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# EL RESIDENTE

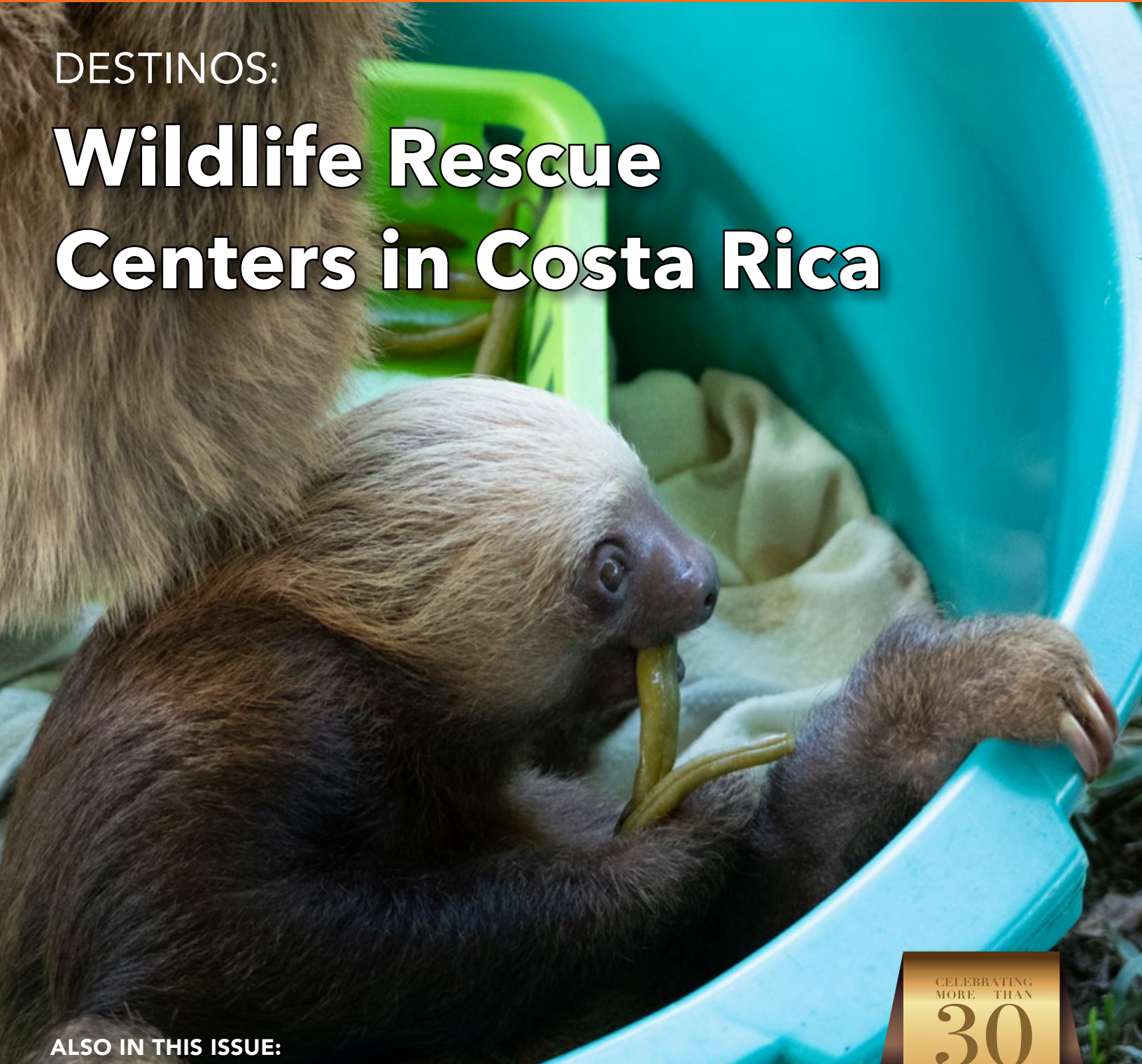
May

June

2026

DESTINOS:

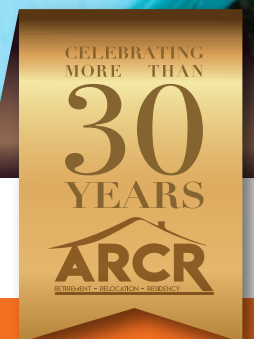
## Wildlife Rescue Centers in Costa Rica



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

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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

The rainy season has begun and we are all faced with the decision we have to make each year: Should I buy a cheap umbrella knowing it will turn inside-out at the first strong wind, or should I buy an expensive umbrella that I will lose within a week of buying it? Decisions, decisions! Here's an alternative; stay inside and read *El Residente*! This issue is a good place to start. And if it's still raining outside, go to the ARCR website ([www.arcr.cr](http://www.arcr.cr)) click on Magazine, and read some back issues that you skipped when the sun was shining! Rain or shine, *El Residente* is always a good place to get information.



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# ACROSS THE BOARD

Notes and News from the Board of Directors

## THE ARCR 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.

### NEW MEDICAL SERVICES DISCOUNT

ARCR has entered into an agreement with Hospital International La Catholica for members making cash (out-of-pocket) payments for medical services to receive a 10% discount. All that is needed is proof of your ARCR membership (free in the office.) For more information about the services Hospital International La Catholica has to offer, see their website at: <https://directorio.hospitallacatolica.com/es/search> or <https://hilc.cr/> (The discount does not apply to accounts being paid by insurance, including TRICARE.)

**APPLE STORAGE SCAM** According to the newspaper The Guardian, Apple users are getting emails saying their iCloud storage is full or nearly full and 'Your photos will be deleted'. The fraudsters then trick people into clicking on links that can expose bank and personal details. For full details of the scam and how to protect against it, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2026/apr/12/apple-icloud-storage-scam-emails>

**TRICARE RECIPIENTS** Hospitals Biblica, Catholica, and Cima are now accepting patients with TRICARE for payment (after deductibles are met.) At the time of this writing Hospital Metropolitano is not accepting TRICARE for

payment and requires the patient to pay "up front" and seek reimbursement from TRICARE.

**LOCAL HEROES** Watch for our upcoming feature "Local Heroes" in which ARCR recognizes those expats who have made exceptional contributions to their local community; people whose actions have bettered people's lives and advanced the culture in some unselfish way. Want to get a head start? Do you know someone in your community who is doing incredible things? Drop us a email and tell us who that is and what they have done.

**BANKS NOW PAY FOR FRAUD** A law passed by the Legislative Assembly came into effect on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, which boosts protections for financial system users and holds banks accountable for fraud, even if the financial institution itself isn't directly at fault. The legislation (Ley 10.889) amends the Ley de Promoción de la Competencia y Defensa Efectiva del Consumidor (Law for the Promotion of Competition and Effective Consumer Protection. For more information see the online newspaper Q Costa Rica, April 24, 2026. <https://qcostarica.com/costa-rican-banks-must-now-reimburse-victims-of-fraud/>

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# DESTINOS

by William Duckwall



## Wildlife Rescue Centers in Costa Rica

Costa Rica has an abundance of wildlife rescue centers. A visit provides a close look at the local animals, indeed, much closer than you will get on a walk through a national park. Another plus – any admission fee you pay for a tour will go towards the rehabilitation and upkeep of the animals. This short article will detail the centers I have visited multiple times; there are many more. If you are interested in a particular species or want to find a center in a specific geographic area, do a little online browsing to narrow the field. A

good place to start is *Animal Sanctuaries in Costa Rica: 10 Ethical Places to See Wildlife Up Close* <https://tinyurl.com/cyfbp7dm>. Here are three I recommend.

### TOUCAN RESCUE RANCH

<https://toucanrescueranch.org>

The Toucan Rescue Ranch (TRR) lies about one km west of Route 32, fifteen km from the center of San José. The drive from downtown takes about half an hour,



depending on traffic. Note: it lies only 200 meters from Route 112, a well-known “shortcut” for anyone coming from or through Heredia. My wife and I first visited the ranch in 2019 and have returned several times with friends and family.

The TRR was established in 2004 by Leslie Howle and Jorge Murillo. Leslie is a US expat who has lived in Latin America since she was seven. Their initial focus was bird life (i.e., toucans). Then, in 2007, they took in Millie, a sloth, their first mammal. That same year, they became the second facility in the world to successfully breed Emerald Toucanets. They own more than 40 acres of tropical lowland rainforest in Sarapiquí, a property used for releasing rehabilitated animals.

Many of their early rescues were birds that had been kept as pets; they generally suffered from malnutrition. They still care for toucans, but also care for parrots, parakeets, hawks, owls, as well as mammals, including sloths (mostly two-fingered), ocelots, kinkajous, monkeys,

porcupines, and an otter. BTW, they prefer to call sloths “two-fingered” vs. two-toed, because both two-toed and three-toed sloths both have three toes on their hind feet.

International Sloth Day, which comes in late October, kicks off the Sloth Ironman Games at the ranch. With events like the One Meter Dash and the Poop-Off Challenge, you can’t go wrong. I confess I have not attended the Sloth Ironman Games, but I now recognize the void in my life, and vow to attend in October! We have attended a couple of fundraising, celebratory dinners hosted by TRR and are the proud owners of two paintings: one by a baby toucan, one by a baby howler monkey. Both were won via silent auction at one of the dinners.

