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# EL RESIDENTE

January

February

2025



THE FORGOTTEN COAST:

## What is that Strange English in Limón?

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

What to do This Summer  
We Have Fairy Dust!

The Legacy of the United Fruit Company  
Costa Rica Indigenous Art. Where to find it.

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

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## Editor's Note

**H**appy New Year! As tradition dictates, January 1<sup>st</sup> is a time for new beginnings. Wanting to honor that custom, this issue of *El Residente* begins a new theme – a year-long series that examines and highlights the unique culture of a part of the country that is often overlooked; the Caribbean Coast. This fascinating series starts by telling us how the colorful and unique brand of English spoken there came about. It's an interesting story.

That's not all that is new for 2025! We also welcome some new contributors. Please give them a warm welcome. We are sure you will enjoy their work.

For those who have enjoyed the Taste the Tropics pieces about unique and tasty tropical fruits and vegetables, the series will continue. Don't put away your napkins just yet. The delicious treats are just no longer on the cover.

Here's looking forward to a new and exciting year!



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# ACROSS THE BOARD

## Notes and News from the Board of Directors

**RESOLUTIONS** Like every New Year's Day, January 1, 2025, comes with promises to do things better. At ARCR, the Board of Directors is no exception and we have identified some improvements to accomplish in the coming twelve months. At the top of that list is to enhance the important and respected "Seminar for Expats." The upgrade has already started and the first step was to bring the seminar's name up to date. The information-packed two-day program on living in a new culture is now called, "**Tips and Tricks for a Pura Vida Life: A Seminar.**"

To ensure the Board of Directors is on the right track, we are eager to hear from past attendees who have suggestions on how to make the seminar experience better for others. Simply drop us an email at: [service@arcr.cr](mailto:service@arcr.cr) with the Subject line, "Attn. BoD." Or, contact one of the Board of Directors: Martha Rollins, Berni Jubb, Nhi Chu, Linda Leake, Romulo Pacheco, or Allen Dickinson, in person. They will be pleased to hear from you.

Continuing with the theme of improving our endeavors for 2025, the Board of Directors has decided to clearly define the organization's objective by adopting the following Mission Statement:

**The Association of Residents of Costa Rica aims to assist people with up-to-date information on how to navigate the intricacies of transitioning**

**to and living a "Pura Vida" life in Costa Rica, through a team of professionals offering services in various areas of expertise.**

Watch for more changes to promote your association's significance and practicality to be made during the coming year.

**BANK SCAMS (AGAIN)** A Consumer Reports investigation found that sophisticated scams targeting bank customers are becoming more common. Yet when the depositors make reimbursement claims, the nation's biggest banks often deny them. A Consumer Reports article titled **Scammers Are Stealing Billions From Americans' Bank Accounts. Here's What You Need to Know** describes how scammers work and tells how to avoid becoming a victim. You can read the complete article by going to: <https://www.consumerreports.org/money/scams-fraud/scammers-are-stealing-billions-from-americans-bank-accounts-a9798061056/>

**TREE OF HOPE** Through the generosity of its members, ARCR has again been able to provide some holiday joy to the children in the Hospital de Niños and Obras del Espiritu Santo. Nearly \$1,500 was donated and was used to purchase Christmas gifts for the children. The items were wrapped in holiday paper and delivered by the ARCR Office Staff, resulting in many happy smiles. The children and the ARCR Staff want to send a big THANK YOU out to all those who contributed.

# 2025 Official Holidays, Observances, and Days Off in Costa Rica

DATE	DAY	NAME	TYPE
1 Jan	Wednesday	New Year's Day	National Holiday
19 Mar	Wednesday	Saint Joseph's Day	Observance
11 Apr	Friday	Battle of Rivas	National Holiday
1 May	Thursday	Labor Day / May Day	National Holiday
15 Jun	Sunday	Father's Day	Observance
25 Jul	Thursday	Annexation of Nicoya	National Holiday
2 Aug	Saturday	Day of Our Lady of Los Ángeles	Non-Compulsory Payment Holiday
15 Aug	Friday	Mother's Day	National Holiday
25 Aug	Sunday	National Parks Day	Observance
9 Sep	Tuesday	Children's Day	Observance
15 Sep	Monday	Independence Day	National Holiday
22 Nov	Saturday	Teacher's Day	Observance
1 Dec	Monday	Abolition of the Army Day	Non-Compulsory Payment Holiday
25 Dec	Thursday	Christmas Day	National Holiday
31 Dec	Wednesday	New Year's Eve	Observance

## DEFINITIONS OF HOLIDAY TERMS

**OBSERVANCES:** If the date falls on a weekday, it is a paid day off for Costa Rican workers.

**NATIONAL HOLIDAYS:** Non-essential businesses will be closed. Paid holiday for Costa Rica Workers. A worker who is required to work on a National Holiday must, by law, be paid double wages.

**NON-COMPULSORY PAYMENT HOLIDAYS:** Official holidays; however, the employer is not required to pay employees double if they are required to work that day.

SOURCE: <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/costa-rica/2025>

# CARIBBEAN CONNECTION

by Connie Foss

## The Forgotten Coast: What is that Strange English in Limón?



**W**hile waiting at the bus station in Limón one afternoon I noticed a cluster of young foreigners huddled together by the concessions. They were obviously tourists, obviously a group of some kind. As we stood in line to board the bus to Puerto Viejo I asked one of them, “Are you here as volunteers? And where are you from?”

The young woman answered in a twangy English accent, “I’m from New Zealand, but we’re from all over the world — we’ve come here for three weeks to teach English in the schools.” The two things these young folks had in common; they all spoke English, and they

were all taking a gap year from college (or, had not yet begun their university studies).

In Costa Rica, although tourism is a major industry and source of GDP, there remains a serious shortage of English teachers in the public schools. To remedy this — or perhaps this is why — volunteers come to Costa Rica to teach English. They’re everywhere. Why? Because the public schools here do not offer adequate instruction in English, and many schools provide none. But young volunteers from all over the world are willing to pay their way to come and teach it.



It should be obvious that an 18-year-old high school graduate is not qualified to teach English in a school. However, the government of Costa Rica would rather accept unqualified volunteers to teach a few classes for free than hire qualified English teachers from Limon — simply because they speak a mother tongue referred to as “broken English” by the education system.

Not everyone recognizes the irony of this situation, but I do. For a century, Limon province was a nearly 100% English-speaking population... until the central government came to the region and closed the English schools. But I am getting ahead of myself.

I am a qualified English teacher, a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) professional who came to Costa Rica in September of 2009 to teach English in the Central Valley. I started out teaching in private language schools where public school students paid tuition to learn English. Three weeks later, I took a weekend excursion to Puerto Viejo, where I was a bit puzzled to hear the people all around me speaking English. It was an interesting variety of English, which I later learned is called Limonese Creole, or *Mekatelyu*. I was instantly hooked.

Some months after this initial contact with *Mekatelyu* I returned to Puerto Viejo to spend the two-month school

holiday. One evening, just when I had given up on the idea of having any English students, a young Tica walked through the gate of the lodge where I was staying, followed by a middle-aged man, apparently her employer. “I heard about your English classes from some friends here,” the man explained, as he took out his wallet and handed me the first weeks’ wages. How could I refuse? He wanted me to give his personal assistant, Alexa, English lessons four times a week for the entire two months.

I sat right down with Alexa to show her the lesson materials I planned to use with her. But she didn’t seem interested in the book. “I like to listen to music,” she said. “Do you have any Bob Marley?”

I put the textbook away and opened my laptop. I played “Redemption Song” from a streaming music program while she followed along with the song’s lyrics, which I happened to have in a Word document on my laptop. Afterward, I asked her if she had any questions about any of the vocabulary Bob Marley had used in his song. What she said was the last thing I expected to hear: “Are you going to teach me the broken English? I want to talk the patois.”

My lessons with Alexa gave me something more than an income: Alexa’s question about teaching her the “broken English” inspired me with curiosity to learn more about the Afro-Caribbean dialect that is spoken from Manzanillo to Siquirres, and throughout Limon Province.

In February I went back to the Central Valley, this time to teach on the faculty of the English department at the National University (UNA), where I would be teaching students and staff a required course in English. One afternoon, all of the faculty were called to a meeting to talk about the policy of “publish or perish.” I was terrified! But then I recalled my question about *Mekatelyu*. I asked the department chair if I could write about that, and she was delighted.

(By the way: *Mekatelyu* literally means, “Make I tell you.” In Standard English, “Let me tell you something.”)

As I began the search for reliable sources on the topic, I discovered that nearly all of the work has been written in Spanish—and continues to be written in Spanish. This struck me as odd, until I realized that Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica. But was it always that way? Belize and Guatemala, with large populations of Afro-Caribbean citizens, validate the English Creole in business and education. But in Costa Rica all academic and government documents are in Spanish. Fortunately, I knew enough Spanish to comprehend what I was



reading. But I wondered why all of the books and articles about English speakers in Limón were published in a language that native English speakers—academics and students—may not understand. Even in the cases where the original source of information was in English, a Spanish translation always accompanied it.

I eventually discovered an entire book about *Mekatelyu* in the university's library. It was a massive work—the dissertation of Anita Herzfeld, an American linguist who had lived in Limón for years to study the language. Herzfeld's 2002 publication of *Mekatelyu, La lengua criolla*, is a book for academics who want to understand the phonetic patterns, syntax, and structure of the dialect. But the book is also interesting because she tells stories about everyday life in Limón, and uses sentences spoken by the locals who speak Limonese Creole next to Standard English and Spanish to show that there are linguistic patterns to the language. Her work proved that “broken English” is actually a language, and that it should be officially recognized and preserved.

Herzfeld's book is written in Spanish. I studied Spanish at the university level, but deciphering academic writing (known as “pseudo Spanish”) is a challenge, to say the least. (Academic English is a challenge!) But I did my best, and some parts of the book were easier to understand

than others. The following is a paragraph I have translated from another article of Herzfeld's, published the year after her book, that briefly summarizes the history of *Mekatelyu* in Costa Rica:

*In the 19th century, a mostly Afro-Jamaican linguistic minority settled down on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, a Spanish-speaking country. They went there to work for Minor C. Keith, an enterprising U.S. engineer who had been commissioned by the Costa African government to build a railroad that would join an eastern port to the capital city in the Central Valley. Later, to help finance that enterprise, Keith founded the United Fruit Company and the Jamaican workers remained in the province of Limón to plant bananas. Their English-based, Limonese Creole language has remained extant in spite of many government attempts to eradicate it, most likely because it acts, among other elements, as an identity marker for its people. But, will it survive globalization? And if so, for how long?*

Yes, how long? I discovered it nearly a decade after Herzfeld's study. As an English teacher in Costa Rica, I was aware of the situation—and it was getting worse. Most of the younger students I was teaching in schools in Limón province did not speak a word of English, while their grandparents often didn't speak Spanish. The generation between was too busy working to notice—and



many Limon families were intermarrying with Spanish-speaking Costaricans, which meant their children were not learning the mother tongue. This language loss between generations is a serious problem, because language is the means of communicating a society's culture and values.

