

Paradise Post

News From Ojochal, Costa Ballena,
Costa Rica and Beyond



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Updates from the Osa

2011 was a year that many would like to forget. Economic and political turmoil permeated a good portion of the world. Costa Rica wasn't immune to these effects but did fare fairly well. President, Laura Chinchilla, recently announced that investments into the country increased by 7%, job creation improved by 4% and inflation fell from 5.82% to 4.72% in 2011. The University of Costa Rica's School of Economic Sciences is predicting that this year will see moderate economic growth of 3.8% to 4.8%.

Locally, businesses are growing and new ones are opening up (see Roadhouse 169 Bar and Grill on page 2). Citrus restaurant just celebrated their 4th anniversary with a special dinner and bellydance show and our Indonesian restaurant, Ylang Ylang, is now serving Sunday brunch from 10:30 to 3:00 with a variety of small dishes priced from \$2

to \$6. Shelagh at Royal Palm Interiors just had her Grand Opening Sale with the Uvita store opening just before Christmas. There is also a new Ojochal Community Organization with both Tico and expat members who are the 'go-to' group for local concerns and represent the area to relevant government departments. Lastly, Phases 4, 5, 6 and beyond are seeking \$20 donations for bridge maintenance from anyone who regularly uses it.

May 2012 be a healthy and prosperous year for you. Pura Vida!

Kristina Welburn
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Costa Rica is the First Country in the Americas to become Measles and Rubella Free

Health authorities are seeking certification from The Pan American Health Organization as well as the World Health Organization for the historic achievement of being free of measles and rubella for over 10 years.

In 1999 Costa Rica had a large rubella outbreak and in response the Ministry of Health adopted the goal of its elimination. In 2001 a nationwide vaccination campaign for rubella and measles reached approx. 95% of persons aged 15-39 with the goal of leading to complete measles and rubella elimination. Along with an aggressive campaign by both the Ministry of Health

and the Social Security System that goal has been reached.

Measles primarily affects children and can cause serious complications including blindness, encephalitis and pneumonia. Rubella can cause severe birth defects and both illnesses can be prevented by vaccination.

In Europe many countries do not have outbreaks under control. According to the CDC, In France alone more than 14,000 cases of measles were reported from January through June of 2011.

No More Junk Food in Schools

The ministries of Education and Health recently signed a decree prohibiting the sale of all junk food in public schools starting this month. The decree bans the sale of food too high in sugar, calories and fat. In conjunction, the State will promote recreational and sports activities at all schools and colleges in order to decrease childhood obesity.

Danza de los Diablitos: Dance of the Little Devils



Each new year is marked by a celebration by the Boruca people of Southern Costa Rica. The Boruca, indigenous people of Costa Rica, are a pre-Columbian tribe formerly called The Brunka and currently have only approximately 2000 members. Danza de los Diablitos (Dance of the Little Devils) is a 3 day festival which runs from December 31st through January 2nd.

The males of the tribe perform a re-enactment of the Spanish conquest wearing costumes of burlap and banana leaves with elaborate masks carved out of balsa wood. The masked men are the Diablitos (The Spanish colonists called the tribe evil and little devils) and they are given the task of fighting to dispel

the Spanish intruders which are represented by a man dressed as a mock bull.

After each battle the Diablitos gather at the nearest house and ask to be rewarded with Chicha (a corn beer). After the men have enough to drink the masks are put back on and another "battle" ensues with a new bull. Needless to

say as the day progresses the Diablitos become increasingly tipsy and the event culminates with a all night dance party.

In the re-enactment the mock bull is destroyed and the Borucans are always triumphant.

The masks are an important source of income for the tribe. New ones are available throughout the country but it's the used ones that are said to possess magical powers.



53 new species were discovered in Costa Rica last year. The new discoveries consisted of 26 new insects, 8 fungi and 19 plants. Currently Costa Rica's biodiversity includes around 500,000 species.