Quick sloth facts: Both two-fingered and three-fingered sloths evolved from the giant (up to several tons) ground sloths that roamed South and Central America about 40 million years ago. They are not closely related to each



other, however, and are often cited as an example of convergent evolution.

3-fingered ( <i>Bradyptes variegatus</i> )	2-fingered ( <i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i> )
Active during the day	Active at night
9 vertebrae in the neck	7 vertebrae in the neck
Eats leaves	Eats leaves, flowers, fruits
Has a black mask, permanent smile	Ace uniform tan color, nose described as “piggy”
Female whistles when ready to mate	No whistling, generally larger than 3-fingered

Both species have three toes on their hind legs and swim surprisingly well..

The TRR offers a variety of tour options. The two-hour Classic Ranch Tour is the basic tour, \$15 for locals, \$37 for international visitors. The one-and-a-half-hour Nocturnal Tour (\$25) is also an overview sort of tour, but with an emphasis on the animals that are more active at night. There are also private tours, virtual tours for classroom groups, and overnight stays. We’ve done the Private Slothies and Coffees Walk, which adds a coffee break and an extra hour focused on sloths to the Classic Ranch Tour, which is a great tour for those who are sloth-deprived. Note: All tours and visits require a reservation! Book online; their website is very good. If you want still more, there are volunteer opportunities: the ranch has about 100 volunteers pitching in over the course of a year and welcomes nearly 10,000 visitors each year.

The TRR efforts are not limited to its site in San Isidro, Heredia Province. Before the pandemic, they partnered with Café Britt to plant 1200 native trees to reconnect



forest canopy that had been fragmented by agricultural development. They have a range of programs, tailored to specific wild animals: toucans, sloths, parrots, and raptors. I hardly need to add that donations are welcome. One unique way of donating is to purchase needed supplies from their Amazon wish list and bring them in your luggage when you come to Costa Rica from the US. (Shipping to Costa Rica from the US has become difficult and expensive. Making use of any extra luggage allotment is a brilliant workaround. See their website for details.)

## **JAGUAR RESCUE CENTER**

<https://www.jaguarrescue.foundation/en-us/>

Wildlife enthusiasts can visit the Jaguar Rescue Center (JRC), which ironically has no jaguars and never has. The

exact details and order of events are not entirely clear in my mind, but the central tenet of the story is that locals found an ailing wild cat on a nearby beach. Thinking it was a young jaguar, they brought it to the eccentric pair of animal lovers who lived nearby. From that day onward, they were known as the jaguar people, and when the couple formally established an animal rescue center, they named it the Jaguar Rescue Center. The original wild cat was actually an ocelot.

The founding couple was Sandro Alviani, an Italian biologist, and his Spanish wife Encar Garcia, who grew up in a small town near Barcelona. Sandro was a herpetologist, devoted to reptiles and amphibians. Encar was a primatologist, devoted to monkeys and apes. She had worked for eight years in the Barcelona zoo, where she helped care for the famous albino



gorilla named Snowflake. There are some hints online of their early days, mentions of having six sloths in the bathroom, and a monkey in the dining room.

Little by little, visitors began to come to see the animals. At first, tourist income came in the form of voluntary donations. Later, the center began to charge a modest fee for tours.

The JRC is located near Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, one of my favorite areas of Costa Rica. The local population blends Jamaican and Bribri culture. The restaurants are great and varied; there are dozens of small to medium hotels (and zero monster resorts). Nearby Cahuita National Park provides a calmer alternative to the bustling Manuel Antonio on the Pacific coast.

Public tours are one-and-a-half hours long and offered twice daily at 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. Reservations are not mandatory, but arrive 20 minutes early to make sure you get a spot, and to be sorted into small groups by language – Spanish, English, (German, French when available). The cost is \$29 per person; children under 10 are free. To be safe, call or email ahead of time to confirm they will be open, or book online at least one day in advance.

Private VIP tours are also available. These two-hour tours start at 2:00 p.m. and cost \$80 per person (minimum of 2 people); children under 10 are free. The tour can be tailored to your preferences.

The JRC now has accommodations for those wishing to stay nearby. There are three bungalows that are next to the JRC, and therefore close to Playa Cocles and Playa



Chiquita, as well as restaurants and markets. There are also two houses available to rent for a minimum of two nights. The houses are in the La Ceiba Natural Reserve, two km from Punta Uva Beach. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended to reach the two houses.

There is an online interview with Encar that covers some of the particulars of their rehabilitation work. This is her answer regarding the monitoring of sloths released back into the wild:

“All the sloths we release have a microchip that we can read when they come down to the ground. We also paint their nails with a special nail polish that lasts a long time and, with binoculars, we can observe them for quite a long time. In addition, here we are in the Caribbean and my neighbor makes wonderful braids. We put a braid in their own hair with colored threads that lasts up to 1 year. This way we can identify individuals. We go out to look for them in the forest at 5 o'clock in the morning. Luckily they don't have a very large territory and, although it sometimes takes them a week or two, they usually return to the same tree.”

The Italian founder, Sandro, passed in 2016, but his spirit lives on. Even if you never visit the JRC, you can enjoy a

YouTube interview with him, found on the JRC website. The sound is a little flaky, but there are English subtitles. <https://tinyurl.com/26wdtjny> The JRC website is very good, presenting a very clear picture of JRC operations. For 2025: 1,429 animals rescued, 2,497 community participants reached, 34 transformers insulated (preventing wildlife electrocutions), 10 canopy crossings installed, 410,000 followers on social media.

One of the goals of the JRC is to ensure that every school in the area can visit the sanctuary at least once a year, so that children can become agents of change. They also conduct visits to schools and community centers and provide online experiences to expand their reach. Much of their workforce is volunteer, including the tour guides.

Remember, Sandro was a herpetologist. He was off exploring an area of primary forest and came across a huge bushmaster, the largest poisonous viper in Costa Rica. He regarded this as a good omen! Accordingly, he eventually purchased the land, which is now the La Ceiba Natural Reserve, a 49-hectare primary forest part of the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located near the end of Ruta 256, the

road that runs through Puerto Viejo de Talamanca. La Ceiba is the release site for the JRC.

Their website describes their public tours this way. “Guided by professionals who have extensive training with our animals, you will see things you wouldn’t even have known to look for, and learn things you could never imagine.

## SLOTH SANCTUARY OF COSTA RICA

<https://www.slothsanctuary.com>

The Sloth Sanctuary (SSCR) has a long history. Originally, the founders, Judy Avey-Arroyo and Luis Arroyo, purchased the 320-acre property to offer birding tours on the Estrella River. The jungle reclaimed its land from its former use as a banana plantation, and

the property was officially declared a biological reserve in 1975, then known as Aviarios del Caribe. Everything changed on April 22, 1991: a 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck nearby. Forty-eight people died in Costa Rica; seventy-nine died in Bocas del Toro, Panama, a little farther south. Bridges and roads were wiped out. For some time, the area near the epicenter was accessible only by helicopter from Panama. Reconstruction of the road from Limon to Sixaola (the border crossing to Panama) took months. In 2010, the road was paved and designated Ruta 36.

The quake changed the course of the Estrella River, which ended the birding tours. The Arroyos built a small hotel on their property. A year later, three neighbor girls brought a tiny baby sloth to them, knowing that they were animal lovers. They sought advice from zoos and wildlife rescue centers, but found that no one knew much about sloth care. They were held in low regard, similar to the “trash” status of opossums in the US. They observed the sloths on their property and raised their infant, sloth Buttercup, to maturity. By 1997, the Sloth Sanctuary was in operation, officially recognized as a rescue center. Buttercup lived until 2019 and passed peacefully in her sleep, making her the oldest captive-living three-fingered sloth in the world at the time.

The SSCR has maintained its focus on sloths; their mission statement is simply:

“We are dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and research of sloths and conserving their rainforest habitat.”

They are located on Ruta 36, about a half hour’s drive from Limon, about 4 km before the little town of Penshurt. (The Jaguar Rescue Center is 32 km past the Sloth Sanctuary, roughly another hour; continue on 36 to Hone Creek, then Ruta 236 through Puerto Viejo de Talamanca.)

The basic tour is the Buttercup Tour, a one-hour tour that starts on the hour from 8 am to 3 pm (last tour on





Sunday is at 2 pm). Prices range from \$30 for international adults, \$15 for children 5-12, with a discount for locals. For \$5 per person, a canoe excursion through the adjacent slow-moving river can be added to the end of the tour.

There is also a two-hour Insiders' Tour, which adds an hour to the Buttercup tour with a visit to the nursery, and an opportunity to hear from the people who care for the babies. For the sloth-obsessed, this should not be missed! Baby sloths are at the top of the cuteness scale. There are two tours per day, at 8:45 am and 12:45 pm; reservations are required. The cost is \$150 for adults, \$75 for ages 6-18, and \$85 for seniors aged 65 and up. We have done this tour twice; the second time we brought our son and his fiancée. I don't entirely trust my memory, but I think the canoe excursion was included in the package. If you book the Insiders'


Tour, you can also book lodging in the Buttercup Inn, which has four rooms. The rates are very reasonable and include breakfast on the veranda overlooking the river.