At the end of my year at UNA I presented what I had learned about *Mekatelyu*. The evaluators told me the topic was worth further investigation but it was up to me to do the rest. As I continued to look for more information, I discovered the name of Quince Duncan, a Costarican academic who was born and raised in Limon. But all of his books and articles are in Spanish, and most of them had been published decades ago.

In 2013 I was teaching English at a bilingual school in Limon. During a lunch hour conversation with a colleague one day, I mentioned the problem of finding information about *Mekatelyu*. My colleague connected me with George Watts Williams; He knew just as much of the history as Duncan, he spoke English, and he lived in Limon.

When I contacted Mr. Watts about meeting for an interview, he very cordially invited me to come to his office. The rest is history; We have been friends now

for over a decade, and he has provided me with enough information now to write an entire book!

George Watts has an impressive resume of accomplishments as a community leader who, over the years, has labored tirelessly to gain national recognition of Limon's unique heritage. In 1980, Watts was President of the organization responsible for setting aside August 31st as Afro Descendants Day in Costa Rica.

George Watts is a descendant of the original Jamaican immigrants who came to Limon as temporary workers to construct the railroad. Interestingly, Watts is a contemporary of his academic counterpart, Quince Duncan. The stories he told me in English dovetail with Duncan's written histories in Spanish. Interestingly, I also learned that both Duncan and Watts were ordained as priests in St. Mary's Episcopal church in Siquirres, the first Episcopal church to be established in Limon Province, by West Indies immigrants. In fact, by the time I met him, Watts had retired from teaching and was the Interim Priest at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Watts continues to resist the dominant culture of "the Spanish," as he calls the Costarican hierarchy and academic community, by speaking and writing in English. And that was fortunate for me!



Limón, Costa Rica. Calle 1ª

On that first meeting in his office, I asked Reverend Watts to begin with a general overview: How, where, and why are there native English speakers in Costa Rica?

Because he had given this lecture many times, he spoke from memory:

*African slaves were brought from Africa to the Caribbean islands to work on the British plantations. They were from different tribes, so communication was difficult among them. While they were all mixed up together, they began to use the English language as a way of communicating and understanding each other.*

*Our Creole came to this region with our ancestral immigrants, especially from Jamaica and Trinidad. They brought not only their language, but also their culture and their way of life. We can now distinguish three languages spoken by Limon blacks: Creole, Spanish, and Standard English. Creole English is what we speak to our families at home. Creole possesses the attraction of a group code not generally available to outsiders.*

*The problem is, Hispanics think of Creole as a broken or bad English. In our high school, any use of Creole in the classroom is likely censored by teachers, who see it as the encouragement of "flat talk." But when they first arrived*

*in Costa Rica, black people in Limon had the economic advantage over Hispanics precisely because they spoke English, the language of the railway and the banana companies.*

*In the early 1870s, Henry Keith and his brother Minor Keith brought hundreds of Jamaican and West Indies workers to build the railroad, and later to plant bananas. They came to Costa Rica because they were promised that they would earn a lot of money, and would be here only for a short time.*

*These Afro-Caribbeans did not intend to settle permanently in Costa Rica. They planned to stay only a short while and then to return home. They considered themselves Jamaicans, not Costaricans, and viewed their stay as only a temporary means by which to earn money.*

*Because the West Indians saw their stay in the country as temporary, they had no interest in themselves or their children learning Spanish. They felt their own culture and educational system were superior. It was common for parents to hide their children so as to avoid having to send them to a Spanish school. The West Indians brought their own institutions with them to Costa Rica, and similarly they set up their own schools, usually under the auspices of*



*the churches. Teachers were brought in from Jamaica, and naturally the medium of instruction was English.*

*The maintenance of their language and traditions then became very integrated into the general culture. The church played an extremely interesting role in Limon. English schools in Limon were associated with the Protestant churches: The Baptist, Methodist, and Anglican churches had long-established schools. In smaller settlements, such as Cabuitta, inter-denominational school boards were set up to organize the schools. Many English schools continued in existence for a considerable length of time. But the Teacher Joseph Augustus Thomas school was the only English school recognized by the Costa Rica government to extend a certificate of achievement to its graduates.*

*During 1915, the government intended to open public Spanish schools in Limon. Between 1922-1955, approximately 47 public schools were opened in Limon, in order to inculcate national values. But the Black community did not at once give up its own English schools, and at that time most children were sent to both. Naturally the black students' initial lack of mastery of Spanish was considered a problem by the teachers, who forbade the use of English in school.*

*In 1948 a law was issued which stipulated that all those living in Costa Rica could obtain their citizenship: After almost a century of possessing no nationality, these black immigrants became citizens of Costa Rica. The radical change in the relationship of West Indians to the State after 1948 meant that, at least in theory, it was now possible to transform our status from unwanted plantation residue to rightful citizens.*

*But there are still West Indians alive today who have learned Spanish only as a foreign language. Some of the older people may have been educated only in English, and may have trouble reading and writing Spanish. Many others, as myself, belong to a generation who attended Spanish school in the morning and English school in the afternoon, and are literate in both languages.*

*Afro-Caribbean Costaricans can now be integrated socially, politically and economically but only through channels made accessible to us by the dominant Spanish-speaking society. Education is the only way we as blacks can reach a better position in this country. We must be conscious that we are a minority group in which it is impossible for us to have complete dominion, but if we are considered to occupy*

*a responsible occupation we have to demonstrate what we are capable of.*

*Since the decline of the English schools, most Creole speakers now only study English as a foreign language in primary and secondary schools. As a result, most young people in Limon now speak Spanish, not English, and few students attain the confidence to use Standard English outside the classroom.*

That was what I learned just in my first visit with Reverend Watts.

Over the years, thanks to Reverend Watts and his continued updates on the happenings in Limon, I have attended book talks and cultural events that have given me a wider view of this fascinating “family tree” of Afro Caribbean culture that was planted unintentionally in Costa Rica by two businessmen working for the United Fruit Company (now Dole, Chiquita, and Del Monte).

My Spanish continues to improve as I delve more deeply into the literature of this region; books like Carlos Fallas’s classic, *Mamita Yunai* and Quince Duncan’s *Una Cancion*

*en la Madrugada*, both personal accounts of the lives of banana workers.

In the next issue of *El Residente*, I will share details about the role Jamaican immigrants played in developing the infrastructure that became central to the economy of Costa Rica—and now, is key to the tourism industry.

Who was Marcus Garvey, and how did his presence influence the development of Limon? What would have happened if Garvey’s Black Star Line plan had convinced the Jamaicans to leave Costa Rica and return to Africa? Find out more in the next article!

*Connie Foss holds a MA in Linguistics/TESOL. She settled in the Talamanca region of Limon (first, Puerto Viejo, and now Cabuita) in 2020 and teaches English as a volunteer to the Bribri community and Family Literacy at the American Corner in Limon.*



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# TASTE THE TROPICS

by El Residente Staff



## Chiverre

**W**hat are those large gourd-looking things I see at the feria? The ones with the mottled green and white skin? They're chiverre!

The chiverre is a large squash, known in the scientific world as *Cucurbita ficifolia*. It has many common names in English, which include black-seed squash, cidra, fig-leaf gourd, Malabar gourd, pie melon, sidra, and Thai marrow. (Incidentally, the word “chiverre” is also used in Costarican colloquial Spanish to refer to a person’s large, rounded belly.)

Like many varieties of squash, the plant grows as a vine and its tender sprouts help it expand through and within other vegetation. The chiverre does not require much dedication from farmers; generally, the seeds are dispersed through maize fields and the plants are allowed to grow freely among other vegetation. As they grow large the fruits become visible in the pasture.

The mature fruit is large and rounded with a characteristic smooth and thick shell and, at its full growth, can weigh up to five kilograms (11 lbs.) During the ripening process,



the color of the fruit's hard external shell ranges from light or dark green to cream. Its shape and appearance are somewhat like a watermelon. Inside, the pulp is white and fleshy and will become stringy when crushed. The large seeds are black and there can be as many as 500.

The plant is native to the Americas; the oldest archaeological evidence of the squash was found in Peru. Although the place of domestication and the expansion of its edible uses are unclear, linguistic evidence suggests that it originated in Mexico because of the wide use of names based on its náhuatl name, *tzilicayotli* (white pumpkin).

In Costa Rica, the major producing communities are Zarcero, Sarchí, San Ramón de Alajuela, and the south of Cartago. La Feria Nacional del Chiverre (The National Chiverre Fair) has been celebrated since 2003. The celebration takes place in the town of Laguna de Alfaró Ruiz (Zarcero) and occurs with the participation of neighbors, different committees, and institutions. The event, held just before Semana Santa (Easter Week), is held on Laguna's sports field where visitors can enjoy a wide variety of chiverre products and preparations such as empanadas, breads, wine, and biscuits, all made with the squash's flesh as a main ingredient. Last year's edition extended over nine days and saw over 30 thousand visitors.

Although production is not exclusive to Zarcero, over the years the local farmers in that area, whose plantations can spread for over 20 hectares, have specialized in chiverre production. Many communities of this canton have been dedicated to the production of the fruit for several decades, making it the country's major chiverre supplier to the bread industry.

Peak production happens between February and April and, for this reason, chiverre is readily available for Semana Santa. It is a Cost Rican tradition to prepare the famous "dulce de chiverre" for the confection of breads and other baked goods, such as empanadas, during the Easter holiday.

The nutritional value of chiverre varies, depending on which part of the plant is being used. The seeds are rich in minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and lipids; the flowers are rich in calcium, phosphorus, and fiber. The fruit, both green and ripe, and the sprouts are excellent sources of dietary fiber.

Like most squashes, this fruit has a relatively neutral taste. For this reason, the dulce (sweet) is a good option to make the most out of the fibery pulp. This culinary technique was inherited from the colonial Spaniards, who came up with different types of preserves made with sugar cane and various spices. Traditional aromatic "secret" ingredients to heighten the flavor of the dulce



include tamarindo preserve, fig leaves, cinnamon, cloves, and vanilla extract.

The tender sprouts, flowers, seeds, and fruits are all edible, and it is a food that has been present in the Cost Rican diet since pre-Columbian times. Nevertheless, current popular knowledge is mostly limited to the use of ripe fruit to make the traditional “miel de chiverre,” which is a marmalade made from the fruit’s flesh.

