

Paradise Post

News From Ojochal, Costa Rica
and Beyond

January 2011



Inside this issue:

Crime decreases	1
Ethical Traveler top 10	1
Foreign companies in Costa Rica	2
Economic freedom increases	2
Bananas get designation	2
Tourism update	2
New neighbors	3
Le Bistro: Review	4
School benefit	4
Royal Palm Interiors	4
Homeschooling	5
Teachers improve	5
News from Pacific Lots	6
San Juan River dispute	6

Updates from the Osa

We made it through the worst rainy season in memory. Many roads throughout the country were badly damaged but things are pretty much back in shape and life goes on.

Caroline and Hans have reopened Ylang Ylang for Indonesian food lovers and other snow birds are returning. Considering the storms up North I'm sure they've been counting the minutes.

Despite the rain, 2010 was a pretty good year for Costa Rica. Among many successes they exported \$192 million over the initial 2010 forecast representing an increase of 7.5% over

2009. Costa Rica also won the 2010 Future Policy Award issued by the World Future Council at a global biodiversity summit in Japan as the first developing nation to meet UN biodiversity commitments.

Costa Rica's also been notorious for bad drivers but in 2010 traffic fatalities were the lowest in 5 years, yippee!

Kristina Welburn

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Costa Rica returns to Ethical Traveler's Top 10 List

Ethical Traveler, a nonprofit organization, founded to empower travelers to change the world, has returned Costa Rica to its 2011 list of "The Developing World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations". The organization urges people to be mindful of where their money is going. Travel is one of the biggest industries on Earth and the economic power of travelers is enormous. Deciding which countries to visit and where to eat, sleep and tour when you get there make a substantial impact on the environment and human rights.

They focus on 3 categories: Environmental Protection, Social Welfare and Human Rights. In each category they look at information past and present to not only understand the current state of the country but how it's changed over time. They look for countries that are actively improving the state of their people, government and environment.

Costa Rica returned to the list, after falling off last year, due to increased efforts by President Laura Chinchilla to stem the country's sex tourism industry. The government has seriously stepped up its public awareness campaigns, creating a new office focusing on human trafficking and training officials. This year Costa Rica scored exceedingly high in the Environmental Policy Index (EPI), the only developing country and one of only 4 in the world to make it into the top "100-85" score category.

Belize dropped off this year's list due to government seizure of mineral-rich land, high profile corruption and emerging child sex tourism. Ethical Traveler also mentions that the urge for development is threatening its mangrove islands.

For a complete list go to www.ethicaltraveler.org

www.PacificLots.com

Costa Rica is Now Even Safer

The OIJ (Organismo de Investigación Judicial - Costa Rica's FBI) released the crime statistics of 2010 and crime is decreasing in the country, particularly violent crime. Every category showed a decrease other than theft which rose from 4,191 cases in 2009 to 4,488 cases in 2010. There is however, an explanation. Before last year petty thefts of less than \$500 were not included in the statistics. Jorge Rojas, the Director of the OIJ has changed this and said, "Stealing an object, regardless of value is a crime".

Companies Set Up Shop in Costa Rica

2010 was a good year, exceeding foreign investment expectations for Costa Rica. 29 multinational companies settled in Costa Rica providing more than 7 thousand new jobs; 11% of the country's new jobs. The corporations ranged from services, advanced manufacturing, clean technology and life sciences (medical devices).

The Director of CINDE (The Costa Rican Investment Promotion Agency), Gabriela Llobet, stated that they expect to attract even more foreign companies in 2011. "There are areas which we must continue paying attention to. Among those are the modernization of our ports, the improvement of the road infrastructure, the simplification of processes, the opening of the telecommunications market, and the strengthening of our human resource: updating study programs in different techniques, creating new ones and emphasizing the importance of learning English" said Llobet.

Some of Costa Rica's largest multinationals include: Intel, HP, Boston Scientific, Western Union, Sykes, Baxter, P&G and Hospira.

Jeffrey Frankel, Professor of Government at Harvard University, recently wrote that people should look to the periphery of the world economy for models of economic successes to emulate. Small countries have experimented with policies and institutions that can be adopted by others.

He cites Costa Rica and Mauritius, Africa each pulling ahead of their regional peers. Among many of their decisions that have worked out well has been to forgo a standing army which has led to a political history without coups and financial savings used for education, investment, etc....

Frankel states that small countries tend to be open to trade and freer than large countries to experiment and to be open to new ideas. The results can be useful lessons for us all. For more information see: <http://www.project-syndicate.org>

Economic Freedom Improves



The 2011 Index of Economic Freedom by The Wall Street Journal and The Heritage Foundation covers 183 countries across 10 specific freedoms such as trade freedom, business freedom, investment freedom and property rights. Costa Rica's economic freedom score is 67.3, making its economy the 49th freest in the 2011 Index. Its overall score is 1.4 points higher than last year, reflecting small increases in five of the 10 economic freedoms. Costa Rica is ranked 9th out of 29 countries in the South and Central America/Caribbean region, and its overall score is higher

than the global and regional averages.

Following the recent years of economic contraction, Costa Rica's economic rebound has gained some momentum and become more broad-based. The trade regime is more open, and management of public finances is sound. Costa Rica has taken measures to improve financial-sector freedom by consolidating private banks, easing procedures for the operations of foreign banks, and introducing a new development bank structure.