Again, let me recommend the SSCR website. In addition to the specifics of tours and hours of operation, there is a wealth of background information, including intriguing details on the extinct giant ground sloths (23 known species, up to seven meters tall). There is also information on ongoing research and on their partnership with the Dallas World Aquarium, and a deep dive into sloth

biology – metabolism, digestion, genetic analysis, and the invertebrate ecosystem associated with every sloth. There is a sloth moth expert! Biologist Jenny Phillips from the National Institute of Biodiversity in Costa Rica has studied the critters living in the fur of wild sloths living at the SSCR. Spoiler alert: moths, moths, and more moths. No roaches, worms, fleas, or ticks.

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

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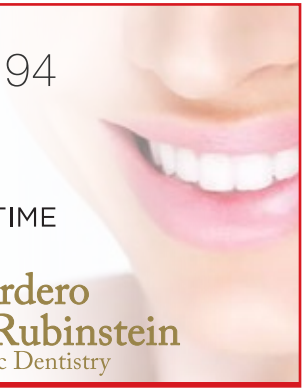


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# OUT AND ABOUT

by Mitzi Stark



## Exploring Biological Corridors and Museums

**W**e still have several weeks of sunny summer weather left, enough time to spend a day in the open air at one of Costa Rica's environmental treasures. The country is known for its conservation, and many of its natural reserves and biological corridors are yours for exploring.

There are 44 biological corridors in Costa Rica, all under the protection of SINAC, the Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación. Many of the areas are open for hiking and the enjoyment of nature. There are no fake rocks or cement logs or animals in cages, and the butterflies roam free. There are trails, and some of

them are not too difficult for easy hiking. Others are a challenge. Take your pick.

A good place to start is with the **Biological Corridor Montes de Aguacate**, or Avocado Mountain Corridor. This is a huge patch of land that includes Atenas, Palmares, and San Ramon, covering 69,051 hectares (172,000 acres). Some of it is in government hands, and some is private, and it includes farmland and small communities that demonstrate sustainable living for humans as well as flora and fauna. It also serves as a means of sustainable tourism and is a connecting area for animals to move about without risk, which adds to

Costa Rica's reputation as a protector of wildlife. Its hills and valleys offer fantastic views of Costa Rica's western provinces, and the area includes the mining museum and old gold mines in Abangares.

Another is the **Madre Verde Reserve**, located in La Granja de Palmares. This was once a coffee farm with a pasture for cattle, but in 2001, a foundation was formed to buy and maintain the land as a reserve. The idea was to link it to other lands as part of a green corridor and to protect the water sources. It has a sort of easy 2.6-kilometer sloping trail for exploring that is divided into sections so that you can hike at your own pace without too much exertion.

Schoolchildren come to the Reserve on field trips to plant trees and learn about conservation. The trail opens with the **Pollinator Garden**, a short walk surrounded by plants and flowers that attract bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Enter there and you will be surrounded by butterflies. There is also a bee house and special constructions to attract bees. Additionally, there is an old stable with helpful information and a place to sit and rest.

From there, the trail divides, but it forms a loop, so choosing to go either way you will experience all of it. Continuing on are the **Coyote Stone Trail**, the **Volcano Lookout**, the **Bromeliad** section, the





**Tolomuco Trail**, and the **Life Hill Lookout**, where you get a view of the city of Palmares and Cerro del Espiritu Santo. Although it is a short, fairly easy climb, you can turn back at any part of the trail.

Much of the area is rebuilt forest and woodland from tree-planting projects begun 20 years ago. Much of the fauna is of the insect category, but many birds visit the area and it is home to coyotes, raccoons, snakes,

and other animals. On my visit, we saw butterflies, a pair of agoutis (a type of rodent related to guinea pigs, common in Central America), and a cat.

There is a fee of CRC 1500 per person donation, but you can give more, which is needed to help maintain the area. You pay at the building at the base of the trail. Some funding comes from the popular Palmares Festival held every January. There is also a



*tienda* (shop) where you can find local organic honey, chocolate, and souvenirs. Madre Verde is open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., closed Tuesdays. If you live in the area and want to help, they need volunteers. See Fundacion Madre Verde or call 8810 2914.

To get there, take the Pan American highway to Palmares. Look for Calle La Granja, one of the first cross streets after entering Palmares. Turn right and travel about two kilometers. Look for signs for Madre Verde on the left.

Next up is **Cerro del Espiritu Santo**, or Holy Spirit Mountain. The most challenging part of this reserve is finding it. The roads are not well marked, but by combining WAZE, Google Maps, and asking people on the streets, we found it. It is the highest point on the road between Naranjo and Palmares and can

be seen from the Pan-American Highway around Naranjo. There is an interesting history connected with this mountain; originally, it was a volcano, and the crater is still there, but time has eroded it, and it is now hard to find.

The area is subject to *temblores* (earth tremors), which left the local population nervous back in the last century. In 1916, the parish priest of Naranjo had a shrine with a statue of Christ erected at the highest point in the district. Unfortunately, before it was finished, an earthquake damaged the parish church, and funds for the shrine were diverted to repair it. The statue was never finished, but people have regarded the mountain as a place for pilgrimages and recreation ever since. There is a road up to the top which looks steep, but we made it in a four-cylinder



Daihatsu Terios. You can park at the top or at the base and walk up.

The trip is “worth the views,” as people claim. The height at the top is 1363 meters (for a rough conversion to feet, just triple that; it’s not totally accurate, but close enough). Cerro del Espiritu Santo is a popular place for picnics and excursions and on the weekends it can be crowded. Our weekday visit was quiet, giving us a chance to explore and climb through the ruins of the old chapel. There is a *sendero* (hiking trail) and the views are fantastic, but it may be a bit scary for anyone with height issues. Open every day and there is no admission charge.

Like to go hiking? How can you find more hiking trails? Easy. Enter “Costa Rica hiking trails” in Google and start scrolling. See the Monte de Aguacate biological corridor for information on this sector.

\* \* \* \* \*

For those less inclined toward hiking, **International Museum Day** is May 18th and museums around Costa Rica and the world will open up with special events and exhibits to promote history and culture.

Costa Rica is blessed with numerous museums. Some are part of the Ministry of Culture and are well

known. There are also regional museums, municipal museums, and some are part of the university system. Here are a few better-known ones in the San Jose area:

The National Museum on the Cuesta de Mora, Av. Central, Calles 15-17, the Jade Museum in the same area, the museum of Contemporary Art in the CENAC complex in the old liquor factory, Av. 3 Calles 3-5, and the Central Bank’s Precolumbian Gold Museum.

There are many less well-known museums that are often overlooked.

**The Children’s Museum** or the Costa Rican Center for Science and Culture is on Calle 4, Av. 9. Located in the old penitentiary building, it is an absolutely stunning place for children and adults. With 40 rooms of activities, it spans history from dinosaurs to robots and combines learning and fun. The museum may be noisy and crowded with kids, so choosing a school day for a visit will reduce the noise. The same building houses the Penitentiary Museum and the National Art Gallery. Admission is CRC 2000 colons for kids, 3,000 for adults. Special rates for older adults.

**Museo La Salle of Natural History** has a lot of natural history with 14,000 examples crammed into one building. This collection covers zoology,

anthropology, and mineralogy. Located on the south side of La Sabana Av. 12, Calles 66-72, next to the Ministry of Agriculture building. Cost is CRC 2500 for adults, less for children and older adults.

Juan Santamaria Historical and Cultural Museum is in the center of Alajuela and has exhibits and information on the Campaign of 1856, in which Costa Rica's army routed an invading mercenary force and guaranteed independence and freedom for Central America. The building is the old army quartel and municipal jail, but now includes art galleries, collections of life in the 1800's, a theater, and a venue for events. And you can take a tour of the parapet by asking any of the guards for the tour de techo (roof tour). Free. Open Tuesdays – Sundays 10 a.m. 5 p.m.

**Cartago's Municipal Museum** was also part of the army's quarters back when there was an army, and the building itself was a battle scene in Costa Rica's brief civil war in 1948, with loyalist troops inside and liberation troops just out the door. This museum has displays, an art gallery, and offers events and beautiful gardens. For Information on the area's history, ask a guard. Open 9-4 all days. Free.

The **San Ramon Regional Museum** is right on the central square. Located in a historical building that once housed the city government, the telephone exchange, and the fire department. Built in 1878 and since modified, it is now part of the University of Costa Rica's western campus. Interesting displays include a children's area, natural and social history of San Ramon, including a replica of a giant sloth. This museum, with its connection to the university, offers many events for the public. It's free and is open Tuesday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Last on my very incomplete list is the **Ecomuseum of Mines** located in Abangares near San Mateo. It offers more than hiking, as this area was once a center of gold mining. There is a museum of old mining equipment and information about the early 1900s "gold rush" here. Moderate hiking. Open every day.

Although no specific plans were available when we went to "press", Costa Rica's museums celebrate this annual fest. Last year, the National Museum held a series of art classes, talks on exhibits, and concerts around that time. Check the museum calendars around May 18th for special programs in your area.