Many recipes are available that describe culinary delicacies using the seeds, sprouts, and fruit in stews, soups, meatballs, picadillos, tortillas, cajetas, and turrone. Many of these recipes go back for generations, and some of them are still prepared. Others can only be found in childhood memories of older living souls.

The most tedious part of the preparation is the removal of the shell and the crushing of the pulp. The traditional way of removing the shell is to place the squash over burning coals. The objective is to remove as much water as possible to produce high-quality dulce. This also dries the gourd

before the shell is removed with a sharp knife. Another method of drying the fruit is to leave it out in the sun for several days before removing the shell. After this, the seeds are removed, and the crushed pulp is placed in a cloth sack and left to hang for over 12 hours to drain any remaining liquid.

To make the dulce de chiverre, unrefined whole cane sugar (known in Costa Rica as *tapa de dulce*) is melted in a large container with water, adding cinnamon, cloves, or other spices to the dried pulp. The mixture is cooked until it becomes the caramel color of the sugarcane.

El chiverre plays a big role in the Tico psyche. It represents the time of joy and holidays that comes with *Semana Santa* and the big belly that comes from overeating. It’s also a link to the past, to the grandmothers who prepared delicious empanadas to share with their loved ones, and as a link to the times of Costa Rica’s pre-Columbian, permanent residents.

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# A DAY IN THE LIFE

by Allen Dickinson

## Why I got my Residency

This is the story of an ill-fated Visa renewal trip (aka, border run) I made some years ago. I had been putting off applying for residency but this trip gave me the impetus to take the residency application step. I ran across the tale when I was looking through some old files and thought that relating it now might be a good lesson about how delaying applying for residency can backfire.

This time I decided to go to Panama to renew my visa; previous trips had been to Nicaragua and I wanted to see something different. The bus departed in the late afternoon.

The route was over the mountains, the road the Ticos call the Cerro de la Muerte, from Cartago through San Isidro de General. I had brought a book, which was a good idea because by the time we got to San Isidro it had started raining outside and the humidity caused the bus windows to fog up. Soon it was dark and in a few hours we were at the border. Transit between countries was smooth and uneventful and we were soon on our way to David; I intended to disembark there to spend my “out of country” time.

After entering Panama the bus made several roadside stops and people got on or off. My book was engrossing and I continued reading while I waited for the bus to pull into the terminal in David, which I assumed would be well lit so I'd know I when we arrived. A little later I realized that while I had been reading quite a bit of time had passed and it seemed like we should have gotten to David already. I went forward and asked the bus driver, “How long until we reach David? His reaction was a moment of stunned silence, then said, “David is about an hour behind us.”

It was my turn to be stunned. What I didn't know is that there is not “terminal” in David; that the bus just stops at an unlit roadside bus stop on the main highway on the outskirts of town. There, passengers who were bound for local destinations got off and took taxis into downtown David or wherever.

Luckily the bus driver had lived and worked in New York City for some years and spoke excellent English. “Uh, what should I do?” I asked.

“Well, you could get off now and maybe catch a northbound bus in a few hours and go back to David. Or, you can go on to Panama City with me. Or, I could let you off at the next stop, which is in Santiago. It's about halfway to Panama City. Hey, you want to sit up here with me? We can talk.”

It was dark and rainy so standing at the side of the road for a few hours didn't sound too appealing. Option two didn't strike my fancy either; I had no desire to see the canal or city. Santiago it would be, and I settled into the vacant seat opposite the driver. The view should have been great, the huge window in the front of the bus was a few feet away, except it was dark... and rainy... and the wiper wasn't on. I couldn't even see the road to know how many lanes there were. The driver and I had a nice, but short, conversation and before long it had run its course. In a moment of silence I asked him if he could turn on the wiper on my side (at least I'd be able to see if we were about to have a head-on collision or something.)

“It's broken.” he said.

Back in my original seat there had been a light and I could read my book, but up front, in my “VIP seat,” there was no light. I didn't want to seem rude to the kindly driver, and leave him alone so, for the next .... I'm not sure how long ... all I could do was ride in silence and watch the rain-streaked glass through which occasional headlights would appear. Late night traffic apparently isn't too common in rural Panama.

At about 1:00 a.m. we pulled into Santiago. This was a real terminal with diagonal slots for a dozen buses (two were occupied) and everything was very brightly lit. There was a clean and modern passenger landing area, two restaurants, one regular, one cafeteria style, and both were open! Also attached to the terminal complex was a motel. My driver buddy told me that he was sure I could get a room there, no problem, so I

got off the bus, waved goodbye to my new friend, and headed for the motel desk.

It took several minutes for someone to show up at the desk, but when they did I was smilingly informed, "Sorry, we are full!"

After confirming what I couldn't believe I had heard the first time, I turned and walked back to the bus area... just in time to see my friend and his huge bus pulling away. Well, that narrowed my choices down!

I stood outside the terminal on the edge of the road and eventually was able to wave down a taxi. Cabs were scarce that time of night too. "Take me to a motel, please."

"Si, Señor"

We went about a half-mile down the road and then pulled into a nice looking motel. I had the driver wait. "No, Señor, we are full."

Back to the cab. "Llena. Un otro?"

"Si, Señor!" and off we went again. The next motel didn't look as nice, but I was getting tired and didn't care. Strike three, it too was sold out.

As we had gone south I had noticed a seedy establishment a mile or so back on the opposite side of the divided highway. I had seen a disreputable-looking group of guys standing outside but I was getting desperate and didn't care. I instructed the driver to head back. Last chance or I might be renting the back seat of his cab for a few hours!

A high-speed run back up the highway ended in the dirt parking lot of the run-down motel I had seen. I exited the car, made my way through the group of guys I had noticed — all of whom were holding beer bottles and talking soccer — to the office window, which was about five-feet above the outside ground level, and inquired about a room.

"Si, Señor! Es 30 USD." I took it! (Normally I'd think the price was a bit high, but compared to camping out in the back seat of a taxi with the meter running, it didn't seem so bad.) I paid and was handed a three-foot long broom handle with a key securely attached to one end by a welded metal ring. I paid the cabby, retrieved my luggage (one small bag) while a "guide" was summoned from the parking lot to escort me.

The guide was needed. The route to the room was through a rabbit warren of paths between multiple small buildings, all of which were on pilings three feet above the terrain

(must be a flood area, I thought.) The path would have made the old British maze designers proud and I wondered if I would find my way out in the morning.

Our trip ended at a partially opened door; my room. It too was on pilings and the threshold was about chest height. "Open for ventilation, maybe?" I thought; it was hot even at 2 a.m. I quickly learned that the door was blocked by a bed inside which had to be shoved aside to get the door open enough to enter. It was hard to do from the steps below the room's floor level but at that point I was up to the challenge; I needed to get some sleep.

Inside I discovered the room was only slightly larger than the double bed, which was the only furniture in the room. There was, however, a window A/C unit sticking out of the opposite wall. Fingers crossed, I turned it on and it began blowing cool air. Off to the side there was a bathroom about the size of the box a refrigerator comes in. Jammed into the space was a toilet and a shower. There was no shower curtain or anything and it was obvious that one person showering and another using the toilet at the same time was unwise. (On the other hand, one person could do both at the same time without problem, should the need arise.)

Before I undressed I shoved the bed against the inside of the door; a latch and lock were not included in the price. Anyone wanting to rob me would have to move the bed, with me in it. (I never discovered what the key-on-a-stick was for. Maybe defense?)

As I undressed I realized the temperature in the small room was rapidly approaching that of the inside of a commercial food storage locker... and falling. A closer look at the A/C unit revealed that there were no controls, except for the on/off switch, and it was not the original. The fan was permanently set on "hurricane" and the temperature at "arctic" and it was blowing directly on the bed. It was a bit cool but I figured it was better than the high temperature of the room when I entered and I'd deal with it. I just wanted to sleep.

I laid down on the bed and covered myself with the one sheet available but soon decided that cold air from the A/C unit might be good in the daytime, but at night a single sheet wasn't going to be enough. I took socks, underwear, and a T-shirt out of my bag and stuffed them in the hole in the front of the A/C unit where the vents used to be, but the fan blew them out onto the

floor before I could get back in bed. Rather than freeze, I chose to sweat and turned the unit off.

The next morning, early, as the temperature rose above sleeping level, I got up and headed for the shower. What I had failed to notice the night before was that the shower's water supply pipe that was sticking out of the wall did not have a shower head on it; when I turned the water on I was rewarded with a blast of high pressure water... right in the face. Some went up my nose.

An hour later I turned in my broomstick and headed towards the bus terminal – I wanted a seat on the next bus headed back north! It was a hot, one hour walk and when I got to the terminal I learned that the motel desk also handled the ticket sales for the bus,. There I was told that the next bus would be about midnight. OK, could I get a room? “After 11:00” I was told. It was 8:30 a.m. Hmm, what to do?

Restaurant, breakfast, coffee, my book. OK that would work. The food was OK, the coffee good, but my book was finished about 10:00. Now what?

I imposed on the motel desk clerk and left my bag behind the counter with him and went for a walk. Santiago is not a large town. The spacious modern bus depot seemed like a bit of overkill, but OK. About a block away from the terminal was a U-shaped strip mall. Some of the stores were open and by walking slowly I was able to kill most of an hour. I tried walking up a side street but there was nothing to see but residences. By the time I meandered back to the motel it was after 11:00 and I was given a room.

Not only did the room cost less (\$24.00 USD) than what I had paid the night before, but it (one of 64) was the lap of luxury! I laid down on a marvelous bed, turned on a big TV on the wall, set the A/C on cool, and took a three hour nap in the temperature-controlled air.

Refreshed, I awoke at about 2:30. Now what? Long time until the bus comes. Another walk. It was Saturday and this time I found a local car “show” (eight cars) and I was able to talk to a couple of the car owners. Then it was back to the mall to check out the stores that had been closed that morning.

One of the places that was now open was a cafeteria – a Morrison's kinda place, if you know what those are. I was hungry so... One of the things I saw that looked good appeared to be a white sauce lasagna. I got some. It turned out to be a fish and pasta dish, but it was good and I ate it along with some vegetables.

Back to the motel. Some TV (all Spanish) and another nap. About 8:00 p.m. I awakened and went out and checked with the desk clerk; “Yes, the bus would be on time.” I was still tired but decided to not go back to the room fearing I'd fall asleep and miss the bus, so I went to the terminal cafe. Coffee, a piece of cake, and rereading my book. About 11:00 I got my bag from the room, checked out of the motel, then went to the public seating area in the terminal. Midnight came and went. No bus. 1:00. a.m. Same thing. I went to the motel/bus ticket desk and inquired, “Where's the bus?”

“Oh senor, it is on time... it leaves Panama City at 12:00. It should be here about 3:00 a.m.”