Stingless Bees

If you've been fortunate to visit our area and dine outdoors you've no doubt have had uninvited company. Small stingless bees cannot resist a delicious jam or fresh squeezed juice. They are a bit larger than flies and although can be bothersome are harmless and an integral part of our ecology.

Although the bee has no stinger it can create a unique problem. Its attack pheromone is citronella so if you use a shampoo with a citronella base the bees may become tangled in your hair.



Another type of stingless bee

Tourism Figures for 2011 Encouraging

The Costa Rican Tourism Board (ICT) recently released their figures for 2011. 2.2 million tourists visited the country in 2011 which was an increase of 4% over the previous year. The ICT's goal is to increase tourism by 5% through 2016. Their focus has been on new advertising, plans for a new national convention center and new flights to the newly renovated and expanded airports.

In 2011 2.5 million seats were available on flights to the Juan Santamaría International Airport just outside of San Jose and the Daniel Oduber International Airport in Liberia accounted for 343,000 seats.

The advertising campaign "Costa Rica's Million Dollar Gift of Happiness" featuring a talking sloth has been quite a success and has already awarded vacation packages to 40 winners.

Sustainable tourism is also a focus of the ICT and they have been issuing new sustainable tourism certificates to businesses that have reduced their environmental impact and

developed socially and ecologically responsible business modes. They expect to have 60% of all hotel rooms in the country certified by 2016.



Welcome to the Neighborhood

Erik and Laura from Colorado

Erik and Laura first visited Costa Rica 13 years ago, and with their dog, Burgess, spent 3 months in a beach house on Playa Grande in the Pacific northwest. They have returned two other times, once with their children, and have always dreamed about what it would be like to leave the rat race and relocate. The couple and their eight year old twins Quinn and Ellie were looking for an adventure the likes of which are hard to find these days in the United States. As the owners/operators of a small garden center in Colorado, they have worked for fifteen years in what can only be described as a very challenging, quite short growing season. While the mountains provide their own unique brand of beauty and adventure, both Laura and Erik, who grew up in San Diego, are more drawn to the ocean. They purchased a beautiful lot in suenos del tropico with an ocean view that renders them both speechless. Needless to say, "we're chomping at the bit" to get down there permanently. Finding schooling for the kids was the top priority, and the international school nearby seems to be the fit they had to have. The idea of bilingual children is very appealing, not to mention fostering a deep connection with the natural environment. Both Erik and Laura love the idea of living somewhere that doesn't care to spend money on a war machine. Everything about Costa Rica represents the things that are most important to this couple and their children. Pura Vida!



Phillip and Ryan from Ontario

Phillip is an Industrial Mechanic Millwright and Automatic Equipment Mechanic who has been employed for 20 yrs at Kodak Canada. He's also patent holder for a therapeutic light device and a Golf training device, <http://theraled.com/>, <http://therapet.ca/> <http://gripitrite.com/> and <http://laser-grip.com/>.

He lost his wife of 38 years this September to the ruthlessness of cancer; and is left with a wonderful son Ryan 28. Valoree and Phillip were within 6 months of retirement and had dreamed of other wonderful places in the world to enjoy.

Phillip said "Ryan and I are about to keep the dream alive and thankfully have found Steve Linder of Pacific Lots; an authentic person who has helped to blaze a trail and set the stage over the last 2 decades. This makes it possible to become a part of a new community and help to build on this most wonderful theme of a more natural and healthy lifestyle. Ryan and I will take this opportunity to bring some enthusiasm and investment to the community; and, have already promoted Pacific Lots to all who will listen."

The Roadhouse 169 Bar and Grill

A new hotspot has recently opened in town, Roadhouse Cafe, and it's getting very good reviews. Along with regular drink specials they serve Roadhouse chips and salsa with guacamole, spicy tacos, fresh salads, buffalo shrimp...and more. Local resident Jan writes " I really like the food at the Roadhouse. It is good food and good service. The food generally comes out of the kitchen quickly. My favorite is the shrimp taco basket. The spice is nice, the tacos have a crunchy cabbage and the shells aren't fried."