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# CARIBBEAN CONNECTION

by Connie Foss



## The Mission for Seafarers

### THE PORTS OF LIMON

There are now two ports in Limon. The original port, located at the edge of Limon city, is the docking site for cruise ships only. In 2019, a larger port opened in Moin (a few kilometers from Limon city) to serve the container cargo ships. There have been some issues related to drug trafficking at this port, as traffickers are known to smuggle drugs in these giant containers. For a brief time, Chaplains George and Linda Watts were not permitted to enter this port for safety reasons. Fortunately, the Costarican government has been working to resolve this issue.

### CRUISE SHIP TOURISM IN LIMON

During the winter months, cruise ships from Europe and North America dock at the Port of Limon nearly

every day. For anyone who has never been on a cruise (that includes me), these ships resemble apartment complexes, sometimes six stories high.

For an example of the size and capacity of these cruise ships, I looked up some facts about Royal Caribbean Ships. The largest cruise ships can hold up to 6,698 passengers, employing a crew of 2,300. These ships are like entire neighborhoods. Imagine how many crew members it would take to run a ship and keep everything “ship-shape.”

It is beyond dispute that cruise ships leave the largest carbon footprint of any other type of vacation. Personally, I have never been on a cruise because of the enormous environmental damage they cause. But the reality is that as long as people pay to go on cruises, cruise ships need to employ crews. And these crews

are often paid low wages and suffer from poor working conditions.

## THE MISSION FOR SEAFARERS

That's where the chaplains for The Mission to Seafarers I wrote about in the last issue comes in. This non-profit, British-based organization has posts at ports on all nine continents of the world. Their mission statement: "Mission to Seafarers provides help to the 1.89 million people who face danger every day to keep our global economy afloat." The Mission serves the crews of all types of vessels, including cruise ships and container cargo ships.

These ship crews are at sea for months, or even years, at a time. When the tourists disembark for a tour of Limon – including a half-day tour of Puerto Viejo, or Cahuita National Park – the crew finally has a chance to go ashore. Maybe they haven't called home in a month, or can't access Wi-Fi on the ship, or maybe they need to go shopping. Or maybe they just need a break from the stress of catering to thousands of demanding vacationers. And sometimes they need to talk to a chaplain about some type of abuse or mistreatment that happened to them on the job. The organization even tracks crew satisfaction through a quarterly "Seafarer Happiness Index."

Chaplain Linda Watts explains the history and mission of The Mission to Seafarers:

The Mission to Seafarers (formerly The Missions to Seamen) is a Christian welfare charity serving merchant seafarers worldwide. It operates through a global network of chaplains, staff, and volunteers and provides practical, emotional, and spiritual support through ship visits, drop-in seafarers' centers, and a range of welfare and emergency support services.

The Mission to Seafarers is a mission society of the Anglican Communion that offers help and support to merchant seafarers. The charity provides its services through the chaplains that it appoints to port centers in over 50 countries. Ship visits, supported by volunteers,



can provide free advice on employment issues or personal problems, as well as help in maritime emergencies. Through its centers, The Mission to Seafarers provides communications, stores, transport services and publishes a bi-monthly news digest for seafarers called *The Sea*.

The organization has its roots in the work of Anglican priest John Ashley, who in 1835 was on the shore at Clevedon, England, with his son, who asked him how the people on ships in the Bristol Channel could go to church. Recognizing the needs of the seafarers on the four hundred sailing vessels in the Bristol Channel, he created the Bristol Channel Mission. He raised funds, and in 1839, a specially designed mission cutter, *Eirene*,

was built with a main cabin that could be converted into a chapel seating 100 people.

His work inspired similar ministries in the UK, and in 1856, it was decided that these groups should be formally organized under the name The Mission to Seamen Afloat, at Home and Abroad. In 1858, the name was shortened to The Missions to Seamen, and the organization adopted its Flying Angel logo, still in use today.

As shipping transitioned from sail to steam, there was a need for places for seafarers to go while ashore, as ships could now dock at quaysides because they no longer had to anchor at sea waiting for a favorable wind. In response, the mission gradually opened centers so that the men could be offered light refreshments, reading and game rooms, good, cheap accommodations, and a chapel. The mission now operates over 250 centers worldwide, including the one in Limon.



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# ALAJUELA NORTH

by Berni Jubb

## Form, Fit, and Function



**Y**our survival in paradise may depend on a cool little invention.

Had a fall lately? Was it at 2:15 AM during a thunderstorm while you were trying to figure out why the water pump was still running? Or did you stumble over a large black dog on a dark night on the way to the bathroom? Maybe you missed a step in an unfamiliar part of the garden and went tumbling. Or perhaps you were attempting the high-wire act of trying to find the flashlight icon on your cell phone while walking, only to realize that navigating a staircase with that \$1,000 technologically amazing glass rectangle is a great way to meet a surgeon.

Nobody tells you in the "Moving to Costa Rica" seminars or web sites that when the lights go out (and they do go out regularly) the world doesn't take on the "charming, romantic candlelight" ambiance of a French bistro, it is the pitch-black of, "I-can't-see-my-own-nose" darkness of a subterranean cavern.

For those of us in the semi-retired-neo-tropical-gingo community who are "seasoned," this darkness is not just an inconvenience, it is a tactical threat. In the world we left behind a power outage means the streetlights stay on and there was some dim illumination that lets us

see our surroundings. In Costa Rica, a power outage means everything in the world just stops and between you and the bathroom lies a literal minefield of uneven tiles, strange crawling creatures, sleeping dogs, and who knows what else.

Additionally, as we age, our ability to know where our feet are without looking at them starts to take a vacation. Combine that with the "creative" architecture of Costarican homes, where a random two-inch step-down appears in the middle of a hallway for no discernible reason, and you have a recipe for a hip replacement. And for the "Aging Resident," that can be the beginning of the end of the Costarican dream. Medical evacuations, surgeries in San José, and the loss of independence can mean having to leave paradise and return to the land of Nod. But don't despair, there's a preventive solution. Its called an Olight Imini 2.

Last month I took a short trip back to the US of A. A chat with my engineer brother-in-law quickly got me up to date on the techie stuff I'd missed in my months away: Cool coffee machines, high-speed simulators, and the crazy Openclaw AI debate. Then he showed me his Olight Imini 2. I semi-ignored the tiny little flashlight hooked to his key chain and said, "Sure, nice,"

He and I have had go-arounds in the past on flashlight technology and lumen-envy. "No way this thing has the power", I thought. Then he handed it to me and told me to just pull it a "smidge". I did and it turned on. For clarity, let me explain that there are two parts: the tiny light itself (about an inch and a quarter long) which is held magnetically to a tiny base that is even shorter, which has a special charging connector under a rubber cap. A small carabineer connects the whole rig to your key chain. The entire setup is about one-third of the size of a car door opener remote control.

Ingeniously, if you pull the tiny light segment a "smidge", it LIGHTS UP, but stays connected to its base by magnetism. No "on button" is needed (Steve Jobs would have approved.) If you pull a tiny bit harder it disconnects from the base in a very friendly way and stays lit until you put it back in its magnetic home where, with a satisfying click, it turns itself off.

Skeptically, I tried it. I walked outside in the dark and found it has sufficient lumens to illuminate the ground about 10 feet ahead. Pull it out of its magnetic home slightly to navigate a large dog or a set of steps. Release it and it stays connected to your key chain.

The application for my life in the Neo-tropics immediately became apparent!

My brother-in-law lives in Southern California, near an Amazon depot, so a few hours later I had a shiny, new Olight Imini 2 dropped at the doorstep. (This last sentence makes absolutely no sense to our friends in the zona sur. :-))

TIP: Do not buy a green one. The color is psychologically important for those of us who are older than dirt; should you ever drop the bit that is usually held in suspended animation, you want to be able to see it against the jungle floor. So far, I haven't dropped mine because it never really needs to be fully disconnected from its magnetic base to do its job.

Most retirees here rely on their cell phone "flashlight," but rarely use it because it's just another fumble in the dark. Have you ever tried to navigate a staircase while holding that expensive, high-tech device while trying to locate the ON ikon? You're using one hand to balance, one hand for the phone, and zero hands to save yourself when you trip over a large black dog. (If your dog was like my Bandito, he had an uncanny knack for finding a place to lie that was precisely on the path to the bedroom. That was his plan every night. He wanted me to trip over him.)

The charging process is beyond brilliant: No cables. Not one. You pull off a little rubber sheath and insert the whole device into any USB-A charging port. When it's done a tiny green light turns on. Wow! I told you this thing is satisfying!

I knew when I started writing this it might sound like a paid ad. It isn't. My brother-in-law just happens to be a very smart dude and though I didn't "get it" at first glance, I do now... and I'm "pumped!" If you live in the Neo-tropics and carry a key chain, this thing is not just amazing, it is extremely satisfying!

BTW, a quick Google search for Olight Imini 2 returns information on where these amazing little devices can be obtained.

