Installing retaining walls, which should have been built

during the initial construction, is expensive. But fixing serious structural damage costs a lot more.

**Hire an architect:** Architects do not only design homes. They can, and should, be involved in the whole construction process, from beginning to end. Often, wannabe homeowners think they can save themselves the money for an architect, and just hire a Maestro de obras — a construction foreman. This, in my opinion, is a big mistake. Maestros de obras don't usually go to school to learn construction, and generally, they have no idea of construction materials and their costs. They need the supervision of a professional. Plus, when things go wrong, they may walk away. So, hire an architect for the pre-project — the cost is about 1.5 percent of the estimated construction value.

An architect can also provide:

- Construction plan and permitting — the usual cost is 4 percent of the estimated construction value (not including municipal charges and taxes).
- They should put a plan together with the owner to choose a builder — the cost for this part is usually included in the inspection process. The cost for the inspection process by the architect — 3 percent.
- They can help you contract with a formal construction company. Then, in cooperation with you, your lawyer, and the architect, put together a construction contract.

### Other important tips:

- Do not advance any money EVER. Construction crews don't have any money; they use yours and then walk away from the job. Use escrow to advance money. (I remember a recent case of a couple who built their own home. They had to find someone to build the roof — after they had already paid the builder for that same roof.)
- Organize the construction (and payments) in stages, for better control.
- Hire a good, reliable home inspector for inspection before making any of the payments. A home inspector is also a good way to control the architect.




- Be available when needed, especially for inspections. Don't interfere with the day-to-day construction process. The costs of changes you make as you go are the ones that you will never recover when you sell the house.

You don't want to follow these recommendations? That's perfectly fine. BUT, you will NEVER recuperate the money when you sell if you paid too much when you built.

What do you do if your home is already built and nobody is buying? Suck it up! Adjust your asking price to reflect the true market value. It may mean you take a loss, but it's better than waiting seven years for a buyer!


If you would like to find out more about this and not make the same mistakes as others before you, look for the online article, "8 reasons why your property in Costa Rica has not sold in 7 years."

*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](mailto:ivo@american-european.net)*



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by Jack Donnelly

## Upe: The Origin of a Costa Rican Expression

In Costa Rica there is an unusual way of announcing oneself at a home or any type of private space, even an office. It is customary to knock and say “upe” (uu-pay). The purpose of this pronouncement is to elicit a response like someone coming to the door or perhaps saying “pase adelante,” come on in.

Many people are unaware of the origin of this expression. I have even seen language articles claiming nobody knows for certain the source or the meaning.

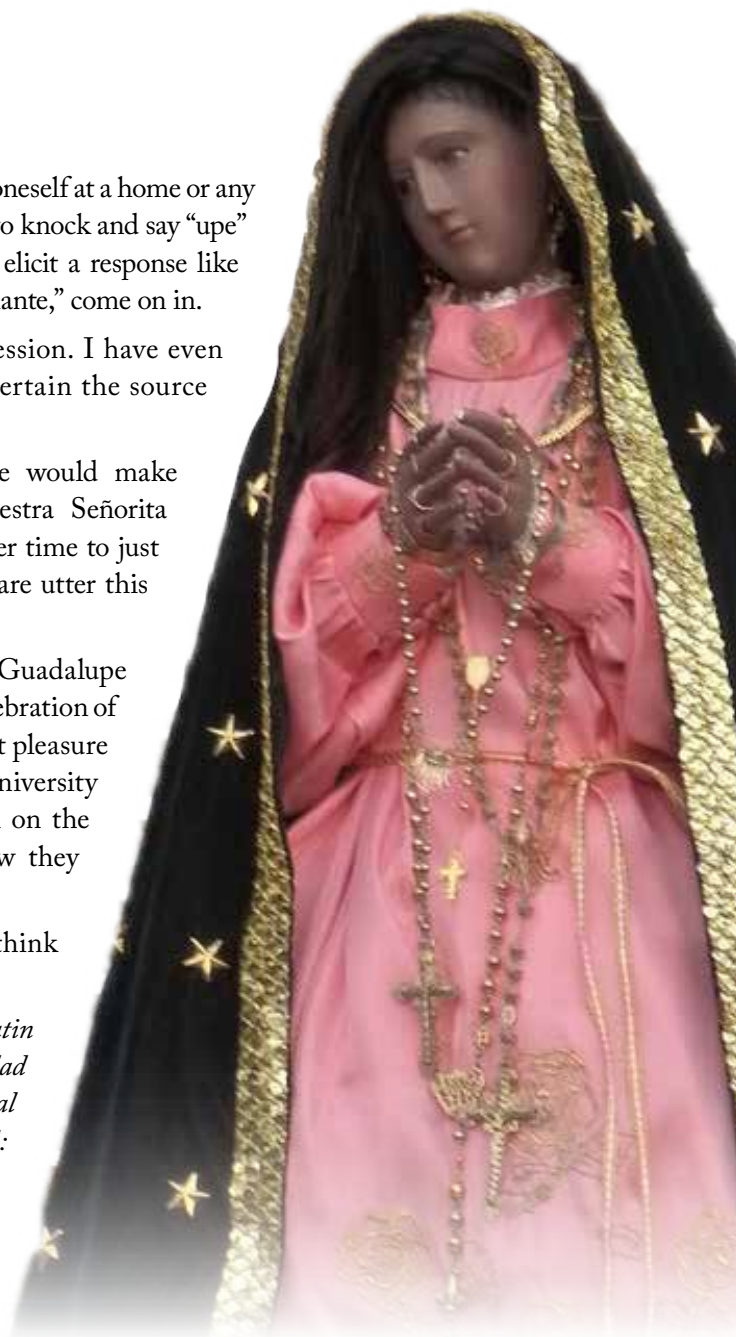
Upe comes from Nicoya, Guanacaste, where people would make themselves known as benevolent visitors by saying “Nuestra Señorita (Señora) la Virgen de Guadalupe.” It was shortened over time to just the last syllable, upe. Presumably, no evildoer would dare utter this holy name before assaulting a household.