About 2:30 a.m. I felt a need to use a bathroom. Because I no longer had a room I chose a public restroom. All went normally and, in the end, for some reason, I decided to take the remainder of the roll of toilet paper with me. That turned out to be a good decision, one of the few I had made recently.

The bus came on time. Guess who the driver was? Yep, it was my friend from the trip down. We had a friendly chat about my time in Santiago and I took a seat. About an hour into the trip I felt an urgent need to use a bathroom. (Yes, the bus had one at the rear.) It was the revenge of the fish lasagna. Thank heavens I had the toilet paper from the motel!

Long story short, before we reached the border I had used the bathroom two more times. A fourth time became necessary just as we pulled into the border facility; while everyone else was exiting I was headed towards the back of the bus. Right after that was when my friendship with the bus driver came to an abrupt end. I was sitting there lamenting the fish lasagna when the bathroom door burst open and the driver appeared exclaiming, “YOU CAN'T DO THAT!” Seems the driver is responsible for cleaning his bus's waste receptacle and he didn't like what I was doing. Unfortunately for him I used the facility two more times before we reached San Jose.

When we arrived at the terminal in San Jose I was empty and exhausted from lack of sleep, intestinal distress, and the long ride back; I just wanted to get home. When I got off the bus and my salutation to the bus driver was ignored, I decided that a longer explanation was probably not going to be welcome and just left. I caught a cab home.

My visa was renewed but on the way back I had vowed I would get the process for residency started without delay!

*NOTE: For those who have fallen for the old-wives-tale that one has to spend 72-hours out of the country to have their visa renewed, like I had ... that is not true! Apparently that myth comes from a misinterpretation of a customs form everyone has to complete when entering Costa Rica which asks if you have imported anything within the previous 72-hours. I repeat, it is a CUSTOMS FORM and has nothing to do with immigration or visas. Old timers here know that all that is legally required to renew their Costa Rica visa is to have their passport stamped in to (and out of) another country. The time lapse between the two events can be an hour or less, which meets Costarican law requirements.*



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# OUT AND ABOUT

by Mitzi Stark

## What to do This Summer



**T**he rainy season is over and there are sunny skies; it's "summer" in Costa Rica! That means it is time to enjoy the warm weather and lazy days in this tropical paradise. Let's find some things to do that are easy on ourselves, the budget, and will get us home in time for an afternoon nap. Or a cool drink.

Museums and churches each have a story to tell, each has a mystery to share. There are some in the central

valley, but by snooping around we may find a secret history wherever we are.

If you live near San Ramón on the western slope of the Central Valley (and even if you don't), it is a great place to visit.

There's not much written about the pre-Columbian history of the area, but it is known to have been inhabited as long as 5,000 years ago. In 2014 a



[Huetar](#) grave dating back 500 years was uncovered in the region. By 1844 settlers from the eastern districts had arrived and created the city and parish of San Ramón, so named because two of the more prominent settlers were named Ramón. The modern small town now has a central park, historic cathedral, and an active museum and cultural center.

Known as “The City of Poets,” San Ramón was part of the “interior” where (supposedly) opponents of the government in the colonial era were sent to get them out of the way. The result was a population that was intellectually active. It remains that way today and with a University of Costa Rica campus and the Figueres Ferrer Center located there, there is much to do.

The Regional Museum on the corner across from the central park is the first place to visit. As part of the University of Costa Rica's connection there is always something interesting going on because students, doing their community service, offer programs, workshops, art classes, robotics, and fairs in all sorts of things. A must see is the model of a giant sloth, just like the real ones that used to inhabit the area. (It took five kilometers of rope to make the hair). As adults we still like to play and the children's library has games, puzzles, puppets, and books to entertain and teach both the little ones and the bigger ones.

The museum building is part of the national patrimony. It was the municipal palace built in 1878, and history buffs



will find it a treat to visit. The two front halls are dedicated to history and local art shows, while the inner courtyard has temporary exhibits. Rooms are available for groups to meet. Consult one of the many student guides or visit the office of the Director inside the museum for information about coming activities. More information can be found on Facebook and Instagram., or check <https://www.so.ucr.ac.cr/es/accionsocial/museo-regional-de-san-ramon>. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed Sundays and Mondays. Admission is Free.

In the center of the **Central Park**, right where all the paths cross, there is a mystery tree. Legend has it that people in this one square block park become confused, disoriented, or lost, and blame it on the tree. Many “Monchos,” as San Ramónians call themselves, swear that they know someone who was affected by the tree. Others claim that any confusion is due to a magnetic field type of thing. The tree has a crumbly bark and is known as a cork tree. Look for it, but watch out!

The huge **cathedral** is next up. It is dedicated to Saint Ramón Nonato (unborn) because back in 1204 he arrived by Caesarian after the death of his mother. He

became a religious leader and the church's patron saint. The patron saint festivities take place on August 31 with huge colorful processions and displays of flowers inside the church. This church was built in the 1920's after an earthquake damaged an earlier building. Visitors are welcome to enter this beautiful church.

Just across the street from the side of the huge cathedral is the **Centro Cultural Jose Figueres Ferrer**. This was the home of Pepe Figueres, Costa Rica's very popular three time president (1948-49, 1953-58, 1970-74.) He was the founder of the modern republic and established many social reforms, including the abolition of the army and significant advancement of women's rights. The first floor contains a museum dedicated to his life and two galleries for art shows. The second floor, accessible by elevator or stairs, has a stage area for programs and concerts, plus room for art shows and classes.

A complete line of activities, classes in music, theater, dance, and art, are offered, some free, others for monthly fees. Additionally, there are musical programs held at noon on every other Wednesday. And there's more! There are special programs ranging from nativity scene contests



to traditional food fairs, held throughout the year. The building is open Tuesday to Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Entrance is free. Check events at [Facebook Centro Cultural e Histórico José Figueres Ferrer](#), and Instagram [centroculturaljff](#). Their phone number is 2447-2178.

San Ramón is located on the Pan American highway midway between San José and Puntarenas, easy to reach by car or bus. Restaurants and shopping are comfortable and it's easy walking around the central area. For those who like to sew or do handicrafts, fabrics and sewing supplies are a specialty with several good shops near the square.

**Alajuela** really doesn't offer much to visitors except as a convenient stopping off place close to the Juan Santamaria airport. However, there are a few things that make a visit to this rural city worthwhile.

Founded in 1782, Alajuela is known as the City of Mangoes. The **Central Park** is full of mango trees that were planted more than 100 years ago to provide food for the poor of the city. The fountain in the

center provided water for the early community. The park is a popular meeting place and includes the "squirrel tree" on the south side, plus peanut vendors for feeding the squirrels. On the east side, across from the cathedral, checker tournaments are held. And, on weekends there may be fairs or music and dancing in the park, depending on weather.

The huge **Cathedral** that dominates the area and covers an entire block goes back to 1854, but has been remodeled in later years. It contains a secret; the heart of strongman President Tomas Guardia ((1870 and 1882) is buried in the central aisle of the church, while the rest of his body is in the crypt of the cathedral in San Jose. Guardia was a forceful leader and brought progress to Costa Rica, establishing the railroad and, along with his wife Emilia Solorzano, promoted education and an end to the death penalty. His statue stands on the corner, diagonal from the park in the spot where his house used to be. The side doors and the little garden are open during the day for a look around the impressive church.

The Juan Santamaria Museum occupies the north side of the square and is worth a tour, including the roof. This 19th century structure was built on a plot of land promised by the original owners for education, but was used as a barracks (cuartel) for the army and later the police headquarters and jail. Barred doors are there as a reminder.

The museum centers around the important campaign of 1856 where the small Costarican army defeated an invading force from North America and guaranteed freedom for the new republic. Most of the displays represent that era, but walk around the building and look at the permanent displays. Ask one of the guards for a tour of the roof (tour de techo) and check out the agenda of activities on [facebook.com/museosantamaria.mcj.cr](https://facebook.com/museosantamaria.mcj.cr)

A three hour walking tour of the city with stories, anecdotes, and secrets is available in English with historian Ronald Castro. You can learn about the origin of Lizano sauce, and about the reputed “communist” church, and many other interesting facts. His tour may include the museum roof. Contact him at 7064 2842, or

on Facebook and Instagram at Alajuela Historica. (My favorite was the church tour.)

The big, pink building on the square is the Cultural Center. Built in 1914 as a municipal building and post office, it unfortunately isn't always open to the public; whether you can go in and look around or not depends on who's on guard duty that day. It provides space for music and art classes and the women's office. There is a legend that underground tunnels connect this building with the museum and the cathedral but historians say that's not true. However, there is a brick-lined shaft in the men's room that leads underground. I have seen it but nobody is sure of where it goes.

Enjoy these sunny, summer days as you explore. And while you do, send your sympathies to those in the cold, snowy regions we left behind.

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# ALWAYS AN ADVENTURE

by Christine Monteith



## We Have Fairy Dust!

**D**iving deep into the lyricism of the English language, the poetic image of "fairy dust" will lead you down a delightful internet rabbit hole of pixies, sprites, and Celtic myths. According to the OED, "fairy dust" (as first written by Robert Browning in the 1840s) had its origin elsewhere. Some scholars believed that it was made from the first spring blossoming of forest flowers, while others argued that it was powdered cocoons of a rare moth species that bred in the spring.

For allergy sufferers, the romantic musings about "fairy dust" are lost in the discomfort and frustration of stuffy noses and serial sneezing. Not being a victim to this

particular malady, I welcome the crystal blue sky and brilliant sunshine of January. After the dormancy of the torrential rains of November, the fruit trees, pineapple plants, and flowering bushes are bursting with fresh growth. This exuberant plant energy lures a myriad of pollinators to sip at their riches.

The early dry season is one of my favorite times of the year. I gratefully appreciate sparkling mornings in the surf and the firefly-filled warm evenings as my friends and relatives in Canada wade through knee-high snowdrifts and bundle up against freezing temperatures. During the months of January and February our property



on the Golfo Dulce is aflutter with fairies. Uh, I mean butterflies, hummingbirds, moths, bees, and bats. Almost every morning while walking with the dogs I see giant blue morphos fluttering along the edge of the forest. The *Urania* moth is almost as spectacular as a morpho. Though smaller in size, it sports spectacular midnight black wings with stripes of neon green. The first time that I saw an Owl Butterfly I was impressed. It had been described to me by a neighbor, but in real life it was awesome. These flutterers are just the top tier of our visitors. There are numerous other species coming by too, ranging from tiny white moths the size of my thumbnail, to complex patterned swallowtails, monarchs, and many more.

While foraging star fruit, pineapple, or anona, I often hear the thrum of a pixie/hummingbird as it zips past my head. Sometimes, it flies so close that I feel a faint brush of its wings against my cheek. Most pineapples are self-pollinated yet the hummingbirds enjoy sipping from the new sprout's flower.