*Berni Jubb is a long-time Costa Rica resident, hotel owner, and sometime philosopher of traffic (which usually takes the form of cursing the last moto to attempt suicide in front of his car near SJO). He and his wife, Nhi, delight in exploring the curiosities of their adopted country and explaining them in allegorical form to their bemused guests at the Pura Vida Hotel in Alajuela. Kudos to my bro-in-law Dan, who inspires me every time we meet.*



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# TASTE THE TROPICS

by El Residente Staff



## Yuca

A common vegetable on Tico's plates, but rarely seen on Gringos', is known as Yuca in Costa Rica. In other parts of the world, this tuber is commonly called Cassava or sometimes Manioc. Regardless of the name used, the plants are all the same. (Yuca should not be confused with the unrelated "Yucca", a spiky genus of perennial shrub widely grown as an ornamental plant in gardens.) The Central American variety is *Manihot esculenta*, a woody spurge belonging to the *Euphorbiaceae* family. Its tubers (roots) are the edible portion of the plant and can range from a few inches to gigantic specimens 40 inches or longer in length. It is believed that the plant was first domesticated in Brazil less than 10,000 years ago.

Because of its flavor and high carbohydrate content, Yuca is a favorite source of starch in Central and South

America (it is the third largest source of carbohydrates, after rice and corn). A single plant may have as many as 10 tubers, enough to supply a family for a week or more. Many Cost Rican families will grow multiple plants, planting them in rotation so as to have a continual supply. Preparation of Yuca is simple; remove the thick, brown peel, cut or break the tuber into smaller (3-4-inch) pieces, then slice the pieces vertically and remove the tough, stringy heart. The pieces can then be included as an ingredient in soups or stews (a popular Cost Rican soup is Olla de Carne). It can also be boiled and mashed, deep-fried as fingers or chips, or prepared in many other ways, including made into flour for bread, and even boiled with sugar and served as a dessert. Sometimes the tuber is processed to remove its starch, which is used to make tapioca. The tapioca is then used as a food thickener, which



can be made into delicious pudding, or as animal feed, and/or for industrial purposes.

**CAUTION:** Uncooked tubers, peels, and leaves of the Yuca should not be eaten or fed to animals as they can contain a small amount of a poisonous substance. This chemical is removed by cooking.

Above ground, the Variegated Cassava is a beautiful plant with green and white leaves on bright red stems. They can grow to 2-3 meters (6-9 feet) tall. It is sometimes used as an ornamental decoration to property and landscapes.

**A TIP:** When purchasing Yuca, it is wise to select the shorter, smaller-diameter ones, as the larger tubers may have become tough and stringy with age. Yuca is often coated with an edible wax for preservation before sale.



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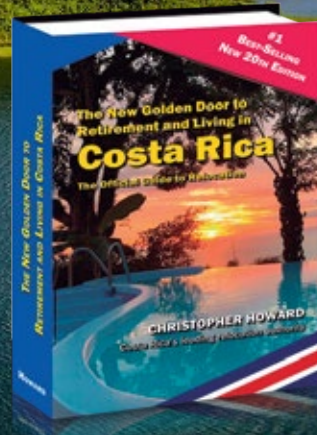
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# A DAY IN THE LIFE

by Allen Dickinson



## Driving in Costa Rica

**I**t is time to run this article again, for those who have not been here long. It is adapted from an article by David Foster Wallace on driving in New York City, published in Harper's in 1996. Because it so aptly describes present-day driving in Costa Rica, it is too important not to share. Presented with thanks and apologies to Mr. Wallace.

### ATTITUDE PREPARATION

There is a simple method of achieving the right state of mind for driving in Costa Rica; before you start your car for the first time, sit in the driver's seat, hold the steering wheel, and think the following: "I am the only driver on the road, and mine is the most important car." It may be hard to accept, especially after you have seen San José at any time of day during the week, but many Tico drivers believe it, and so can you. Consequently, a local driver's reaction to any encounter with another vehicle is first stunned disbelief and then outrage. You

don't have a chance unless you can match this faith. It isn't enough to say you are the most important driver, or to think it – you've got to BELIEVE it. Remember, your car is THE CAR – all others are aberrations in the divine scheme of the universe.

### THE LAW

In Costa Rica, as elsewhere, there are laws about stop signs, maximum permissible speeds, which side of the street you can drive on, and so forth. They, however, exist only as tests of character and self-esteem. Stopping at a stop sign, for example, is prima facie evidence that the driver is, if male, a cuckold or, if female, frigid and barren. Contrarily, driving through a stop sign is proof, not only that you are virile or fertile, but that you are a Person of Consequence. Every Tico's dearest desire is to be an exception to the rule – any rule. Remember, therefore, that signs, laws, and the commands of the Policía Municipal are only for the lowly.

## THE CITY STREETS

The basic rule of driving in Costarican cities is as follows: Force your car as far as it will go into any opening in the traffic. It is this rule that produces the famous Gordian Knot – a four-way deadlock where nobody can proceed. Sharp studies suggest that the deadlock can be broken only if any one of the cars backs up.

That brings up another important point about Costarican city driving; you can't back up because there is another car right behind you. If you could back up, however, and did, you would become an object of ridicule, for backing up breaks the basic driving rule and suggests a lack of virility.

The impossibility of backing up is one of the reasons you will have difficulty parking. Aside from the fact that there isn't anywhere to park, you will find that when you try to parallel park by stopping just beyond the vacant space and backing into it, you can't because someone is right behind you, blowing his horn impatiently. If you point at the parking space and make gestures indicating you want to park, he blows his horn. You can give up and drive on, or you can get out, go back, and try to get him to back up so you can park. You do this by shouting personal abuse into the window of his car. In that instance, one of two things will happen: the Tico may shout personal abuse back at you or, or he may stare sullenly straight ahead and keep on blowing his horn. (If the second happens, you're whipped, for no foreigner can out-sulk a Tico driver.)

The parking problem caused by the backing-up problem creates the Right Lane Horror problem. At no time in a Costarican city should you drive in the right lane. One reason is that it is where the buses stop to load and unload passengers. Another is that Costaricans usually drive headfirst into parking spaces. Thus, every third or fourth parked car has its tail end sticking out into the traffic, making the right lane a narrow, winding adventure. Unfortunately, the left lane also has its hazards: right-lane drivers swerving in and out of the left lane as they steer around buses and the protruding sterns of half-parked and double-parked cars. (Ticos double park only in four-lane streets; in six-lane streets, they triple park.)

Right lane driving is further complicated by the Costarican style of entering from a side street; by driving halfway into the first lane of traffic and then looking to see if another vehicle is approaching. The way to deal with these Lane Swervers and Cross Creepers is to blow your horn and accelerate around them. If you make a careful, polite, in-line stop when your lane is invaded, you not only expose

your social and sexual inadequacies, but you may never get moving again, since you also mark yourself as a weakling whom any other driver can challenge with impunity.

While performing these dangerous gyrations, it is imperative to blow your horn. The more risky the maneuver, the more imperatively you must hoot, for all Tico drivers accept the axiom that anything you do while blowing your horn is sacred. (Horn blowing, incidentally, except in cases of serious danger, is against the law in many Costarican cities. I mention this because you would never know it otherwise.)

Another thing to remember is that one-way streets in Costa Rica are not one-way. To begin with, a driver who has a block or less to go assumes that when the one-way sign was erected, they were not thinking of cases like his. He therefore drives it the wrong way, going full throttle to get it over with quickly and to prove that he really is in a terrible hurry. More importantly, however, is to realize that many Costarican one-way streets also have a contra lane; that is, a lane for going the wrong way. It is reserved for taxis and buses and, indeed, is always full of them, producing the Two-Way-One-Way Street, which, in turn, produces lawsuits, pedestrian fatalities, and hysterical foreign drivers.

A distinctive feature in Costarican cities is the rotunda—a circular path fed by as many as eight streets. Costarican traffic commissioners have sensibly mandated one-way, circular traffic for most of the rotundas. But the traffic circle, with its minuet-like formality of movement, is, to a Tico driver, an exhilarating opportunity to out-bluff other drivers by taking the shortest cross-lane path from their point of entrance to the intended exit, all the while sounding their horn and flashing their lights.

All Costarican city driving requires (and soon produces) familiarity with the Funnel Effect. Especially in those cities that preserve narrow pathways as streets, which basically means all Costarican cities, you will find that four-lane streets often, after four or five blocks, become a two-lane and then a one-lane street. Since many Costarican cities are force-fed with automobiles by an excellent Pista (highway) system, this produces both the Funnel Effect and the Reverse Funnel Effect.

At first glance, it may appear that the Funnel Effect is more dangerous and unnerving than the Reverse Funnel Effect. This is not correct. True, the unwary motorist entering a Funnel may get trapped against one side or the other and have to stay there until traffic slacks off around one or two



o'clock in the morning, but you can usually abuse your way out of the trap.

It is the Reverse Funnel which produces what insurance companies refer to as “death or dismemberment.” Imagine the effect of bottling a number of prideful and excitable Costarican drivers in a narrow street for half a mile or more, and then suddenly releasing them. It's like dumping out a sack of white rats. As each car emerges, it immediately tries to pass the car ahead of it and, if possible, the two or three cars ahead of it. The car ahead is passing the car ahead of it, and so on. If all Costarican cars were of even roughly the same power, this would simply produce wild, group acceleration. But in Costa Rica, the car engines range from 500 cubic centimeter midgets to Formula 1 racing cars, and the first hundred yards of the Reverse Funnel, before the shakedown, produces a maelstrom of screaming engines, spinning tires, and blaring horns.