Members of the Cofradía Nuestra Señorita Virgen de Guadalupe (a religious brotherhood dedicated to organizing the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12th) take great pleasure in recounting how a big-wheel academic from the University of Costa Rica traveled to Nicoya to conduct research on the origin of the expression. They relate with relish how they simply sat him down and explained it to him.

I use this term commonly when I visit Tico friends. I think even the dogs appreciate the convention.

*Jack Donnelly has been a life-long enthusiast of Latin American folk culture. He graduated from the Universidad de las Americas in Mexico City with a degree in cultural anthropology. Donnelly is the author of COSTA RICA: Folk Culture, Traditions, and Cuisine which is available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle, also in the ARCR office. This article was previously published in ICR news.*

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## FINDING MY WAY IN COSTA RICA

31

By Carol McCool

## Moving On

*These are stories of my transitions in Costa Rica; from a farm in the mountains, to a bed and breakfast in Escazú, to whatever the future holds. Along the way I have met some very special people and had some wonderful experiences.*

As I said in the last chapter, there is a popular flowering bush in Costa Rica which has blossoms that are a lavender color upon opening, and gradually fade to white before dropping to the ground days later. The name of the bush is, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, and it always reminds me of the Buddhist concept of impermanence: Change is constant. So it is with my life.

My trips out to my farm had become less frequent. However, a special event brought me out there one afternoon.

## Graduation in Túfares

In the midst of a brief but intense downpour, a small turnout of neighbors, classmates, aunts, uncles, and a grandmother waited on small chairs in the one classroom of Escuela Túfares. It was for the afternoon graduation ceremony for the elementary school in this rural village, and it was about to begin.

Once a thriving farming community, the community's population had shrunk to under 100 and the school's enrollment was down to 17. The one teacher teaches all subjects to all six grades. Yet the community has continued to care for its school; neighbors paint the walls, repair its roof, build new desks, and care for the equipment.

My friend's daughter, Kimberly, was the guest of honor and the only student in her sixth-grade class. With one parent on each side, she slowly entered the room to a recording of the "Triumphal March" from Verdi's opera, "Aida." Kimberly and her parents took their seats at the table of honor along the chalkboard covered with decorations. I was sitting with the other guests on one of the small chairs and wiped away an unexpected tear. Kimberly's mother, too, struggled to keep from crying.

Kimberly, now 12, was small when her parents began working for my then-husband and me on our farm in this village. They continued to maintain the farm for me in

my absence. The years passed quickly and we had been through a lot together.

At the teacher's cue, everyone stood and sang with a recording of the national anthem, Noble Patria. It is not a song about war, as the anthems of so many countries are, but a celebration of democracy and peace, with verses like, "Peace reigns white and pure," and "May peace and labor ever live." Make no mistake; Costa Rica is not a country of pacifists. One verse promises, "If anyone should try to besmirch your glory, you will see your people, valiant and virile, exchange their rustic tools for weapons."

For half an hour, the teacher described Kimberly's achievements. Her sixth-grade project had been to research and write a 30-page report on the birds of the area. Her story won a national award and she got a three-day trip to the University of Costa Rica as a prize. The teacher gave awards to Kimberly and the other students for their achievements that year. Gifts and photos followed. A simple meal in the school lunchroom, prepared by Kimberly's aunts, concluded the festivities.