In the last year, the most exciting development are the vanilla vines. A friend gave us about 20 meters of vanilla vine that he'd been growing on his farm a couple

of miles away. And, as the research tells us, commercial vanilla flowers have to be hand-pollinated in order for beans to sprout. Our friend said that his vanilla vines had extended all across several of his trees and that a few beans had appeared.

My husband Ben draped the vines through the cacao trees and when he noticed a few flowers he used a toothpick to scrape pollen from the anther cap and apply it to the stigma. He dutifully conducted this procedure a few times with no result, so we decided to let nature take its course. Well, we must have some of the rare vanilla pollinator bees (or sprites) living nearby. To our delight, we discovered three vanilla beans! Next step... fermenting vanilla (a procedure four times as complex as pollinating) is another story. What is most exciting is that chocolate and vanilla, two of our favorite flavors, are thriving.

The cacao trees are more than just the support structure for the vanilla vine. They are the field for our pitched battle with the squirrels. Those bushy-tailed rascals are chowing down on the ripe cacao pods. I guess that gives them the frenetic energy to

race over to the young coconut trees, scrape through the tough shells, and drink all the coconut water. In retaliation we are harvesting the cacao pods just before they turn yellow. However, we haven't found a method to counter the attack on the pipas (young coconuts.) Until the squirrels discovered our pipas we let the nuts mature until the bottom of the shell wrinkled. At that point the coconut water is sweet and the meat is crunchy and tasty. Unfortunately for us, the squirrels prefer their coconut water young.



Until I moved to Costa Rica I didn't think much about how my favorite flavors like chocolate or vanilla are produced. Conveniently, I purchased a bottle of 'real vanilla' from the store or unwrapped a chocolate bar. Now, seeing a cacao flower that eventually sprouts a pod, or holding a vanilla bean as it hangs from the vine, seems like magic. My logical mind understands it is simply nature, but watching the brilliant butterflies and hovering hummingbirds my

whimsical imagination makes it easy for me to believe in the magic of fairy dust.

*Christine has had the good fortune to live, work, and travel around the world, and now is happily ensconced in tropical tranquility near the Golfo Dulce with one husband, two dogs, and four hens.*

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Duty Officer (after business hours): (506) 2519-2000  
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## United Kingdom Embassy

Phone: (506) 2258 2025

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

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

Email: [costarica.consulate@fco.gov.uk](mailto:costarica.consulate@fco.gov.uk)

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

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

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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)

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Meters × 3.28 = Feet

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Square meters × 10,000 = Hectares

Hectares × 2.47 = Acres

Kilometers × .62 = Miles

Centigrade × 1.8 + 32 = Fahrenheit

Liters × .264 = Gallons

(These are APPROXIMATE factors, NOT EXACT.)

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# FROM THE EMBASSIES



## PUT A LOCAL SPIN ON YOUR FAVOURITE TRADITION

Settling into a new country is an exciting but often challenging experience. One of the most rewarding ways to ease into your new life is by blending your own traditions with the local culture, as you develop a deeper appreciation for your new home.

This new year, if you aren't already doing this, we invite you to make a few resolutions to enjoy the best of both worlds!

Bring afternoon tea to the tropics: Turn a Costarican coffee break into a British-inspired afternoon tea. Use local ingredients like fresh tropical fruit to complement scones and clotted cream (or the best approximation you can whip up). Invite your Costarican friends to experience this quintessentially British ritual.

Keep Sunday traditions alive: Miss a classic Sunday roast? Try recreating it with a local twist. Swap traditional potatoes for yucca or plantains, and pair your roast with a refreshing glass of chilled hibiscus tea instead of your usual ale. It's a perfect way to bring family and friends together, blending traditions old and new.

Celebrate the outdoors: A love of countryside walks can easily be continued in Costa Rica. Trade rolling hills for lush rainforests or beachside strolls. Make it a resolution to explore a new trail or national park each month, connecting with Costa Rica's spectacular biodiversity while staying true to your love of nature.

Mark British holidays with local flair: Whether it's Pancake Day or Guy Fawkes Night, add a Costa Rican touch to your celebrations. Why not serve pancakes with dulce de leche for Shrove Tuesday or light sparklers by the beach on Bonfire Night? Sharing these traditions with new friends creates lasting memories.

Give back to your community: Both British and Costa Rican cultures emphasise the importance of giving back. Make a resolution to support a local charity or volunteer for community projects. It's a wonderful way to show gratitude for your new home while upholding values that are important to you.

By blending British traditions with Costa Rican culture, you can create a unique, fulfilling lifestyle that honours the best of both worlds. Here's to a joyful and meaningful 2025!



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# SOUTHERN LIVING

by Adelia E. Ritchie



## Pothole Slalom: Driving in Costa Rica

**D**riving in Costa Rica is always an adventure, even under the best conditions. Mountain roads are steep and curvy, with abrupt drop-offs not protected by guard rails. Pedestrians, hoping to remain invisible, wear black when walking the streets at night. Fortunately, they can often be spotted by the light from their cell phones, which is the sole focus of their attention.

Yes, it's the end of the rainy season, also called the "green season." This is the time of year when it rains every single day, usually in the afternoon, but sometimes — like most of November — the rain never stops, causing landslides, collapsed highways, fallen trees across roads and power lines, and, yes, the ubiquitous annual pothole infestation. Dodging them requires skill and solid back teeth.

Before I go there — to current road conditions and two flat tires already this month — I should mention that potholes are almost friendly compared to routine daily driving hazards here:

### ONE-LANE BRIDGES

You're driving up a steep mountain hill on a narrow two-lane track when a Jake-brake-screaming 18-wheeler comes barreling towards you, his trailer occupying most of your lane. He's waving at you to "Move over!" Hidden under a banana leaf at the edge of the road, you spot a bent sign, "Ceda el paso," indicating a one-lane bridge two meters ahead of your front bumper. The titanic transport is already halfway across as you wrestle your speeding automobile to a

halt, preferably with at least three tires still in contact with the pavement.

Those one-way bridges are less about traffic rules and more about who has the guts to drive onto it first. First-timers may or may not survive without leaving a load in their pants. For experienced Costarican drivers, this covers the main rjles:

- . “The Courtesy Standoff”: Two cars meet at opposite ends. Both drivers insist the other go first, leading to an awkward standoff, both cars flashing their headlights at the other. It’s like a politeness duel: “No, YOU go!”
- . “The Overconfident Charge”: Beware the driver who doesn’t pause to look, barreling onto the bridge, cell phone in hand, leaving oncoming drivers to quickly reverse before everyone ends up in the river.
- . “Who Can Reverse Better?”: One driver realizes halfway across that they should have yielded. Now it’s time to test their reversing skills. (My rule for driving in Costa Rica? NEVER back up. There is always an unseen death trap waiting to snag your right rear tire.)
- . “Unwritten Rules Roulette”: One must yield to the car already on the bridge. But what happens when both drivers claim they were there first? Honestly, this is rare. The real problem is when traffic begins to stack up behind both vehicles frozen in indecision... and no one wants to back up, and soon no one can.

C’mon! It’s the rainy season. Mind you, generally speaking, many roads in Costa Rica are excellent. In fact, the main highway through the country, the Interamericana, was built in part by the US Corps of Engineers. But this time of year, roads turn to fishing holes, paved or not paved. Driving unpaved roads in the rainy season can be exactly the same as driving in knee-deep, crunchy peanut butter.

**WHAT CAUSES POTHOLES, ANYWAY?** Potholes in unpaved roads, especially in the tropics, form due to a combination of water dynamics, soil mechanics, and traffic stress.

Here, heavy rains are common, leading to saturated soils. Water reduces friction between soil particles, especially for clay-rich soils common in Costa Rica, which expand and become as slick as you-know-what when wet.

Pressure and repetitive stress — especially from heavy transports and earth-moving machines — displace soil

and force water to the surface. Loose soil is pushed aside, creating ruts and depressions. Flowing water along road surfaces carries away loose particles and deepens existing depressions. On slopes, gravity accelerates this erosion. And every time a vehicle encounters a pothole, its edges are further eroded and the hole is enlarged.

The photo is my road this morning on the way to town: swimming pools, meteor craters, fishing holes?

Normally, I prefer to drive straight over smaller potholes, my wheels straddling the hole. But sometimes, like in the photo above, finding a clear track is impossible. And sometimes, it’s prudent to stop the car and check the depth of the bigger ones. That puddle might be a tiny splash or a car-swallowing abyss. Some say you can see China through some of these.

## TOURIST SEASON

There’s a reason “high season” begins in November, when the rains start to subside. This is when bazillions of tourists begin flooding in (pun intended) with their shiny rental cars. I am reminded of my former life as a consultant back in the States, always on the road, when my driver remarked, “There’s no curb too high for a rental car.” Similarly, here, there’s no pothole too deep.

I’m not complaining. Really. It’s all part of Pura Vida, and we all adapt to it and wait for it to end when the road resurfacing machines show up. Soon. Please. Pretty please with a mango on top?

For this expat, many things about living in Costa Rica were scary the first time: buying a house, getting a bank account, driving the Cerro de la Muerte, and backing up in the car. This beautiful place is not for everyone, and certainly not for the faint-hearted, but for those with a sense of adventure and strong bowel control, it’s divine. Pura Vida.

*Adelia Ritchie is an editor, author, scientist, and technical writer. Her recent book, “The Accidental Expat: A Costa Rican Adventure,” was inspired by her adventures in setting up a household in the Southern Zone, where she currently resides.*



# THE VIEW FROM DOWNTOWN

by Michael Miller



## Delicious Food and Amazing Art in One Old House

**W**hen Orvieto Morales was a little boy he went to school at the pink steel building in downtown San José known as the Edificio Metalico. After school he would often walk a couple of blocks to the stylish and beautiful neighborhood called Barrio Amon, where he could visit many of his aunts and uncles and cousins who lived in some of the magnificent homes there.

Today, Orvieto Morales once again spends a good deal of his time in a beautiful old home in Barrio Amon. Now, however, he is not visiting relatives. Instead he is running one of the finest restaurants in San José, the Orvieto Restaurante: Cocina de Autor (Signature Cuisine), which is located on the ground floor of one of the classic Barrio Amon homes built at the beginning of the 20th century.



The house, built in 1910, features expansive rooms, high ceilings, and is on the historic registry of Costa Rica. Chef Orvieto tells us that he wanted to take advantage of the beautiful setting to create a restaurant for casual dining that also has great ambiance. “I hoped to provide a nice place for lunch and dinner,” he said modestly.

Well, he has definitely done that!