The setting is relaxed and comfortable. The Roadhouse Cafe offers live music and dancing and has a large screen TV for sporting events including NFL Sundays.

Owner, Bob Swanson, has been in Costa Rica for 3 years. He grew tired of sitting on hard chairs and sofas, could not find spicy food and a great place to watch games. He also loves having cocktail parties. He says " What better way to meet new friends and have lots of fun than owning a bar and restaurant in Costa Rica." If you're in the area stop in and say "hello".

They're at KM 169 on the highway in Playa Ballena between Uvita and Ojochal and are closed on Mondays. www.Roadhouse169.com



Christmas in Ojochal

New home owner, Dave, wrote to us to fill us in on his first Christmas in Costa Rica.

"I just spent my first Christmas in Ojochal with my three children (20,23,25). It wasn't as sunny as we had hoped, but the scenery was amazing and the house and pace is just perfect for relaxing and rejuvenating. Of course, the power went off several times and we had no water for two days, Christmas and Christmas Eve, but bathing in the river with biodegradable soap was an unscheduled adventure we'll never forget. Note to self: don't overschedule and overorganize your life to where you miss unique experiences that aren't mentioned in any guide book. We brought along several DVDs because it gets dark, really dark, by 6pm, but it only takes a couple days to get acclimated to being up at 5:30am and enjoying a full day of daylight activities: whale-watching from Uvita, exploring waterfalls above Uvita or at the tilapia farm, canopy tour at Osa Mountain Village, visiting the treehouse community at Finca Bellavista, surfing and a beer at Dominical, etc.... We tried to cook and eat in every other night, but the local restaurants are very tempting and of high quality. Our favorites: Exotica, Mammepappa, Jardin Tortuga, The Lookout, and Casa Linda. I'm heading back in February for two weeks with some work associates (two groups, one week each), and am hoping summer will be in full swing by then, with long hot sunny days! Life is good indeed in Ojochal! Dave"



David enjoying a fresh seafood lunch.

The Great Green Macaw Release Part 1!

Great Green macaws are the second largest parrot species in the world; native to Costa Rica some people are predicting they will become extinct in the country within 20 years. The Ara Project aims to do something about this and 2011 saw our first ever Great Green Macaw release.

Due to poaching and deforestation, in particular the cutting of the protected Mountain Almond tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*), their preferred food source and nest tree, numbers of Great Green Macaws worldwide have dropped alarmingly. With less than 2500 mature individuals worldwide, they were classified "endangered" by the IUCN in 2008 and are a CITES I species. Once prevalent throughout the entire Caribbean half of Costa Rica their range has declined by as much as 90%. Since 1994 a conservation project in the current range of the macaws in the north of the country has been aiming to preserve habitat and nest trees and reduce the impacts of poaching on the Great Greens in Costa Rica. The great news is that the decline has stopped and numbers have stabilised. However there are still less than 300 mature individuals with only 25-35 breeding pairs.

The Ara Project has been breeding Great Green macaws in captivity for several years now. It was with relief and excitement in 2009 we finally found a suitable site to release these magnificent birds into the wild. The new site on the south Caribbean coast of Costa Rica was perfect, formerly home to a thriving population of macaws they are now all but extinct in the area but the habitat remains intact with large numbers of mountain almonds and other food sources for the macaws.

Over a year was spent raising the money to fund the site which allowed us to build a new release aviary and accommodation for the on-site biologist. On March 27th 2011 the day had finally arrived and the macaws were transported from Alajuela to their new home in the jungle. The project has previously done 10 releases of Scarlet macaws but we have never released the Great Greens, in fact this was to be the first official release in the world.