Next year Kimberly will attend colegio (secondary school) in a town 12 kilometers away. She is an intelligent, hard-working young person with an excellent character and parents who love her. I hope the world, as it continues to change, will welcome her talents and provide her with opportunities to shine.

## Moving on

I made the decision to close the B&B after four years because it was not making money. I notified the landlord when I would be leaving. But all of my life I have been unrealistic about time and underestimate how long things take. Based on my flawed estimate of the time needed, I had committed to joining a two-week long delegation of peacemakers in Colombia with an NGO I admired, and had bought the airline tickets. That gave me just two

months to close the bed and breakfast, liquidate the assets, and move into a new home before leaving for Colombia.

Part of the Colombian trip involved traveling into a remote area and accompanying campesinos struggling to stay on their lands in the face of threats and harassment from persons and corporations wishing to steal it. The presence of international observers gives hope and courage to the campesinos and helps to curb the violence directed against them.

The trip, however, had caused me to have some concerns about my own safety and I talked with a friend who had been there several times. She said that, as an American, I was in little danger. Violence in Colombia had decreased but not stopped. Some Canadian mining engineers had been captured by one of the guerrilla groups, and the area I had planned to visit was menaced by a right-wing paramilitary group called the Black Eagles. A retired U.S. military man was abducted while backpacking alone in the area on the same day I was scheduled to arrive.

I received an information packet from the NGO which contained a page of instructions about what to do in the (unlikely) event of being taken hostage, and I became very uneasy. The gist of this communication was that when taken hostage, a person is suddenly in a situation where he or she has no rights. The captors will use violence to be sure you understand how your status has changed. I began to feel that I was not willing to take that risk, however slim the chances might be.

Besides my concerns about kidnapping, etc., I was, predictably, behind in my efforts to close the B&B and was having some doubts about whether I would make the deadline. And then, the decision was made for me: I got a toothache. The dentist could find nothing wrong. The X-ray showed nothing. The next day the pain increased and a lymph node under my jaw became sore and swollen. I did not want to be in a remote part of Colombia and have a dental infection that could cause a lot of pain and create a problem for others. So, I decided to skip the trip and advised the group that I would not be going. The pain and swelling vanished the next day.

The benefit was that I now had the time I needed to complete everything for the closing. Adding to the difficulty was that Paul, my assistant manager at the B&B, was starting the new phase of his life with Lisa, and I needed help to sell most of my furniture and appliances, and to find another place to live. This became less complicated when a couple from Monteverde came for a month after their plans to rent a cottage in that town high up in the mountains fell

through. I could not have gotten through that month without them. Liquidating the business was far more work than I had expected and it would have been impossible without their help. We have continued our friendship in the years that followed.

As I think back on the years at the B&B, I remember my musings about the importance of place in people's lives. This is the last installment of the "Finding My Way in Costa Rica" stories. What I have learned is that what matters is not the place so much as the people. Place, while important, holds the human connections — whether for a day or for a lifetime. Life is about the people you share it with. The people who shared the B&B experience with me, like me, were in transition. Maybe we are all in transition. Sharon, Sean, Robin, Paul, Lisa, Uriel, the guests, me and others — all of us were finding our way. Like the Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow flowers, our lives are constantly changing.

*Carol McCool moved to Costa Rica many years ago after retiring from working as a psychologist in schools in the Chicago area. Her stories about living on a farm in the mountains of Costa Rica are published in the anthology, "Costa Rica Kaleidoscope." Her next book, due to come out soon, continues the adventure.*



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by Marshall Cobb



## The Tránsito Dance

In October of 1989 I found myself steering a wheezing, smoking moped down a dark road. My good friend and college roommate sat behind me, his fingers digging into my sides as he continued his lengthy complaint about the fumes coming from the obvious gas leak.

We'd found this relic at a garage sale hosted by a local friend's family. No money changed hands — the family was just grateful that someone was willing to haul it away. Our treasure was really more of a bicycle than a moped, and it featured all the worst characteristics of both.

My efforts to ignore my friend's death grip were interrupted by the glare of headlights in the one, mostly-broken, mirror, perched on the handlebars. We were a long way from our shared apartment on the northwest side of Austin, and it made me uneasy that these headlights had seemingly come out of nowhere.

A few moments later I was blinded by the spotlight beam from an Austin Police Department cruiser, which was now beside us. I'd apparently driven past the cruiser, which had been laying in wait for a speeder, one of the few offenses the moped was not capable of committing. The red and blue flashing lights looked peaceful in the smoky air and I felt surprisingly calm, until the loudspeaker mounted atop the cruiser crackled to life.

"Get that hunk of junk off of my streets. Now!"

I'd done any number of stupid things up to this point in my life, but this particular time I ignored the urge to argue that the streets belonged to us all, and instead pulled over to the curb. My friend and I watched as the cruiser disappeared in the dark, which soon enveloped us again, as the headlight on the moped didn't work any better than the muffler, the carburetor, or the brakes.