Orvieto Restaurante has become a popular favorite and it has been getting rave reviews. His dishes take advantage of the abundance of the fresh produce, meats, and seafoods that Costa Rica has to offer. He buys lettuces, radicchio, basil, and many other vegetables from carefully selected local farmers. Much of his seafood comes fresh from the Gulf of Nicoya on the Pacific Coast. He has also found farmers who provide his restaurant with some of the best meat products in the country; Costa Rica is

often ridiculed for the poor quality of its steaks and beef but Chef Orvieto has agreements with ranchers near Coronado (to the east of San José) and Sarapiquí (north of Heredia) who provide top quality black angus and brahman beef.

Orvieto Restaurante is often considered a “Mediterranean restaurant” but Chef Orvieto says he does not want it tagged as a theme restaurant. He says, “As much as possible, I want to make this a farm-to-table restaurant, without borders.”

Chef Orvieto got his early training in Mexico and he often visits Italy. It is clear that he has been greatly influenced by these two countries. You can see, and taste, that influence with some of his more popular dishes. For example, two of his most popular starters are Parmesan Croquettes and Ceviche Tropicales. The croquettes are



appetizers the size and shape of golf balls, made with Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. The Ceviche Tropicales is a wonderfully creative dish bursting with surprising flavors, made with passion fruit, coconut milk, chipotle, spearmint, and lime juice.

The menu includes main dishes with seafood and meats. Orvieto tells us that one of the most popular entrees is beef tenderloin in black truffle butter. My friends and I love his pasta dishes, and I think his pasta with osso buco is to die for.

In addition to good food, Orvieto Restaurante can also provide lots of fun. This classic old home actually has a backyard (something you rarely see in downtown San José.) People often gather there with glasses of wine where, during the evenings, they can watch old silent-era movies projected on the yard wall. On Friday and Saturday evenings there is a piano player who draws a crowd.

The restaurant has a wine selection from Chile, Argentina, Spain, and Italy. Although they do not currently have a

permanent bar, the restaurant sets up a temporary bar in the backyard when people gather there, and they can make many popular cocktails for you.

Orvieto Restaurante is open from noon to 10 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and from noon to 4 p.m. on Sundays. It is located on Calle 11, the cross street is Avenida 9. That puts it about 50 meters north of the big INS insurance tower.

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As wonderful as Orvieto Restaurante is, there is another equally important reason to visit this historic home; on the second floor is one of the most important art galleries in San José, Galeria Talentum.

Readers of my stories about downtown San José may remember an article I wrote a few years back about Galeria Talentum when it was in a building on Avenida 11 next to the Toarmina Hotel. The owner and director of the gallery, Gabriella Catarinella, purchased the current location in 2022 and moved the gallery there.



Take the stairs up to Galeria Talentum and enjoy the art on display. They change the works every two months so you can visit the restaurant and gallery many times a year and always see something new. Sra. Catarinella says when deciding what to display she tries to maintain a balance; they will display the works of new, “emerging” artists along with more established, more famous, artists. For example, as I write this, Galeria Talentum is honored to be displaying works of the celebrated artist Fernando Carballo.

Sr. Carballo is from Cartago and was recently awarded the Magón National Culture Award, one of the highest recognitions awarded by Costa Rica. His works can be found in important collections in the United States, Mexico, all over Europe ... and of course, here in Costa Rica.

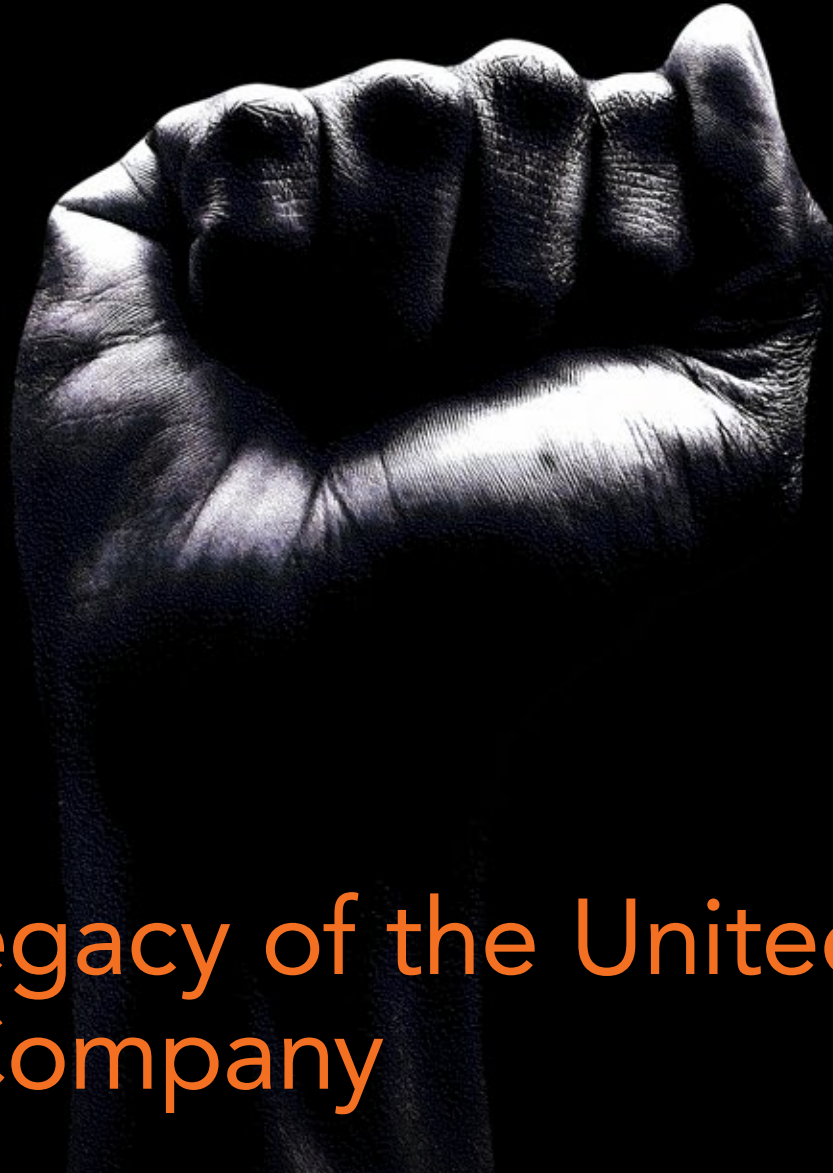
You can visit Galeria Talentum for free; it is open when the restaurant is open. Once you are in this wonderful old home you just need to climb the stairs.

I have always maintained that San José is a city of surprises. This beautiful old home is a wonderful example. This is another reason why I call downtown San José the “heart and soul” of Costa Rica. The Orvieto Restaurante and Galeria Talentum are included on the Walking Tour of downtown San José, which emphasizes Costa Rica's history and culture. The tours are conducted by the renowned tour guide Nury Mora of The Real San José Tours. You can contact them at: [TheRealSanJose@gmail.com](mailto:TheRealSanJose@gmail.com)

*Michael Miller is the author of the unique first-person guidebook that focuses on downtown San José, San José, Costa Rica, A stroll through the “heart and soul” of Costa Rica's capital city. Copies are available at Amazon (both Kindle and in paperback). To link to Michael Miller's Amazon Author Page, [click here](#)*

# LEGAL UPDATE

by Romulo Pacheco



## The Legacy of the United Fruit Company

**A**t first this may seem like just a history lesson, but in fact the laws of modern Costa Rica are deeply intertwined with the history of foreign corporations. Particularly of note is United Fruit Company (UFCO), which played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic landscape of the nation, making it what it is today. While the events of the 19th century are often overshadowed by the events of the 20th, the strikes and labor movements during that period laid the groundwork for the struggles that would follow and the ultimate formation of the nation as it is today.

### THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Founded in the 19th century, the United Fruit Company emerged as a dominant force in Central America, particularly in Costa Rica, where it established vast banana plantations. The company promised economic growth, modernization, and to contribute to the development of infrastructure such as railroads and ports. This progress, however, came at a significant cost to the local population because UFCO's practices often

prioritized profit over the welfare of workers, leading to exploitative labor conditions, low wages, and a lack of basic rights for Costarican laborers.

The company's influence extended beyond economics; it became a political powerhouse wielding considerable control over the Costarican government. This relationship fostered an environment where the interests of foreign corporations often took precedence over the needs and rights of local citizens. The repercussions of this were felt acutely during the labor strikes of the 19th century, which were a response to the oppressive conditions perpetuated by the United Fruit Company and similar enterprises.

## THE STRIKES: A FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

The strikes were a manifestation of growing discontent among workers who sought better wages, improved working conditions, and the right to organize. These labor movements were not isolated incidents; they were part of a broader struggle against colonial legacies and the exploitation of local resources by foreign entities. Workers, many of whom were indigenous or of mixed descent, faced significant challenges in their fight for rights and often met with resistance from both the UFCO and the government.

The strikes highlighted the stark inequalities present in Costarican society, where the wealth generated by banana exports was concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority of workers lived in poverty. The demands of the striking workers were not merely economic; they represented a call for dignity, respect, and recognition of their contributions to the nation's economy. The labor movements of this era laid the foundation for future activism and the labor rights of Costaricans today.

## THE AFTERMATH AND REFLECTION

The legacy of the United Fruit Company and the 19th-century strikes is a reminder of the complexities of globalization and foreign investment. While UFCO contributed to the economic development of Costa Rica, it also exposed the vulnerabilities of local laborers and fostered the socio-economic disparities that arose from foreign dominance. The aftermath of the strikes saw a gradual awakening of labor rights consciousness among Costarican workers, leading to the establishment of unions and organized labor movements in the following decades.

## THE PATH FORWARD: LABOR RIGHTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In the wake of the strikes, Costa Rica began to see the emergence of a more organized labor movement. Workers, inspired by their predecessors, sought to unite and advocate for their rights more effectively. This period marked the beginning of a long struggle for labor rights, which would gain momentum throughout the 20th century, culminating in significant reforms and the establishment of labor laws that aimed to protect workers' rights.

The legacy of the United Fruit Company and the labor movements of the 19th century serves as a crucial chapter in Costa Rica's history. It highlights the importance of recognizing the contributions of all workers to the nation's economy and the need for equitable treatment and fair labor practices. As Costa Rica continues to navigate the complexities of globalization and foreign investment, the lessons learned from this period remain relevant, reminding policymakers and citizens alike of the importance of prioritizing human rights and social justice in economic development.

The strikes in Costa Rica, influenced by the practices of the United Fruit Company, were not just labor disputes; they were a significant part of the broader narrative of resistance against exploitation and inequality. They laid the groundwork for future labor rights movements and highlighted the ongoing struggle for dignity and respect among workers. As we reflect on this legacy, it is essential to continue advocating for the rights of all workers and ensuring that economic progress does not come at the expense of human dignity. The story of Costa Rica's labor movements is a testament to the resilience of its people and their enduring fight for justice and equality.