## ON THE HIGHWAY

Costarican roads, just like Costarican streets, change their character unexpectedly. It is not unusual to be driving on a four-lane, modern asphalt highway, then round a curve and find that you are suddenly driving on a two-lane, unpaved road with man-sized potholes. In reality, however, most roads are somewhere in between these extremes.

The paramount feature of Costarican highway driving is la Paseo, meaning both “to pass with an automobile” and “to surpass or excel.” To paseo someone is to excel him socially, morally, sexually, and politically. By the same token, to be paseoed is to lose status, dignity, and

reputation. Thus, it is not where you arrive that counts, but what (or whom) you pass on the way.

The paseo procedure is to floor your accelerator and leave it there until you come upon something you can pass. If la Paseo is not immediately possible, settle in the wake of the intended target, at a distance of six or eight inches, blow your horn and flash your lights until such time as you can pass. Passing becomes possible, in the Costarican theory, whenever there is not actually a car to your immediate left, regardless of road width or lane markings. La Paseo, however, can also take place on the right-hand side of the overtaken vehicle.

When a Tico driver sees the car ahead of him slow down or stop, he knows there can be but two causes. The driver ahead has died at the wheel, or else he has suddenly and mysteriously become a Person of No Consequence, which is roughly something that, in Costa Rica, hangs over every driver's head. He, therefore, accelerates at once and passes at full speed. If the driver ahead has, in fact, stopped for a yawning chasm, the passer is done for. More often, however, the driver has merely stopped for a stoplight. The same thing, naturally, is happening on the other side of the intersection, and the result is the Cross-Double-Cross; the instant the light changes, all four drivers obey the Law of Occupation of Empty Space and the four cars meet in the middle of the intersection, followed closely by all the cars that are tailgating them. What follows is the Four Handed Personal Abuse, in which the drivers of the two right-lane cars usually team up against the drivers of the two left-lane cars, but this is by no means a rule. Sometimes the newer or more expensive cars team up against older, cheaper ones.

In Costa Rica, you will see big trucks – huge, semis with cabs seating four abreast. There are no special speed limits for trucks enforced in Costa Rica. As if the very sight of these things was not terrifying enough, the drivers often paint mottoes across their cabs just above the windshield, usually religious. It can be nerve-shattering to meet one of these monsters coming down a narrow mountain road at fifty miles an hour, and panic may loom if you see “God is Driving” written on the cab, while “Heart of Jesus, Help me” also bears thinking about.

## THE PEDESTRIAN

It is gauche to be a pedestrian in Costa Rica; a pedestrian is automatically a Person of No Consequence. The Costarican pedestrian feels ashamed of their status and does everything they can to avoid acting like a pedestrian. To cross the street in the crosswalk, for instance, would be admitting they are a pedestrian. To cross the street, the Tico crosses in the middle of the block, strolling slowly through the traffic, trying to make it clear that they are not a pedestrian at all, but a driver who has momentarily alighted from their car. If you treat them like a pedestrian, thus drawing attention to their shame, they will be furious. Do not look directly at them. Do not drive around them. Above all, do not stop for them. If they challenge you to drive within four inches of their toes, drive within four inches of their toes, as if they were not there. Of course, if you drive on their toes, they will shout personal abuse and call a cop.

## THE SCOOTER PLAGUE

To get some idea of the Costarican Scooter Plague, imagine all the chinks between cars are filled with hurtling motor scooters, each sounding its tinny horn, racing its motor, and emitting a small cloud of hydrocarbons. I used to think that nothing could be worse than the Costarican Scooter Plague, but I was wrong. As young Ticos have accumulated more money in their pockets, the Scooter Plague has given way to the Cheap Chinese Motorcycle Menace, which is louder, faster, and altogether more surprising.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Editor's Note: At this point, the original narrative cuts off. Rumor has it that the author was seriously injured by a motorcycle traveling at breakneck speed while its Tico driver was simultaneously texting his novia (girlfriend) about their plans for the evening.*

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# GUEST COLUMN

by Edie Bakker

## Costa Rica Writers Group



The name of the group tells its purpose, but what happens at a Costa Rica Writers Group meeting? Before we take a look at a typical CRWG meeting and what transpires, let's clarify the group's rules: At the start of each meeting, members agree to maintain confidentiality, listen respectfully, and focus feedback on the writing rather than the writer. Now, on to the meeting.

After reading a piece she had written and hearing the group's comments, Gracie, smiling with relief in her eyes, says: "Wow! Thank you all for your comments! As for the issue of tenses, I'll work on them. Tenses are hard!"

"You've got a challenging piece," the moderator reassures her. "You're writing in the present tense with

a flashback, and then, in the end, you move forward to the future. If you want, you can call me later, and we'll work on it together."

Now, it's Jill's turn to read her piece. It's almost perfectly written. Everyone is in awe of how she wrapped the end back to the beginning and managed to make the whole story symbolic of old age. It made them think about things in a new way. A reminder is made to the group that they are here to discuss the writing, not the content, as it gets a little religious. This rule keeps us from political or religious arguments, yet gives us the freedom to write about them. Someone mentions a typo in the last paragraph on page three. Several ask whether she has considered publishing her story or making it the beginning of a book.

Johnathan then reads his story. It's good, but there are no paragraphs. Obviously, Johnathan is a new writer, and several mention the lack of paragraphs, but they try to do so gently. The group members also tell him what is good about his story, and someone explains to him how to separate paragraphs. When it's his turn to speak he is grateful, but also a little embarrassed. Tom volunteers to put paragraphs in it for him and send it to him later, as both have chosen to be on the networking list and share emails.

According to the clock, it's time to move on to the skills presentation. Jason has put together a paper on when to write out numbers. We all listen with eagerness.

The names and the scenes have been changed in this description to protect privacy, while showing what our group is like. But everything here is based on real events, real people, and real things that happen in the Costa Rica Writers Group. The CRWG is a place to learn, grow, and improve our abilities.

At each meeting, a writing challenge is suggested. Its purpose is to stimulate creativity. Participation is

optional. Right now, we are collecting short stories for a book. Make that two books! We have submissions from all over the world; many are about living in Costa Rica.

We meet via Zoom on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 11:30 am to 12:45 pm. That's an hour and fifteen minutes of pure camaraderie and growth as writers. From time to time, we may skip a session for a holiday or because a moderator isn't available that week, and the response is always, "No! Please don't!" Some say it is what keeps them going through the month. That begs the question: Are we a writers' group or a support group? The answer is, we're both!

Come join us. Writers of all skill levels are welcomed, encouraged, and guided to improve their work. They can read their first poem, or practice presenting a book they've just published, or present anything that they have written for evaluation. We do it all. We have seen people grow in their writing skills in a matter of months.

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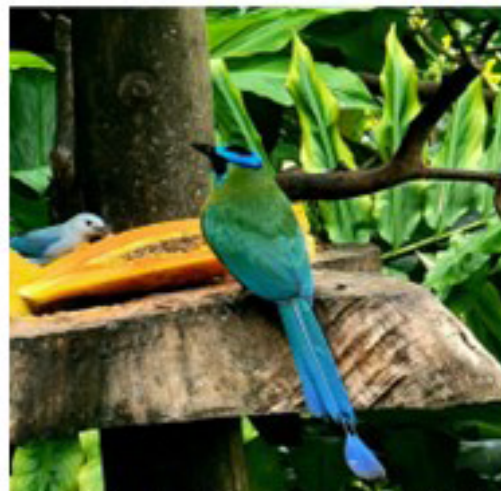
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# GIVING BACK

by Martha Rollins



## My Rio Pacuare Trip, January 2026

*Editor's Note: The Association of Residents of Costa Rica (ARCR) demonstrates its appreciation for Costa Rica by sponsoring charity and cultural programs, sometimes partnering with organizations that share these values. Two of those organizations are the Costa Rica Humanitarian Foundation and the American Legion, Post 10.*

**M**y first encounter with the indigenous people of Costa Rica occurred shortly after I arrived sixteen years ago. At that time, I visited two indigenous schools in the Smiriñak Indigenous Territory. I wanted to find out how I could get to know

them better and become a friend of the community. I was referred by the owner of Galeria Namu, a gallery of indigenous art in San José.

Both schools are located on the Rio Pacuare, a beautiful wild river known for first-class white-water rafting, in



the upper Talamanca Mountains, where the Cabécar people originated. The Cabécar are the largest and most isolated of the eight indigenous groups in Costa Rica and are the only indigenous people in Costa Rica who speak the Cabécar language on a daily basis.

At first, I was alone. Gradually, others, including Terry Wise from ARCR and several adventuresome members of the Women's Club of Costa Rica, became interested and joined me. George Sellers from the American Legion is one of those early companions. He was on this trip also. We have now visited the community each year for sixteen years.