I often think about that night when I see the Tránsitos (Policía de Tránsito – Costa Rica's Traffic Police) operating in our zone. Many of the motos and quads being ticketed by Tránsitos share traits with my free moped; broken, smoky, loud, leaky mechanical beasts that should have been retired long ago. And, their unlicensed, uninsured drivers bear a lot of resemblance with the 1989 me, as well.

It is therefore easy for me to empathize with the plight of those ensnared by Tránsitos — until I appreciate just how quiet and peaceful the streets become when the Tránsito is in town. Car traffic converts to pedestrians and bicyclists, the pirate taxis disappear back into whatever dark corner from whence they came, and the chirping of birds replaces a non-muffled engine as the song of the street.

The change is swift, and it begins even before the Tránsitos arrives. This is because when they attempt to



sneak up the mountain, many of the people they pass on the few available routes immediately warn their buddies via broadcast texts to one of several different WhatsApp groups dedicated to the effort.

This game between the Tránsitos and the unlicensed/uninsured/uninspected portion of the vehicular population would therefore seem to be hopelessly tilted on behalf of the offenders. What works against them is the fact that there is just one main road connecting the better part of the Santa Elena/Cerro Plan/Monte Verde expanse. Tránsitos are well aware of this fact when they set up shop right in the middle of the zone — often switching to the pickup truck that belongs to the local police to further camouflage their presence.

Local motorists with jobs will often take the chance that they can make it across town before Tránsitos arrive in the morning, and can probably count on the fact that the Tránsitos will be long gone by the time they get off work and return home. Tránsito personnel do not appear to enjoy working in the dark, or in the rain.

Yes, there is a public bus that runs along this same stretch, but those with early starts to their work day usually get the Tránsitos word too late to make the early bus. Those who choose to accept the lengthy wait for the bus to lumber back through town are then late for work (an outcome which might eventually conclude with the loss of the job). Also, many of the workers trying to get across the zone either live far away from the public bus route, or work for an employer located well off the main road. (Back in the fall of 2015, service was suspended for several days when Tránsitos stopped the public bus and found that the driver didn't have the proper licensing.)

For all of those that do chance it, there are many others who can't afford the risk; the high fines or the potential

loss of their vehicle. Tránsitos' presence in the zone therefore has a chilling effect on workers and work in the area. Many times over the past years I've received an apologetic text from a worker that couldn't come as agreed as they were stuck home because of the Tránsito.

However easy it may be to root for the underdog, and against the Tránsitos, it remains equally true that living, walking, and driving are better when the problem vehicles are off the streets. Besides the noise and congestion, some of the worst drivers in the zone are apparently part of the group that disappears when Tránsito is around.

Extended wheelies up the main road or attempts to round a corner at 6 G's are not quite as attractive when a potential ticket lurks ahead.

There is the added benefit that the tourist vans, with overly aggressive, mobile-phone-centric drivers from all over Costa Rica, are also better behaved when a Tránsito is around. At their very worst, when the vans are empty because they've already dropped off the tourists/witnesses, the driver of a tourist van will gladly cut in front of you so close that you have to jump back to avoid having your feet run over. Any objections are often met with a screamed reply urging you to go back to your own country, which is clearly something the driver, whose job depends on tourism, hasn't fully thought through.

Lastly, there is one more element to consider in the love/hate relationship with Tránsitos; the average daily wage in Costa Rica versus the costs of purchasing, insuring, and maintaining a vehicle. A quick look at the minimum wage scale here in Costa Rica quickly reveals the challenges; how is a gardener earning 10,000 colones (less than U.S. \$20) a day going to afford a good, reliable car, moto, or quad — particularly with gas hovering 600 colones a liter (a little over \$4.00 a U.S. gallon at current exchange rates)?

Yes, this is a minimum wage salary scenario. But, particularly here in the tourist-centric Monte Verde district the bulk of available jobs are low paying, service industry positions which often disappear in the heart of the rainy season when tourists are scarce.

And so, with no easy answer in sight, we continue to find ourselves embracing, or at least accepting, the Tránsito dance.

*You can read more about life in the Monte Verde community by going to: [www.marshall-cobb.com](http://www.marshall-cobb.com)*



By Rómulo Pacheco

## Marriage and Divorce in Costa Rica

Some people like the idea of being married under the sun on a private deserted beach in Costa Rica, rather than getting their marriage license and having a ceremony before someone in their hometown. So for those considering that idea, I will explain how things work here.