The birds were then held in the release aviary for over 4 months which gives them time to adapt to many of the challenges which await them as wild birds. This was the first time they had seen the sea, monkeys, sloths, toucans and so much more and is the period used by the biologist to teach them the foodstuffs they would need to eat in order to survive in the wild. Used to eating a lot of softer fruits at the breeding centre the diet was slowly changed to contain primarily nuts and seeds in particular the seed of the incredible mountain almond. These seeds are only obtained by cracking the nut which surrounds them; they are incredibly hard and take several hefty blows with a hammer or machete to open. It took a while but soon the birds were opening these delicious nuts and eating the food which will hopefully be the main constituent of their diet for many years to come.

By July a visible change had occurred to the birds, they were over most of their worries and wanted to get out of the aviary. Groups of parrots flying by and feeding in the trees would make them call with frustration; it was time to start releasing them. The release methodology used by the project is a 'soft' methodology being slow and intensively managed but the results from our previous Scarlet macaw sites, with a survival rate of the macaws of 85%, gave us the encouragement required to continue the techniques with the greens.

The story of the first ever Great Green release by The ARA Project will continue in the next edition of the newsletter...

If you would like to help The ARA Project continue its ground breaking work with the Great Green Macaws in Costa Rica or get more information please visit our website www.thearaproject.org and click [donate](#).

Jenny Pettigrew
Assistant Breeding Centre Manager/Veterinary Technician/Volunteer Coordinator
The ARA Project



Costa Rica Rises in The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2011

The 4th edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's www.eiu.com Democracy index was recently released. The index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide, covering almost the entire world population. The index is based on 5 categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture.

The report states "Free and fair elections and civil liberties are necessary conditions for democracy, but they are unlikely to be sufficient for a full and consolidated democracy if unaccompanied by transparent and at least minimally efficient government, sufficient political participation and a supportive democratic political culture. It is not easy to build a sturdy democracy. Even in long-established ones, democracy can corrode if not nurtured and protected."

2011 was a tumultuous year

politically with debt crises, weak political leadership, dramatic change in the Middle East and North Africa and rising social unrest worldwide. Some of the most important developments noted by the organization are:

- Popular confidence in political institutions continued to decline in many countries
- Increasing social unrest could pose a threat to democracy in some countries.
- Democracy in the US has been adversely affected by a deepening of polarization of the political scene and political brinkmanship and paralysis.
- In the US and UK there has been a rise in protest movement. Problems in the functioning of government are more prominent.
- In Europe extremist political forces may not have profited from economic dislocation yet

but populism and anti-immigrant sentiment are on the rise.

- Democracy in Eastern Europe has again waned with 12 countries' scores declining in 2011
- Increasing crime in some Latin American countries has had a negative impact on democracy.

Costa Rica fared very well compared with the rest of the world. While the US fell from 17th in 2010 to 19th in 2011 Costa Rica rose in rank from 25th to 20th, well above any other country in Latin America other than Uruguay at 17th. Chile has the next the closest ranking at 35th followed by Brazil at 45th and Panama at 47th.