For many years, to reach the schools, we had to hike on indigenous footpaths and cross a river on a swinging rope bridge. There were horses to carry rice, beans, and books for the children, but we had to unload the horses so they could swim across the river, then load them again for the rest of the trip. At the schools, we slept in sleeping bags on the classroom floor and cooked by candlelight and propane. Rubber boots were essential

in the mud of the rainy season, and our only shower was a pipe bringing river water into the kitchen area.

At that time, the older children going to school carried their younger siblings across the river. Mothers made difficult decisions about sending their children to school instead of keeping them safe at home, and children died each year. The andorival, similar to a ski lift, used to cross the river in front of the school, was no longer functional, and the children had to walk several hours to school, using footpaths and the road instead. Teachers stayed at the schools and returned home only on weekends.

Several years ago, on one of our visits, we distributed copies of the first Cabécar language dictionary, developed by a researcher at the University of Costa Rica. We gave copies to students of indigenous and non-indigenous schools as part of a team project. To our surprise, the Cabécar students told us there were mistakes in the dictionary; it contained Bribri words. After checking with the university, we found that the UCR researcher conducted all his research in

the lower Talamanca area, where the Bribri and Cabécar meet and interact, rather than in the original area from which they had migrated.

Over the past few years, ICE and other donors have helped with changes and improvements. A road into the Smiriñak Territory has been improved, and we can now utilize 4X4 vehicles to reach the community. Both schools now have running water and electricity, and a new kitchen has been installed at Escuela Paso Marcos (renamed Escuela Smiriñak). Also, fences have been erected to protect the children from a sometimes raging river. The number of children attending the schools now totals 70, from pre-school to grade six.

On January 4 - 7 this year, our team of volunteers and donors returned once again to the schools we first visited so long ago. On this trip was long-time donor George Sellers, O.J. Rivera, Leo Nelson, Bill Flagherty and his wife Leticia, from the American Legion. Gail Nystrom from the Costa Rica Humanitarian Foundation came and helped with activities, as did



indigenous leader Gamaliel Molina Diaz (Gama), an important part of our group, and former Directora of Sikua Ditso, Betty Vargas, a Cabécar woman.

We met at the Wagelia Hotel, our home base in Turrialba. Our first priority was to meet with Betty, who lives near Turrialba and has been battling cancer for several years. She has been unable to work or travel and would accompany us for her first visit to her old school.

We again brought school supplies, including notebooks, paper, pencils, pens, and art supplies, which we had purchased in San José, where we had a better selection and lower prices. We spent the afternoon in Turrialba with Betty, buying the food supplies, rice, beans, oil, sugar, tuna fish, and other staples, for distribution to the children and their families. The men loaded it all into the 4X4 SUVs in our caravan.

A pickup truck and a local driver to lead the way arrived the next day, and we departed Turrialba for Rio Pacuare early in the morning. It had been raining all night, so we knew the road up and down the mountains, and even crossing one small river, would be muddy and slippery... and it was.

Our arrival in the Cabécar community was met with a warm welcome and a fiesta with activities and sports. George delivered the medicine he had brought from the



US for the horses and a workshop, designed by Gail and assisted by Betty and three volunteer “teachers” from the American Legion, was conducted. The children also created and performed an original play and, with the assistance of two indigenous teachers, created original books that drew on their own experiences in their environment and culture. Gama took sample copies of the children’s books and will work with teachers in other communities to replicate the activity.

The women in the community prepared lunch and served it to everyone. We had provided the ingredients for the meal in advance, and the women spent two days cooking. After the meal, each child was given two bags: one with extensive school supplies and the other with staple food. Teachers were given teacher supplies. A few students in the upper grades were away working in the sugarcane fields and packages were set aside with the teachers for them.

While there, Betty, George, and I met with adults who had been children when we first began visiting this community. They now have children of their own, which they showed us with great pride. Some of the women had been Betty’s students. I was given a set of jewelry made for me by a mother who urged her little boy to present it to me. It was a joyful reunion.

After a difficult trip back to Turrialba, we met to debrief over dinner and say goodbye to Betty...until the next time.

I am deeply grateful to indigenous leader Gama (Gamaliel Molina Diaz) for contacting the indigenous community and organizing our activities with them. He is currently working with three students from Stanford University in California to develop future indigenous games and has selected board members and formed an association to promote the values of the indigenous in Costa Rica. His next project will involve the association and the students in the 2027 Indigenous Games, to be held April 16th, 17th, and 18th. Make your plans and reservations now!

The Indigenous Games were originated to help solve a problem with suicide among indigenous youth in Talamanca. It started small, but Gama has been expanding the program each year to include all Costarican groups, such as the Brunca and Térraba in the Southern Region, and others. He has traveled to Colombia and Mexico to promote the games in those countries and to incorporate their ideas with those of Costa Rica.

You will be hearing more about the 2027 Indigenous Games in future issues of *El Residente*.

This trip was made possible through the generosity of several sponsors. Over the years, we have had many donors, team members, and sponsors, including:

Association of Residents of Costa Rica (ARCR)

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# ON THE GRID

by Ivo Henfling

## What should be included in an HOA fee?

**M**ore property buyers than ever are looking for property in a gated community or condominium. You can read more about the difference between the two here: <https://tinyurl.com/3zbbny8z>. I'll leave the reasons for that to another article. When I started selling property in Costa Rica at the beginning of the 1980's, there were no condominiums. Now, it's pretty common, and you'll find thousands of them all over the country. And that means HOA fees.

### WHAT IS AN HOA?

The letters HOA stand for Home Owner Association. HOA fees are those fees that cover the operating expenses of a condominium complex. Often, they may be called a condo fee, or even a community fee, but they are all the same thing. To make an HOA fee mandatory for homeowners in a common development, the condo needs to have legally registered bylaws. Let me explain.

Legally registered condominiums always have a gate and a fence or wall around the community. Each property in that condominium is separately and legally titled; you can see the "F" in the title number, which means *finca filial* (subsidiary property). The condominium must have bylaws, or CC&R's, registered in the National Register. The bylaws always explain the details of the HOA fee. Those fees are calculated percentage-wise, depending on the size of each property.

There are gated communities, mostly in Atenas, Puriscal, and many coastal mountain areas that do not have formal HOA fees. These communities are not formal condominiums. What are they? Recently, I wrote an article about that <https://tinyurl.com/5b7cknk2> as it's causing a lot of problems with

neighbors in those communities who don't want to pay the fees.

Now that I have explained the difference between communities, let's cover which expenses should be included in HOA fees.

HOA (Home Owner Association) fees should cover the shared costs of maintaining and operating a community and are often misunderstood. What is included can vary widely depending on whether it's a condominium, a gated community, or a mixed-use development (where the developer mixes residential and commercial construction), but there are standard categories that most HOAs include. Here's a breakdown of the core operating expenses, the basics needed to keep the community functioning, and which should always be included:

- . Maintenance & repairs (common areas): Landscaping, roads, sidewalks, gutters, water run-offs, elevators, roofs (for buildings), perimeter walls and fences, water storage tanks, backup power, water treatment plant, guard shack, painting, etc.
- . Utilities for common areas: Electricity (lighting), water (irrigation), sometimes gas.
- . Cleaning & janitorial services: Hallways, lobbies, shared spaces like streets, and gardens.
- . Security: Guards, cameras, gate systems.
- . Pest control/fumigation.
- . Amenities and lifestyle costs. If your community has amenities, HOA fees usually fund them and they can include: Pools, gyms, clubhouses, parks, playgrounds, sports courts, and event spaces or shared lounges.

- . Reserve Fund (VERY important): A portion of HOA fees should go into a reserve fund which covers future repairs to such things as: Roof replacement, road resurfacing, structural repairs, major equipment replacement (elevators, pumps). If this is missing or underfunded, owners may face future large and unexpected “special assessments.”
- . Administrative and management costs (expenses for running the HOA itself): These can include: property management company fees, accounting, bookkeeping, legal services, insurance (liability, building insurance for condos). NOTE: This is often not done, so check.
- . Insurance & Risk Management: General liability insurance, property insurance (especially condos), disaster coverage, depending on location. NOTE: These insurances (and any others) are usually not included, so also please check.
- . There some optional and location based expenses for some communities, depending on the country and development (like many in Costa Rica) that should be determined. These may be for water systems (if private wells/tanks), wastewater treatment plants, private roads and drainage systems, cable/internet bulk contracts.

**. WHAT SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED:**

Typically, HOA fees should NOT cover: Individual unit electricity or water service (unless bundled in condos), repairs inside the home, personal property insurance, mortgage payments.

**WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR:**

Very low HOA fees. This often means poor maintenance or no reserves. Also, determine:

- . Is there a reserve study? None can mean a risk of future high costs.
- . Are the admin costs high? That could be due to inefficiency or mismanagement.
- . Are there frequent special assessments? That can be a sign of poor budgeting.

**A SIMPLE RULE OF THUMB:**

A “healthy” HOA budget is usually apportioned like this: 50–70% is for operating costs, 20–30%

for reserves, and 10–20% is allocated to admin/management expenses.

Most of what I have covered here is part of the due diligence you should do before you purchase. Insist that your real estate agent and your lawyer provide you all of the above information, including financial statements, and the last minutes of the most recent annual meeting.