### MARRIAGE:

In the United States and Canada, persons can obtain a marriage license from a competent authority, like a county courthouse, and then have the rituals of marriage performed by any person who is legally authorized to perform the ceremony. This can range from a priest or minister of a church, to a justice of the peace. In some venues only a notary public is needed to conduct the formalities.

Marriage in Costa Rica, however, is a little bit different... because the laws are different. For instance, in this country, there are two categories of marriages:

The first type is a **CATHOLIC MARRIAGE**: Catholicism is the official religion of Costa Rica, so, by law, one of the benefits is that, just because of their title, priests are able to perform marriage if they have a registered signature and official stamp issued by the National Registry. Officials of all other religions are not authorized to perform marriages, at least the ones you can inscribe in the National Registry that will have a legal standing.

In the case of a Catholic Church marriage, there are additional requirements; the participants must attend a marriage course one week before the religious ceremony, and the persons to be married must be Catholic. Also, it is necessary that the witnesses are Catholic too. The religious ceremony will have the same validity as a civil marriage (see below) after the documents are signed by all the parties involved.

The second type of marriage is a **CIVIL MARRIAGE**: This type of marriage can be performed by a family judge, or lawyer who is a notary, who is authorized by the court. That means that all other religious denominations must

first have the marriage ceremony performed by a lawyer or judge before the couple can go to their church and have a religious ceremony. Lawyers and judges keep a record of the marriage in a special book and are responsible for the registration of the marriage in the National Registry.

In either of the above cases, there are some basic requirements:

- There must be two witnesses who are of legal age and are present at the time of the signing of the documents.
- Birth certificates must be provided.
- A certification must be obtained from the National Registry attesting that the participants are single or divorced. (In the case of foreigners, the lawyer or judge will prepare an affidavit which the couple must sign, affirming their ability to be married and that they do not have any other marital obligations pending.)

After all these requirements are met, it normally takes the official or priest involved about a month to register the documentation in the National Registry. (The National Registry keeps track of all citizen identification numbers and marriage, birth, and death records.)

### DIVORCE:

Divorce here is also a lot different than in the United States and Canada...and many other countries.

1. What might in some countries be called an “uncontested” divorce can take place if both parties seeking the divorce are in agreement. The principal requirement is that the couple must have been married for least three years. If at least three years have not passed since the marriage was initiated, the couple must wait until that amount of time has elapsed. A divorce by common agreement takes about three months.
2. If there is no common agreement, there are several other causes under Costa Rica law which can be used to begin a divorce at any time. But, keep in mind that in those cases there will most likely be a fight because they may involve other psychological,

physical damage, or medical conditions. The other causes to seek a divorce are:

- Adultery
- Attempted murder of the spouse or any of the children
- Prostitution of the spouse or any of the children
- Cruel treatment
- Formal (legal) separation for at least one year
- The absence of the spouse (desertion) is legally declared
- Informal separation (by agreement) for at least three years

If a common agreement cannot be reached, and the situation does not fit into one of those reasons, a divorce will not be granted. It is worth noting that under the other conditions listed above, the amount of time for a divorce to become final is at least two years. So, in the end, it might be more advantageous to get an agreement with the other party and to proceed that way.

One should also be aware that, under Costa Rican law, there are some other important items in a divorce which must be considered. Those are:

- The properties and assets acquired by either of the two parties during the time they were married are to be divided equally.
- If one party received an inheritance during the period of marriage, the inheritance is not subject to be divided.
- The party that provides the income to the family must provide a pension (alimony) to the one that has no income, until he or she has a way to earn a living.
- If there are children, the Patronato (the government institution charged with supervising minors in Costa Rica), is going to be a part of the divorce. Those children will also receive a pension (child support) until they are 18 years old, or 25 if they are in school.
- Normally, the woman will be granted guardianship of the children. That is almost universally true, unless facts can be presented to prove that the woman cannot provide a safe environment in which the children can grow up.

Please be advised that this information is presented as a general guideline, that in any particular case there are always differences and situations that might change some

of the facts of the general rules, so always consult your counselor for professional advice. Such advice can be very important to obtain certainty when you are thinking about how you are going to live in the future. It will also help to avoid complications that might arise when acting without proper professional guidance.

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.

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By Steve Johnson

## Las Gavetas

**W**e all know the traditional symbols of Costa Rica's past — the painted oxcart, the tamal, the guaria morada, to name a few. Some of us even know what a chonete is — those funny-looking white canvas hats still worn by some campesinos. Very few of us, however, know what a gaveta is. Ask the average Tico and he will tell you it's a drawer. But it is also something else, something that played a crucial role in Costa Rica's coffee farming. I'd venture to say it was almost as important as the oxcart, but has been long forgotten.