Country	Rank	Overall Score	Electoral Process and Pluralism	Functioning of Government	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
Norway	1	9.80	10.00	9.64	10.00	9.38	10.00
Iceland	2	9.65	10.00	9.64	8.89	10.00	9.71
Denmark	3	9.52	10.00	9.64	8.89	9.38	9.71
Sweden	4	9.50	9.58	9.64	8.89	9.38	10.00
New Zealand	5	9.26	10.00	9.29	8.89	8.13	10.00
Australia	6	9.22	10.00	8.93	7.78	9.38	10.00
Switzerland	7	9.09	9.58	9.29	7.78	9.38	9.41
Canada	8	9.08	9.58	9.29	7.78	8.75	10.00
Finland	7	9.06	10.00	9.64	7.22	8.75	9.71
Netherlands	10	8.99	9.58	8.93	8.89	8.13	9.41
Luxembourg	11	8.88	10.00	6.67	6.67	8.75	9.71
Ireland	12	8.56	9.58	7.86	7.22	8.13	10.00
Austria	13	8.49	9.58	7.86	7.78	8.13	9.12
Germany	14	8.34	9.58	8.21	6.67	8.13	9.12
Malta	15	8.28	9.17	8.21	5.56	8.75	9.71
Czech Republic	16	8.19	9.58	7.14	6.67	8.13	9.41
Uruguay	17	8.17	10.00	8.93	4.44	7.50	10.00
United Kingdom	18	8.16	9.58	7.86	6.11	8.13	9.12
United States	19	8.11	9.17	7.50	7.22	8.13	8.53
Costa Rica	20	8.10	9.58	8.21	6.11	6.88	9.71
Japan	21	8.08	9.17	8.21	6.11	7.50	9.41
South Korea	22	8.06	9.17	7.86	7.22	7.50	8.53
Belgium	23	8.05	9.58	8.21	5.56	7.50	9.41
Mauritius	24	8.04	9.17	8.21	5.00	8.13	9.71
Spain	25	8.02	9.58	7.5	6.11	7.50	9.41

Costa Rica is Least Corrupt Country in Central America

Transparency International, in their fight against corruption, recently published their yearly Corruption Perceptions Index which is composed of 17 different surveys and assessments.

Worldwide, Costa Rica is ranked 50th while in Latin America it's ranked as the 4th least corrupt country. The most corrupt countries in Latin America are Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela.

The index scores 183 countries and territories from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (least corrupt). The surveys and assessments include questions related to bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds, and the effectiveness of public sector anti-corruptions efforts.

Costa Rica scored a 4.8 while Nicaragua scored 2.5, Panama 3.3, El Salvador 3.4, Honduras 2.6 and Guatemala 2.7 (Belize was not included in the ranking).

The least corrupt countries in the world are New Zealand, Finland and Denmark and the worst were Somalia and North Korea. You can find more information here:

<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/>

The 2011 Global Peace Index

Due to the ongoing dispute over the San Juan River with Nicaragua as well as a perception that crime is on the rise, the Global Peace Index dropped Costa Rica's rating by 5 places last year to 31st out of 153 countries evaluated. Costa Rica is still rated as the most peaceful country in Central America and is ranked in 2nd place in all of Latin America behind Uruguay which is in 21st place.

The Global Peace Index measures internal and external factors relating to peace and security and countries are scored based on these factors. In the region, Panama fell behind Costa Rica in 49th place, Nicaragua at 72nd, El Salvador at 102nd, Honduras at 117th and Guatemala at 125th.

Their 2011 key findings are discouraging:

- The world is less peaceful for the third straight year
- Due to an increased threat of terrorist attacks in 29 nations
- A greater likelihood of violent demonstrations in 33 countries
- Arab Spring unrest heralds biggest ever change in rankings, Libya tumbles 83 spots
- Iceland bounces back from

economic woes to top ranking

- Somalia displaces Iraq as world's least peaceful nation
- Violence cost the global economy more than \$8.12 trillion in 2010
- US peacefulness shows minimal change

You can find more information here: <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/>

A new study, published in *Nature Climate Change*, shows that countries with high incomes and high carbon emissions, such as the US and Denmark, do not achieve higher life expectancies than those with moderate incomes and lower carbon emissions, such as Costa Rica and Chile. This finding challenges the assumption that human wellbeing requires growth in both economic activity and carbon emissions. You can find the article here: www.nature.com

Costa Rica: The Best Brand in Latin America



In a recent study Costa Rica has been recognized as having the strongest country brand in Latin America. Future Brand has recently released their 7th annual edition of the Country Brand Index (CBI) which evaluates 113 countries around the world. FutureBrand assesses the strength of a country brand by measuring awareness, familiarity, preference, consideration, advocacy and active decisions to visit or interact with a place. The most important factors

that differentiate a country's brand are: Value System, Quality of Life, Good for Business, Heritage and Culture and Tourism. A country that's focused on its people and their needs will always score highly.