*Ivo Henfling is a Dutch expat who has lived in Costa Rica since 1980. He founded the American-European Real Estate Group in 1999, the first functioning Multiple Listing Service (MLS) with affiliate agents from coast to coast. He is the broker/owner of GoDutch Realty and can be reached at (506) 2289-5125 or (506) 8834-4515 or by email to: [ivo@american-european.net](mailto:ivo@american-european.net)*



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# ALWAYS AN ADVENTURE

by Christine Monteith

## Ch-ch-ch- changes

(David Bowie, 1971)



**N**ew construction is generally the most tangible sign that a community is changing. If the new construction consists of improved roads, upgraded utilities, or increased housing, then generally, members of the community welcome it. It portends an influx of new people, businesses, and opportunities that improve the quality of life.

I grew up in a faded Victorian-era boomtown in Central Canada where, in my teenager's perspective, nothing much happened. However, after a community organization renovated the historic Opera House, a cultural and artistic renaissance occurred. Fifty years later, Petrolia is a summertime, performing arts mecca

offering cute B&Bs and fine dining wrapped in small town charm.

In the mid-70's my family vacationed on the island of Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos. It was a rugged coral island with one road from the airport to the only two hotels on the island. They overlooked a spectacular white beach edged with turquoise sea. We landed in a DC8 on a gravel runaway with a WWII Quonset hut serving as the terminal. Now, as a tax haven, the island is an upscale combination of resorts, condominium complexes, and shopping malls that offer all the luxury and amenities demanded by the wealthy.

In the late 80's, I lived in Hell's Kitchen on the west side of Manhattan. It was the waning days of the "Midnight Cowboy" culture of Times Square and home of the "Westies", an Irish-American organized crime gang. And I loved living in that neighborhood! I could walk to work (a true luxury.) The blocks stretching from Times Square to the Hudson River were lined with five-story, red brick walk-ups where older women would lean out their windows to watch the passing activity. The 8th, 9th, and 10th Avenue storefronts were mostly "Mom and Pop" businesses. In the blocks near my co-op were two diners, a great butcher, a bakery, dry cleaner, and a typewriter/vacuum cleaner repair store. Then the Worldwide Plaza was built; a skyscraper, complex occupying the whole city block that transformed the neighborhood. Within a few years, the old businesses were replaced with upscale restaurants, wellness stores, even The Gap!

Nowadays, from my deck, I look out over the Golfo Dulce and wonder how new construction changes will impact the vibrant, natural environment the surrounds me.

My husband's first journey to Pavones, the Eldorado of tropical left point surf breaks, was in the late 1990's. Traveling by car from San Jose was a grueling ten-hour trip that included such highlights as 20 miles of gravel corduroy road through the palm plantations south of Quepos, a ferry crossing on a single vehicle sized barge pushed by a boat with an outboard motor, and fording five creeks.

In the intervening years, the Costanera highway was fully paved, a WWII designed Bailey bridge supplants the ferry crossing, and the creek crossings now have bridges (though one is still just a collection of old iron rails.) The indications are incremental but the signals all point to oncoming change.

Bumping along our dusty roads I observe new lanes bulldozed into the forests and fields. It starts with a fresh grading of the deep red earth then, a few weeks later, a layer of compacted gravel. Finally, to establish its identity as a legitimate entrance, a gate would be installed. Not all of these new lanes lead to home construction, some are to grazing pastures or palm plantations. Just in our small neighborhood, there are four new homes under construction on a dead end road that stretches for only two miles. That, in addition to the nine homes built after ours was completed in 2017, indicate progress is happening. We are fortunate that our new neighbors are enjoying and appreciating the precious and unique

qualities of our surroundings and are engaging in balanced stewardship of the environment.

The more people, Tico and Gringo, that discover and enjoy the beauty of the Golfo Dulce, the greater the employment of locals and the more of an improvement there is to their living standards and opportunities. Making this region of the country more accessible will aid in its economic growth.

I am, however, very concerned about the location being considered for the new Southern Zone international airport. The airport's proposed location is just east of Sierpe and north of Corcovado National Park, a World Wildlife Biosphere. This is one of Costa Rica's most ecologically unique and sensitive environments. I can think of several locations further east, like old palm plantations, that would have a lesser impact. Of course, it's been under discussion for ten years and there is no funding, so I'm not going to lose sleep over it just yet. (They do, however, have my vote for a closer international airport. The present seven-hour trek by bus to SJO usually requires an overnight stay in the greater metropolitan area and basically adds a whole day on each end of our out-of-country trips.)

Seeing the changes to places where I've lived and visited over my lifetime, I mourn the loss of the character they had and I enjoyed at that time. Not that what replaces my recollections of those places is bad, but I wonder what the changes will bring to this neighborhood; how will look and feel in 20 years? I hope that I will appreciate and enjoy its transformation. I also hope the changes are similar to what occurred in my hometown where the historic Victorian charm was enhanced, as opposed to the wide-scale reformatting that took place in Hell's Kitchen.

Progress means going forward, or onward, to a destination, but I'd like to think that we can find a gentler way to reach those destinations than using a bulldozer to create the path.

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



# LEGAL UPDATE

by Rómulo Pacheco

## Immigration Law Updates in 2026

If you are planning a move to Costa Rica this year, you should know that immigration law updates are not just background noise. They can affect which residency category fits your situation, how quickly you need to gather documents, what steps come after approval, and more. For many applicants, the challenge is not just understanding the law; it is making sure small procedural changes do not turn into expensive delays.

That is why the smartest approach is to treat immigration updates as both legal and practical. A rule may sound simple on paper, but the real question is how it changes your timeline, your paperwork, and your next decision.

### IMMIGRATION LAW UPDATES MATTER

Costa Rica has long been attractive to retirees, investors, families, and remote professionals because of its stability and quality of life. But immigration policy does not stand still; agencies revise requirements, clarify procedures, and adjust how applications are reviewed. Sometimes the change is substantial, other times the law stays the same while the process around it becomes stricter.

For applicants, that distinction matters. A particular residency path may still be available, but the supporting documents may require different certifications, newer issue dates, or more careful translation. Processing expectations can also shift. If you rely on old advice from a friend or a social media group, you may prepare for a process that no longer works the way it did even a year ago.

This is one reason experienced guidance matters so much in Costa Rica. Immigration is not just about

submitting forms; it is about timing, consistency, and understanding how one requirement affects the next.

### THE UPDATES THAT PEOPLE FEEL FIRST

When people hear about Costa Rica immigration law updates, they often expect headline-level changes. In reality, applicants usually feel the impact first in four areas: category selection, document validity, filing procedures, and post-approval obligations.

Resident category selection can become more important when authorities refine how they interpret income, investment, dependency, or family relationships. A category that seems easiest at first may not be the best long-term fit. For example, someone with retirement income may qualify under one path, while a family with mixed income sources may need to weigh another option more carefully.

Document validity is another frequent issue. Birth certificates, marriage certificates, criminal background checks, and proof of income can all be affected by timing rules. Even when the underlying requirement has not changed, enforcement around expiration dates or apostille standards can become less flexible. Those kinds of changes can force applicants to reorder documents and restart part of the preparation process.

Filing procedures also deserve attention. Government systems may change where applications are submitted, how appointments are scheduled, or what supplemental forms are expected. These are the kinds of updates that rarely make big news but create the most frustration when missed.

Then there are post-approval obligations. Residency approval is a major milestone, but it is not the end of the process. Enrollment in the national health system, obtaining

your cédula, renewing status on time, and maintaining compliance can all be affected by administrative changes.

These are some of the things are why employing an experienced professional to do your residency application can be so important. Your friend or neighbor may have done their residency application process themselves, but there is no assurance that the rules and requirements will be the same for you today as they were for them. Eliminate the chance of frustration and hire a qualified attorney to guide you through the process.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me.

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# CLUB CORNER

## ▶ **Alcoholics Anonymous**

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

## ▶ **American Legion Post 10**

Meets at Yakky's Restaurant 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 Leonardo Nelson (726) 205-9746

## ▶ **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 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 women 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, visit our website at: [www.democratsabroad.org/cr](http://www.democratsabroad.org/cr) Register to vote absentee at: [votefromabroad.org](http://votefromabroad.org)

### ► First Tuesday Lunch

The ARCR First Tuesday Lunch takes place the first Tuesday of the month, 12:00 at the Restaurant El Dorado on Calle 62A in Sabana North. Open to all, no RSVP required. For directions call Allen Dickinson, 7033-3475

### ► Marine Corps Warriors League

Meets the second Saturday of the month at 10 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).

### ► 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@pwn-cr.com](mailto:info@pwn-cr.com) The PWN website is: <http://www.pwn-cr.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.

**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:

Friday May 1, 2026  
Labor Day, National Holiday

Friday May 8, 2026,  
Presidential Inauguration  
National Holiday

Sunday June 21, 2026  
Father's day  
Observance

Tips and Tricks for a Pura Vida Life: A Seminar, June 25 & 26 (Thursday/Friday)

### 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.

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

### ONE-LINERS:

I just burned 3,000 calories. That's the last time I nap while the brownies are in the oven.

Atheism is a non-prophet organization.

I don't suffer from insanity, I enjoy every minute of it.

Always borrow money from a pessimist. They'll never expect it back.

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