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# 11 Common Mistakes When Buying Land



Costa Rica, with its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant culture, and reputation as a peaceful haven, has become a prime destination for those seeking to restructure their lives. And in the process many purchase land. A lack of knowledge, plus the excitement of buying land they fell in love with, are common reasons for rushing into a purchase... and that can lead to costly mistakes.

Buying land is pretty simple for those who do it all the time, but even experienced buyers from other latitudes need to learn some crucial details that can negatively influence a purchase. You might think you are safe when purchasing a lot in a subdivision or from a developer, but you might be in for some surprises; read on.

No matter where the land is located, a primary precaution is do not buy land from a private seller, a realtor, or a real

estate developer on sheer promises. Real estate agents and developers will sometimes make promises... and not deliver. Some common ones are:

- . The city will pave the road in front of the property this year
- . The water company is putting in a new waterline next year
- . The developer will install all the utilities underground

Eventually, you will probably want to build a home or some other type of structure on the land you purchase. It doesn't matter if it is on a public road, an easement, in a subdivision or a gated community, don't purchase land here without complete information. Here are eleven mistakes buyers often make:

## 1. FAILING TO CHECK FOR POTABLE WATER

We all know about the importance of water in our daily lives. Not ensuring the availability of potable water on the property is a huge mistake. It's important to note that you cannot obtain a building permit from the municipality where the land is located without proof of water availability. So how and where can you get that proof?

The seller should have obtained a water letter or “Carta de agua” from the official source controlling the water in the area. There are three possibilities of institutions that can issue a water letter, depending a lot on where the property is:

- . A y A (Acuaductos y Acantarillados).
- . Asada for water. (An asada is a cooperative or association)
- . Private registered water well or water concession on the property, controlled by Dirección de Agua, a subdivision of MINAE.

If the seller offers proof of water access from other than one of the three above, check with your lawyer before proceeding.

## 2. NOT CHECKING THE SURVEY MAP

The plat, or survey map, is called a “Plano catastrado.” It is a map of the property, drawn by a surveyor and registered at the Cadaster or Catastro Nacional. The survey map shows the size of the property, its location, the boundaries of the property, and much more.

Not asking the seller or real estate agent for a copy of the survey map of the land, and checking it, is a huge mistake. It is a good practice to, with that copy in hand, stand at the property and see if it makes sense with the lay of the land. This is a critical exercise that allows you to make a preliminary check of the neighborhood and the land you are buying. It is also essential to check the plat for a stamp that says “visado,” which is the municipal approval of the survey map.

Is there a river or creek on or bordering the property? Because you cannot build on a setback, you want to know what the setbacks or “alineamiento fluvial” are from that waterway. The size of the setbacks can be between 10 and 40 meters depending on the size of the river, and can be

obtained at the National Institute for Housing and Urban Development (INVU).

## 3. NEGLECTING TO HIRE A SURVEYOR

We ALWAYS recommend using a surveyor to check the property's boundaries. When there are several vacant neighboring properties, knowing which one you are buying can be challenging. You don't want to start construction on the wrong property, do you?

It is wise, as part of the purchase–sales agreement option, to stipulate a re-survey of the property before closing, at your cost, to confirm location, boundaries, and size.

## 4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND BUILDING RESTRICTIONS

Costa Rica has strict environmental laws to protect its biodiversity. Properties near national parks, wetlands, or protected areas may face restrictions on development. It is a mistake to not hire an environmental consultant or lawyer to check whether the land adheres to these regulations, particularly regarding river, beach, or forest setbacks.

## 5. NOT CHECKING FOR FLOODING

Another issue to not avoid when buying land is determining if the property is close to the same elevation as a nearby waterway. You might not realize it when purchasing during the dry season, but what can appear as just a small stream can turn into a raging river during the rainy season, one that may flood and create more damage than you'd like. It is a good idea to talk to neighbors and see what they can tell you about what happens during the rainy season.

## 6. FAILING TO CHECK THE ZONING

It may appear to the casual observer that Costa Rica does not have any zoning laws. And true, not every city has a zoning plan. Some municipalities even rely on the GAM (Greater Area Metropolitan) rules for zoning. But not requesting zoning, or “Uso de Suelo,” information from the seller before buying is a mistake. You need to know what building restrictions the zoning carries for the land you are contemplating buying. The zoning will tell you about the density and other information, which can be important for your building plans. Requesting zoning rules will also protect you from building in protected areas or areas that require geological studies.

## 7. NOT ORDERING SOIL STUDIES

Is soil replacement necessary where you will build your house? Maybe the topsoil is all clay and doesn't drain, or maybe garbage was used as fill years ago? Do not make the blunder of not ordering soil studies. They are not expensive but are well worth the investment; they will tell you if the land is stable, if you need soil replacement, retainer walls, or other costly investments you were not considering.

## 8. NOT HIRING AN ARCHITECT

Not hiring an architect to inspect the building lot you plan to purchase is another mistake some buyers make. An architect can give you a professional view of the quality of the property, the best construction site, what direction the wind (and rain) come from, where the drainage should go, how to take advantage of views, and other great tips. The architect might even recommend not purchasing the land and looking for alternatives.

## 9. SKIPPING DUE DILIGENCE

One of the most significant errors a buyer can make is failing to conduct thorough research on the property. Understanding zoning regulations, verifying property boundaries, and confirming the land's intended use are all crucial. Be aware that illegal actions around numbers 1-8 above have been known to happen. Consider that lawyers rarely visit the property they're transferring into your name on their own, so be sure to have them consult the National Registry so that they can ensure that the property is free of legal disputes or liens.

## 10. FAILING TO CONFIRM ACCESS AND UTILITIES

Many properties in Costa Rica are in remote or undeveloped areas. Buyers often neglect to check for the availability of essential utilities like water, electricity, and internet, or for legal access to roads. Obtaining permits for utilities can be lengthy and costly, so ensure these are in place before finalizing the purchase.

## 11. UNDERESTIMATING MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT COSTS

While land in Costa Rica can seem affordable, the costs of maintaining and developing it can quickly add up. Factors like clearing vegetation, building access roads,

and installing infrastructure are often underestimated. Budget carefully and consult with local contractors to get accurate estimates.

## SUMMARY

Buying land in Costa Rica can be an excellent investment and a step toward an enriched lifestyle, but it requires careful planning and informed decision-making. By avoiding these eleven mistakes you'll protect your investment and ensure a positive and rewarding experience in one of the world's most beautiful countries. Take your time, research, and rely on trusted local expertise to make your Costarican property dreams a reality.

*Ivo Henfling is a Dutch expat who has lived in Costa Rica for forty years. He founded the American-European Real Estate Group, the first functioning MLS with affiliate agents from coast to coast, in 1999. He is the broker/owner of GoDutch Realty and can be reached at (506) 2289-5125 or (506) 8834-4515 or email to: [ivo@american-european.net](mailto:ivo@american-european.net)*



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### MARINE CORPS LEAGUE COSTA RICA

Website: [marinecorpsleaguecr.com](http://marinecorpsleaguecr.com) - Facebook: mcleaguecr

Andrew "Andy" Pucek: (506) 8721-6636

Meets 2nd Saturday of the month, Tap House Restaurant, City Place, Santa Ana, 11:00 am

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Exclusiva del  INS

# ALAJUELA NORTH

by Berni Jubb



## Costa Rica Indigenous Art. Where to find it.

**A**re you working on the final touches of your new Costa Rican abode and realize your walls are bare and you have not seen much in the way of interesting art since you arrived here? Costa Rica may not be an artistic Mecca, but with a touch of curiosity and a spirit of adventure, you might just stumble upon another Shangri-La. So where can you find something original and very local to hang on those bare walls? Something that tells the story of this beautiful land every day?

Welcome to a challenging task. Costa Rica, compared to Mexico, Guatemala, and Ecuador with their rich traditions of art, is almost completely devoid of it. It's not that individual artists can't be found, but when compared to the bustling expanse of Ecuador's Otavalo Market, Costa Rica's artisans might seem like a quiet whisper. There are no "art towns" that some may want (though Boruca is VERY good), but what art there is here is elusive, hidden away, and discovering it requires patience, curiosity, and a touch of perseverance.



So here's a little compendium from our travels in Costa Rica. As we explore the country we try to stay on "the road less traveled" and find our way to new and interesting places, usually on our way to something else.

## CHOROTEGAN

We'll start with the northern Pacific and the home of the Chorotega indigenous. The Chorotega make nice decorated clay pots. You can find them along roadside stands around the Nicoya peninsula as well as in many gift shops, but the best place to buy them is the village of Guaitil in central Nicoya. The village center is a field surrounded by pottery makers. The Chorotegans are almost extinct, not so much in their

existence (they are not dying off or dispersing) but as to their identity. Ask a Chorotegan who they are and they may not necessarily say Chorotegan, unlike, say, the Brunkans. Either way, there are real craftspeople at work in this village and surrounding area. It is easy to find pottery in any gift shop or along roadsides of Guanacaste, but Guaitil is a small detour passing through the Nicoya peninsula.

## MALEKU

You might find the Maleku villages off Highway 4 between Monterrey and San Rafael. Be careful when setting your GPS to San Rafael as Costa Rica has 47 of them. The best spot to find Maleku art is driving north from Monterrey,

just before Reserva Indigena Maleku Capi Capi. There are artists within the Maleku towns like San Rafael de Guatuso (the main hub of the Maleku) but you won't find them. The reserve village is also well worth driving in to and visiting. The Maleku are not hard to find, less than an hour from the tourist center of La Fortuna, and it is a shame so many travelers never find these cultural centers.

## BRUNKAN

Our favorite hub of artesanía is without doubt the Brunkan villages to the south, a few km off Highway 2 in Boruca, Rey Curre, etc. The quality of the jungle representations and paintings are really good (you will find them at the airport too but they are nowhere near as good as the work of the best village artists.) They also make some rough textiles. Boruca village is your best stop, but you will find art if you look closely in other villages like Rey Curre. I cannot imagine visiting Costa Rica without a stop and learning about the Brunkans. Once, many years ago, a super old dude in a Brunkan hut told us that Boruca



was on the conquistador route from the Caribbean and there is Spanish gold in the hills. CAUTION: I do not advise driving into Boruca in the afternoon or when it is raining; a 4X4 is essential. Possibly the best artists can be found in Boruca, yet almost no tourists ever go there even though it is less than two hours from Uvita.



Deep in Brunkan territory in the Terraba/Buenos Aires area off Highway 2 there is some reputed Broran art that differs from Brunkan art. We know it is there because the locals say it is (you can't make this up) ... and we have seen photos. We have tried a couple of expeditions and though people said we were heading to a Broran village at one point, we never found one piece of art. We later discovered an interesting curiosity; the Brorans are hard to find because they do not believe in towns or villages. I find that charmin.