In the report FutureBrand writes that's it's been a challenging year for the US which fell 3 places in the index to #6. The downward trend is partially due to troubled socio-political and economic fortunes. However, the US has shown some improvement in perceptions relating to business opportunities (their research was undertaken before the decline in the US credit rating). Tourism also improved in the US due to significant worldwide perception of value due to the weakening of the dollar.

Costa Rica moved up 3 points

from its 2010 ranking to #24 overall and #1 in Latin America. Latin America in general has gained significantly due to many years of relative political stability. Costa Rica was also acknowledged in the category of Natural Beauty reaching 5th place worldwide falling behind New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the Maldives. You can find the full article here:

<http://www.futurebrand.com/>



Here we are in 2012 already, amazing how time flies. That puts our project into its 23rd year in operation. We're already in the middle of a busy season of 4 day discovery property tours and also exhibiting at a number of events. We're sponsoring the International Living "Ultimate Event" being held Feb. 21 – 25 in Cancun, Mexico as well as their event in Panama in April and then to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada (brrrrrr) for a show in March. Our developments and the Costa Ballena region of Costa Rica are growing quickly. A new sports bar opened last month with the NFL Sunday ticket and some big TV's just in time for the February 5 – 8 tour we have scheduled coinciding with the Super Bowl. Being that I am from New England I'll be

routing for the Patriots. Plans for the new international airport just to our south are moving forward with a start date for construction this year. I keep getting older. When I was 18 I didn't think much about how long I might live but now in my 50's it starts to concern me. The fact that adult males live longer in Costa Rica than in the US is very appealing. Costa Rica's economy continues to boom despite problems in many other parts of the world. Everywhere you look there's new housing, new big box stores and commercial buildings as well as road work going on everywhere. Now is a great time to look at property in Costa Rica especially for you northerners....



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www.PacificLots.com/Costa-Rica-Blog/

New Tax on Corporations

Costa Rica just initiated a new tax on Costa Rican corporations (SA's). The tax is specifically aimed at Costa Rican corporations or Sociedad Anonimas (S.A.) as they are called. The new law places a tax of roughly \$175 per year on passive corporations (Sociedad Anonimas) those typically just set up to own land. They are taxing active corporations roughly \$350 once per year on those that are active, for example a business or a house with reportable rental income.

My thoughts?

The property taxes in Costa Rica are ridiculously low and insufficient for the progress they want to make as a nation and the tax is necessary. The total increase is at most an additional \$350 per year added to the incredibly low tax rate of \$1.95 per \$1,000 in value (less than \$400 on a home valued at \$200k), bringing the total tax bill to less than

\$750 per year on a \$200k home being rented out and the tax bill would be less than \$600 per year if the house were not rented..

Why the tax?

At issue was the fact that those who own property in a corporate form, which is the majority of home owners in Costa Rica as well as raw land owners were basically paying nothing for the corporations except set-up costs and yet reaping the benefits of the corporate veil of protection every year. When such a property was sold again there was no tax due since one would merely sell the shares of the corporation, no property transfer was needed since the property was owned by the corporation. Each time a property was resold, Costa Rica was getting no income, no transfer tax, no doc stamps, no fees. That's the main reason why the new tax has been put in place. It was so inexpensive, people

were doing things like owning their cars in a corporation set up merely to own the car, allowing you to sell the car complete with license plates, insurance and inspection. The new tax is due each year by January 1st but this year is not due until the 30th of April. Owners within our developments will be contacted about payment this year since our bills had already gone out prior to the new tax. In the US most states have a similar tax called a corporate minimum tax. It is \$350 in Florida whether you have an active or passive corporation and make any money or not.