When I arrived here in 1968 I saw coffee farms for the first time. Actually, I saw the farms before the plane even touched down. As we approached Aeropuerto El Coco (now Juan Santamaría International Airport) I looked down and saw the rain forest below the plane's wings. Quickly, I noticed that beneath the trees were rows and rows of smaller trees with shiny dark-green leaves. They reminded me of holly bushes and it was almost as if they had been planted. What I was looking at, of course, were plantations of shade-grown *Coffea arabica*, something that has all but disappeared over the years, but is making a comeback.

I ended up living in an area where I was surrounded by banana plantations, not coffee, but then I fell in love with Maria, a beautiful Tica from San Rafael de Heredia. She grew up on a traditional coffee farm — a house surrounded by a few acres of coffee trees, shaded by a variety of different plants and trees such as bananas and oranges. She and her ten brothers and sisters worked

on the farm, and during harvest time they picked coffee from sunup to sundown. In those days all it took was a couple of acres of coffee, and a lot of hard work, to support a family.

Maria's dad, Juan Daniel, showed me around the farm. Everywhere we went we had to walk around or hop over what looked like graves — rectangular holes in the ground, six-feet-long by about two-feet-wide. They varied in depth from a foot to three or four feet. After doing this for a while I finally asked Juan Daniel what they were. He told me they were garbage pits where they threw their organic waste, which included kitchen scraps and organic material from the farm. Back then plastic packaging was not nearly as widespread as it is today, so merchandise was mostly packaged in newspaper, cardboard, or wood, which also went into the garbage pits. The garbage pits were called gavetas, or drawers in English. I remember thinking, that's an awful lot of garbage pits for just one family, and most of them were empty. But they had another important function, which Juan Daniel neglected to tell me about.



Much of the coffee in Costa Rica is grown on steep mountain slopes. I had never seen anything like it before. I began wondering how the farmers prevented soil erosion. The only other crop I knew of that was grown on steep slopes was rice. I had seen pictures of terraced rice paddies in Indonesia and the Philippines, and growing rice on those slopes would have been impossible without terraces, but terraces were nonexistent in Costa Rica. What was their secret?

Years later I discovered the answer, and it had been right under my nose the whole time. One day I was talking to some coffee workers who were resting between bouts of digging gavetas. I asked them why they were digging them; it was an awful lot of work. Their answer was, to prevent soil erosion. Incredulous, I asked them how digging a hole could possibly prevent soil erosion. They explained that in a heavy rain, as the water runs down the slope, the muddy water is caught in the gavetas. If you dig enough gavetas, and in a systematic pattern, they will not stop, but will significantly slow down, the water flow and by the end of the rainy season the gavetas are filled with rich top soil. The next dry season they would dig more gavetas, and so it goes. So instead of building terraces, which are physical barriers to water runoff, the Ticos dug catch basins all over their coffee fields.

Where Maria and I live now, in Concepción de San Rafael de Heredia, the coffee is mostly sun coffee, and these days digging gavetas seems to have gone out of fashion. The ground around the coffee bushes is sprayed with herbicides. With the soil being bare, and not a lot of tree roots to hold it down, when it rains the soil erodes. I used to teach soil conservation in the public schools back in the States, and I fear this is a nearsighted practice; once the topsoil is gone, all that is left is hardpan clay. It seems obvious to me that protecting the soil should be a high priority for Costa Rica but, as housing developments move into the area, the farmers know they can sell their coffee farms and in one day earn more money than they made in decades of farming. So there is little incentive to preserve the soil for the long term.

And here's a side note. My father-in-law, Juan Daniel, once had his life saved by a gaveta. During the civil war of 1948 he supported the revolution. He didn't take up arms, but went around town saying the election had been a fraud. One day soldiers came looking for him and, as he high-tailed it out the backdoor of his house and through the coffee trees, they drew their guns and fired at him. He ended up hiding in one of the gavetas. The family put

a sheet of corrugated zinc on top of the gaveta, covered it with dirt, and took food and water to him at night. The soldiers eventually discovered his hiding place and put him in jail. From San Rafael he was transferred to the Cuartel Bellavista (now the Museo Nacional) in San José. His cell mate was Uladislao Gámez, an important figure in the revolution and in the Liberación governments that followed. Within a few days the government collapsed and Juan Daniel and don Lalo were freed before any harm could come to them. Not everyone was so lucky. So you see, gavetas can be very useful things indeed.

*Steve Johnson arrived in Costa Rica in 1968 as a Peace Corps volunteer. He 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](mailto:johnsos05@yahoo.com)*



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# PARADISE, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

39

by Tony Johnson

## Why Do We Argue So Damn Much!?

As we all know, couples argue a lot. Often about money, in-laws, and household chores. But that only tells us what we argue about, not why. Certainly, partners take different positions on those issues and have different objectives, but even that doesn't explain why they argue, rather than discuss and negotiate. Clearly something very important is at stake in these issues. But is it really the money, the relatives, or the division of labor?