## HUETAR

If you look hard enough you will find one last Quitirissi village of the Huetar with one last artist (well, we only ever met one) making traditional black pottery. He is off Route 239 south west of San Jose. It took us a LONG time to find this guy; his name is Rafael Sanchez and he's about 40 minutes west of San José. There is also some basket weaving in the general area.



## NGÖBE-BUGLE

In the far south of the country there are the Ngöbe-Bugle group, but no traces of art were discovered the times we were there. The Ngöbe-Bugle have a fascinating story, but they are unlikely to tell it to you. Pretty much no tourists ever find this area. It is centered on a town called La Casona, off route 237 heading south from Pérez Zeledón. If you are a newbie here you may wonder why I say Pérez Zeledón, yet

your map shows a large town called San Isidro de El General? There are many mysteries for a newbie to Costa Rica and this shall remain one of them. Just follow Route 237 south from Pérez should you seek out Ngöbe-Bugle art, but I warn you (except for Galeria Namu in San José), we have never found any.



## BRIBRI

Over on the Caribbean side there are some rumored artists and we once found two unfinished paintings after a day of searching with a local. They also make some masks as well as other artesanía like bows & arrows, but they sell primarily cacao in a raw state from which we make chocolate coffee. The more southern Bribri inhabit and manage all the territory inland from Puerto Viejo, and the Cabécar run the territory north from there up towards the Turrialba area.

## CABÉCAR

As part of the recent Indigenous Games project we spent some time in this gorgeous territory and can highly recommend it for visitors. As far as art goes, we found zip, zilch. However, we did discover a unique connection to nature in the area through our



relationship with Gamaliel Molina Diaz, also known as Gama, a local guide and the owner of Se Siwá Eco Lodge (whatsapp +506 8877 0228).

After a day with Gama you won't really care about your "bare white walls" anymore and will, perhaps like us, become transfixed with new ideas about nature, the jungle, and the curiously wonderful traditional peoples that inhabit them.

As a good friend of ours, Adela Ruffati, once wrote from her time deep in the jungles of southern Costa Rica:

*I remembered the time, several years before, in which I brought an Italian friend to the jungle. He was an elderly gentleman who had never before been outside of Europe. As happens often in newly deforested areas, there is no transition from what is pasture to the 50 meter tall trees that make up the jungle. So I led him across the pasture and into the darkened, wet entrails of a lowland forest. After just a few steps the way back to the pasture*

*was no longer visible. He stood in awe, looking upwards. The automatic reaction of a devout Catholic upon setting foot inside a holy place is to make the signal of the cross on the forehead and chest – and that is exactly what he did. I crossed my forehead and chest too and joined my old friend in a long, silent prayer. It was evident to both of us that God may visit the ornate cathedrals of Europe every now and then, but he lives in the pristine jungle, holiest of places.*

Sometimes we may just want to forget about seeking art for the bare walls of our new abode and get out and connect with the natural environment that is Costa Rica.

If you don't want to stumble around the country seeking nirvana you could just wander over to our friends at the fair trade Galleria Namu in San José at [www.galerianamu.com](http://www.galerianamu.com) or whatsapp at 8800 9252. Ask for Conall, who stocks what is undoubtedly the best collection of indigenous art we have ever seen.

But why did you come here in the first place? It's possible that deep in the heart of this country lie answers to questions you've never

considered, places you could never have imagined in your wildest dreams, and people with ideas and perspectives that make strange sense in your new life. Let serendipity be your guide.

Bad roads lead to good stories.

If you would like to learn more about our indigenous neighbors, you can look up a series put out by Teletica earlier this year. For example, this segment is about the Chorotegans: [https://www.teletica.com/masqn/matambu-en-guanacaste-es-el-unico-vestigio-de-los-indigenas-chorotegas\\_357217](https://www.teletica.com/masqn/matambu-en-guanacaste-es-el-unico-vestigio-de-los-indigenas-chorotegas_357217)

Berni Jubb and his wife Nbi delight in exploring the curiosities of their adopted country and explaining them in allegorical form to their bemused guests at their Pura Vida Hotel in Alajuela. You can reach them at: [www.puravidahotel.com](http://www.puravidahotel.com)

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## ▶ **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Groups meet daily throughout the country; times and places change frequently. Schedules for meetings and their locations can be found at: [www.costaricaaaa.com](http://www.costaricaaaa.com).

## ▶ **Al-Anon**

English language meetings open to anyone whose life has been/is affected by someone else's problem with alcohol. Meeting information can be found at: [www.costaricaaaa.com](http://www.costaricaaaa.com)

## ▶ **American Legion Post 10**

Meets at Yakky's Restuarant and Bar, located 50 meters NE of the corner of Avenida 30 & Calle 134, Escazu Centro, at 12:30 PM on the first Thursday of the month. Open to all NATO veterans. For more information call Matthew Lopes, 8968-6935

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

Currently inactive. For information contact Mel Goldberg at 8870-6756

## ▶ **Amigos of Costa Rica**

A US-based non-profit organization established in 1999. Amigos of Costa Rica has the mission of connecting global resources to Costa Rican Organizations. Amigos currently works with over 120 Costa Rican nonprofits and is happy to connect with donors who wish to explore how they can contribute to Costa Rica. U.S. Government tax-payers donations are deductible. For more information go to: [www.amigosofcostarica.org](http://www.amigosofcostarica.org) or email to: [admin@amigosofcostarica.org](mailto:admin@amigosofcostarica.org)

## ▶ **The Atenas Book Club**

Formed in 2004, meets the first Wednesday monthly at 10:30 am, at alternating locations and with discussion leaders among the members. The group reads a variety of books and authors, reading both fiction and non-fiction. All books must be available

on Kindle or some electronic reader. Currently there is a waiting list to join. For more information contact Mary Martin Mason at: [marymason1946@gmail.com](mailto:marymason1946@gmail.com).

## ▶ **Birding Club Costa Rica**

A private group that travels around Costa Rica to observe and identify the 900+ species of birds found here, learn about different parts of the country, and enjoy the company of like-minded and interested people. For more information, visit the website: [www.birdingclubcr.org](http://www.birdingclubcr.org) or email to: [info@birdingclubcr.org](mailto:info@birdingclubcr.org).

## ▶ **Canadian Club**

Canadian Club welcomes everyone to join us for our monthly luncheons and at our special annual events. No passport required. There are no fees or dues to pay, just sign up with your email address and we will keep you informed of Canadian events. For information and to sign up, email Renée-Claude at: [canadianclubcr@gmail.com](mailto:canadianclubcr@gmail.com).

## ▶ **Central Valley Golf Association**

Meets every Tuesday morning between 6-7 a.m. at the Valle Del Sol golf course in Santa Ana. Both individual and two person events with different formats every week. We invite all men and woman with all handicaps to join us and enjoy golf on a picturesque course. No membership required. For more information, contact: Larry Goldman 8933-3333, or email to: [nylarryg@yahoo.com](mailto:nylarryg@yahoo.com).

## ▶ **Costa Rica Writers Group**

Writers, authors, and anyone who would like to write can benefit from this group. Members read and evaluate or critique each other's work, or present what they write. Any aspect of writing can be discussed. We have access to resources for editing, publishing, and the whole writing process. We meet by ZOOM on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month at 11:30 a.m. For more information contact Edie Bakker at: [edierainforest@yahoo.com](mailto:edierainforest@yahoo.com)

### ► Democrats Abroad Costa Rica

Provides information about voting in the US and voting issues of interest to US citizens living in Costa Rica. For more information or to join email: or visit our website at: [www.democratsabroad.org/cr](http://www.democratsabroad.org/cr) Register to vote absentee at: [votefromabroad.org](http://votefromabroad.org)

### ► Marine Corps League

Meets the second Saturday of the month at 11 a.m. at the Tap House in City Place Mall 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), [andypucek@live.com](mailto:andypucek@live.com)

### ► Pérez Zeledón International Women's Club

Formed in November 2009 to promote friendship between English speaking women in Pérez Zeledón and, through friendship, to make a positive contribution to our local community. The Club meets for lunch on the second Tuesday of each month in different restaurants around the canton. We also host a Ramblers group, a Games group and currently have a team working in the Municipal gardens. For more information, please send an email to: [pzwomansclub@gmail.com](mailto:pzwomansclub@gmail.com) or visit our web site at: [www.pziwc.org](http://www.pziwc.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. Meeting schedules vary. For info on the speaker for the month and to register, call Sarah Joy at 8868-6990 or email us at [info@pwnocr.com](mailto:info@pwnocr.com) The PWN website is: <http://www.pwnocr.com>

### ► San Vito Bird Club

A community based birding/nature group centered in the diverse southern zone of Costa Rica. We also facilitate nature education to local elementary schools through Cornell University's Bird Sleuth program. Twice monthly bird walks through the Wilson Botanical Garden and other sites are open to all; binoculars available as needed. Please visit our website: [www.sanvitobirdclub.org](http://www.sanvitobirdclub.org) or email: [eltangaral@gmail.com](mailto:eltangaral@gmail.com) for more information.

### ► The Umbrella Club of Costa Rica (formerly Newcomers of Costa Rica)

Is a group for English speaking women living in Costa Rica to share experiences, ideas, common interests, and to promote fellowship among members. The core of the Umbrella Club is the Interest Groups which meet monthly. There are two to three general meetings a year. There are no dues. For more information, contact:

Grace at 2249-1208 or 8369-7992, or send an email to: [jaygracefernandes@gmail.com](mailto:jaygracefernandes@gmail.com) or Kelly at: [kclayton2003@yahoo.com](mailto:kclayton2003@yahoo.com)

**NOTICE:** Club officers should review the contact information for their clubs and make sure it is up to date.

Send any changes or corrections to: [service@arcr.cr](mailto:service@arcr.cr) subject line; Club Corner, and post them on the the ARCR Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/ARCR123](http://www.facebook.com/ARCR123).



# BUSINESS DIRECTORY

## Important dates in Costa Rica:

1 January, Wednesday,  
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National Holyday

30, 31 January, Thursday/  
Friday, The ARCR “Tips  
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Location: Park Inn  
Hotel, San Jose. Contact  
ARCR Office for  
reservations.

## DEFINITIONS:

**NATIONAL HOLIDAY:** Non-essential businesses will be closed. These are paid holidays for Costa Rican workers. A worker who is required to work on a national holiday must, by law, be paid double wages.

## ONE-LINERS:

I was going to tell a time-traveling joke, but you didn't like it.

How do you deal with a fear of speed bumps? You slowly get over it.

I ordered a chicken and an egg on-line. I'll let you know.

My wife told me to stop impersonating a flamingo. I had to put my foot down.

I went to buy some camo pants but couldn't find any.

I failed math so many times at school, I can't even count.



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