To understand what's actually happening, we must go deeper than "that's how couples are" and make some distinctions. What happens that turns a discussion into an argument? Let's look at the mechanisms that can trigger the transition.

First, let's be clear, not every disagreement becomes an argument. An argument is a disagreement that involves intense negative emotions and causes feelings such as hurt, anger, rage, and the desire to "get even" with our partner. "Which Beatle was the cutest?" rarely, if ever, arouses such feelings, until the disagreement turns into a personal attack, "How could you be stupid enough to think Ringo was the cutest?" Such condemning judgmental criticisms can cause injury to one's sense of self. (I'm using "sense of self" here rather than the more common term "ego" because ego suggests a person with a grandiose, exaggerated sense of importance, abilities, attractiveness, and so on. "Sense of self" is a more neutral term and doesn't imply egotism.) And criticism elicits self defense, which triggers the transition.

### It's Our Nature to Self-Defend

The first step on the way to an argument occurs when we feel our sense of self is in danger of becoming diminished, to which we respond by becoming self-protective. And you might be surprised to hear that our efforts to protect ourselves, and end the conflict, often produce just the opposite effect: more attacks on us. While we feel we're "only correcting the record," the person we're "setting straight" may feel rebuked, scolded, and labeled as personally, not just factually, wrong, and that makes them feel attacked. They definitely don't feel heard by us, so they "turn up the volume" on their concerns, which we experience as a counter-attack — and then we have a battle on our hands. Both are attacking and defending.

The commonly suggested way to avoid such fights, "don't defend yourself, listen carefully to their concerns, ask questions, find areas of agreement," is very difficult to carry

out because self-defense is an innate, natural, reflexive reaction. And this puts us in a bind. We may avoid arguments by resisting self-defense and listening to our partner, but then we feel we allow them to attack us with impunity. And if we don't defend ourselves, we become outraged at ourselves for "letting them get away with treating me like that." But if we defend ourselves, it's likely, as we've seen, to make things worse.

A third way to reduce the need for defense is by developing a more secure sense of self. And, at the risk of over-promising, partners with more secure selves will have a better relationship and happier lives. So, how do we do that?

### What Exactly Is a "Sense of Self"?

Each one of us has a "self," basically IDEAS about who we are as distinct, unique individuals. It's our identity, how we're different from, and we are the same as, others. It's a collection of images, a kind of summary of our history, traits, strengths, and weaknesses; a kind of personal brand that defines how we see ourselves and how we believe others see us. It's not just our personally held image of ourselves; it also includes how others see us. It can be thought of as a coordinate, a spot where we are located on the social map; "I'm important" or "I'm nobody." The deeper we understand the IDEATIONAL BASIS of this essential element of our lives, the stronger our sense of self can become.

A positive, favorable sense of self gives us comfort and security. We feel we belong, that we have value and importance to others. They need us just as we need them. A negative self leaves us anxious and insecure, feeling unliked, at risk of being unwanted, shunned, rejected. The good opinion of others is crucial to our opinion of ourselves, so we desperately defend our image to them and ourselves. Feeling good about who we are and how we are seen by others is important.

### The Parts of Our Self

The self can be better understood by subdividing it into its key elements. A few of the many conditions that are essential to feeling good about ourselves are:

- worth (value to ourselves and others)
- competence (good at something, able to manage our lives)

- integrity (we're basically good, reliable, honest, trustworthy)
- acceptability (OK in spite of all our quirks)
- autonomy (not overly relying on others for guidance)

We NEED to check off all those boxes more or less positively to have a secure sense of self. We must feel that we have VALUE/WORTH, or why bother to get up in the morning. Life, as we all know, demands certain skills to at least survive, if not thrive. Such effective living requires COMPETENCE. No one wants to feel and be seen as unscrupulous, as evil. We want to feel we have INTEGRITY. And however we're unique, we're not outside the borders of ACCEPTABILITY. AUTONOMY means we're regarded as deserving and capable of making our own decisions.

For example, the statement, "How could you be stupid enough to think that Ringo is the cutest?" demeans and diminishes our intellect, and, therefore, our ABILITY. If we're so dumb as to select the wrong Beatle, then the implication is that something is wrong with us; our judgments and who we are don't have much VALUE in the eyes of our challenger. That can make us feel that maybe we don't even have the INTEGRITY to "admit the truth about the situation" or we're "just too damn stupid to see the reality." So maybe we're not deserving of the AUTONOMY to think for ourselves.

So an argument about something as trivial as the Beatles could feel like an attack on every element of our identity. And our partner could be feeling as threatened and demeaned, as we are by our attacks on them. Ringo was never what's ultimately at stake. WE are.

## Those "Parts" Are What We Defend In Arguments

Realizing that we naturally defend those vital parts of our well-being, we can intervene before we become defensive (which means counterattacking our partner). How? By making crucial self-defensive distinctions TO OURSELVES. Silently, internally.

Typically, when others criticize us they tend to exaggerate our shortcomings and extrapolate our mistakes from a few examples to the entirety of who we are. And we do the same with them, making them defensive. We may resist admitting an obvious problem or shortcoming in ourselves because we, too, feel it reveals the entirety of who we are. We spill some milk and are accused of being totally clumsy and stupid. And we buy that gross distortion. We also defend ourselves against our own inner critic, fearing the mistake indicates something negative about the entirety of who we are.

You're probably recalling how each of those "parts" have been points of vulnerability and can be triggers for defensiveness and causes of fights. And we all know how negative judgments about those parts create pain and anxiety.

But what's the role of our "self" and its "parts" in our relationships, not just in conflicts?

## Masters and Disasters

As I have mentioned in previous articles, marriage guru John Gottman identifies two types of bonds, the "Marriage Masters" and the "Marriage Disasters."

The "Disasters" are routinely at Defcon 1, on the verge of nuclear war, feeling their sense of self is mortally endangered by their partner. This creates a climate filled with contempt, criticism, stress, defensiveness, attack and counterattack — and regular, huge battles.

The "Masters," in comparison, are calm and at ease around each other. They focus on each other's strengths, avoid pointing out weaknesses and shortcomings, abstain from attacks, and are very considerate of each other's feelings; there is ample safety and little need for defensiveness. The "Masters" feel their sense of self is safe in each other's hands. This improves both their relationship with each other and with themselves.

It's easy to see which approach (safety or danger — security or menace) is the best for the evolution and growth of the relationship and the partners.

We can learn to conduct our relationships as the Masters do. Living in the safety of a Masters' relationship, we can admit our shortcomings because we know they refer only to a small part of who we are overall, not to our totality. The Masters avoid exaggerating small shortcomings into enormous character flaws and, as a result, we become not only more at ease around our partner, but also with ourselves.

It's hard to be happy with our life while unhappy with ourselves, but much easier when someone is happy with us — and we with them.

Did I over promise?

Next time, more on treating ourselves as our partners deserve to be treated.

*Tony Johnson is a retired university mental health center psychologist who has been married for 45 years — because he did make these changes. He can be contacted for consultations at: [johnson.tony4536@gmail.com](mailto:johnson.tony4536@gmail.com)*



**Organizations are invited and encouraged to post their group activities, information, meeting schedules, and notices of special events FREE in the ARCR Facebook account. Go to [www.facebook.com/ARCR123](http://www.facebook.com/ARCR123)**

### ► **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.costaricaaa.com](http://www.costaricaaa.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.costaricaaa.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](mailto:commander@alcr10.org) or visit our website at [www.alcr10.org](http://www.alcr10.org). If you need directions, call Terry Wise at 8893-4021.

### ► **American Legion Post 12-Golfito**

Meetings are held 4 p.m. 1<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.canadianclubcr.com) or email Pat at: [canadianclubcr@yahoo.com](mailto: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](mailto:cbwn00@gmail.com) and see our FB page - [www.facebook.com/CostaBallenaWomensNetwork](http://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](mailto:bbrashears0@gmail.com), 8684-2526.

### ► **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](mailto:cr.democratsabroad@yahoo.com). Join Democrats Abroad at: [www.democratsabroad.org](http://www.democratsabroad.org). Register to vote absentee at: [VoteFromAbroad.org](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:costaricaporo@yahoo.com) or visit our website at: [www.newcomersclubofcostarica.com](http://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](mailto:d_sandlin@email.com) or visit our website at: [www.pcclub.net](http://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](mailto:pzwomansclub@gmail.com). Please visit our website at: [www.pzwomansclub.org](http://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](mailto:pwn.costarica@gmail.com).

PWN website is [www.pwn-cr.com](http://www.pwn-cr.com)

### ► Radio Control Sailing Club

Meets at Sabana Park Lake. For information write Walter Bibb at: [wwbbsurf40@yahoo.com](mailto: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](http://www.wccr.org)

### ► Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Open to men too. English language group in Cariari de Belén, English-Spanish group in Heredia, Spanish language group in San José. We work on peace and human rights issues. Call Mitzi, 2433-7078 or write us at: [peacewomen@gmail.com](mailto: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: [info@arcr.net](mailto:info@arcr.net), Subject line; El Residente."



# BUSINESS DIRECTORY (43)

## Important dates in Costa Rica:

**May 24/25**, ARCR Seminar for expats. Location TBA.

**June 28/29**, ARCR Seminar for expats. Location TBA.

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