The US dropped .2 to 77.8, Canada rose .4 points to 80.8, Costa Rica's neighbors Panama and Nicaragua rose .1 to 64.9 and .5 to 58.8 points respectively.

For more information see: <http://www.heritage.org/Index/Country/CostaRica>

Costa Rica's Bananas

Costa Rican bananas will now be labeled with a seal denoting their origin conveying the idea that they have been cultivated in a socially responsible and ethical manner. This designation will help market the bananas particularly in the European Union where 40% of consumers are willing to pay more for products with their origin identified.



Tourism Once Again on an Upswing

Tourism worldwide increased by 6.7% in 2010 compared to 2009 with Costa Rica increasing 2010 tourism by 9.2% over 2009.

The U.N. World Tourism Barometer stated that international tourist arrivals were 935 million last year after a 4% decline in 2009 which was the year hardest hit by the global economic crisis.

According to data from the General Immigration Office in Costa Rica for the second time, the country reached an annual visitation record of over 2 million tourists. 2,099,829 tourists entered the country in 2010 whereas in 2009, the number was 1,922,579 and in 2008, 2,089,174.

The U.S. provided 830,993 tourists to Costa Rica which was an increase of 7.2% over the previous year and the Canadian market increased by 14.3% with 119,665 visitors.

Costa Rica's main airport, The Juan Santamaría International Airport, increased visitors by 5.5%. The second largest airport, The Daniel Oduber International Airport, which receives around 18% of tourists increased by 18.1%.

Following the year of global recovery in 2010 growth is expected to continue for the tourism sector in 2011 at a rate slightly above the long-term average.

Welcome to the Neighborhood



Dana and Theresa: Dana and Theresa currently live, work, and play in Las Vegas, Nevada after moving from Vermont in 2004. Every day can be like a vacation when you live in Vegas and they decided that Costa Rica would be a good investment opportunity and an area where they would like to escape for some slow-down time. They look forward to their future years with dreams of building a home at Suenos Del Tropicos to vacation and retire in. Their prize possessions are their cocker spaniels and their Harley-Davidsons, all of which they hope will come along for the ride! They thoroughly enjoyed their time while on the Discovery Tour and feel they have made some life-long friends that they will spend time with in Costa Rica. They are happy to join the Pacific Lots family!

Kevan and Virginia: I'm very excited about building a home in the Southern Zone at the development in Chontales, initially as a rental/vacation home and later as my retirement home.

I was born and lived my early years in Venezuela where my father worked for an American oil company so am at home in a Latin American culture, additionally am engaged to a lovely Venezuelan lady named Virginia.

Virginia was born in La Guaira Venezuela a coastal town just to the north of Caracas. She moved to Fort Lauderdale FL where she and her twin sister designed and made beachwear. They got out of that when the business grew too large and consumed all their time. She was a realtor in Coral Springs before returning to the island of Margarita Venezuela where she owns three vacation rental properties. Virginia spends her time between Margarita, Florida and Abu Dhabi.

We had considered (very briefly) Margarita as an option but life in Venezuela is untenable right now so we chose Costa Rica.

I have not lived full time in the US since my early twenties so have been an expat my entire working career. My current occupation is airline pilot and have lived in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Trinidad and currently in the United Arab Emirates where I am an



Airbus 340 long haul captain flying to North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Owning a home in Costa Rica will allow me to spend my time between Central America and Florida where I also own a home. Having been an expat for so long I don't think I could live full time in Florida and seeing Venezuela is out of the equation as it is so unstable, Costa Rica is a perfect fit.

Virginia and I really enjoyed the sales tour, the property sold itself to us and Patrick and Marcel were great. The guest house was awesome and Maica the cook is the best.

Pura Vida from sandy Abu Dhabi, Kevan



Gary and Sandy: Gary spent 36 years in the area of Human Resources, 17 with Reynolds Metals Company and 19 with a brass company called Extruded Metals, both no longer in existence. He retired from Extruded Metals in December of 2003 and moved with his wife Sandy to Las Cruces, NM from Grand Rapids, MI.

Sandy spent 26 years in software support with IBM, Amway and Foremost Insurance. She recently underwent numerous surgeries and has had both hips and knees replaced.

They're expecting she'll be able to travel to Costa Rica without a wheelchair by the end of February and begin planning on building their home.



Bernie and Harsha: Bernie is from the Bahamas, Harsha grew up in India. We are both currently physicians in Las Vegas.

We are very excited about our recent purchase in Costa Rica. We bought a 3 acre lot in Los Brisas. de Ojochal. Yeahhh!!!

School Benefit in February



Le Bistro

There's another new restaurant choice in town loaded with goodies for the tummy. France Fornier and Corinne Lebron opened Le Bistro a year ago but it was not until recently that I had a chance to visit. Open for breakfast and lunch, the food is rustic chic and the setting is just plain relaxing. Located on the road into Ojochal just after crossing the first bridge, it's a great place for a tasty bite. Highlights of the menu include omelets, croissants, eggs Benedict, crepes (I like the ham, asparagus, cheddar), croquettes, paninis, burritos, good coffee, espresso and cappuccino. An icy cold Heineken will set you back \$2.60 and a glass of wine \$3.00. Food prices run from \$2.00 to \$8.00. See you there!



Escuela Verde of Uvita is holding a benefit event next month that is sure to be a lot of fun.

The fundraiser will be held on Feb. 26 at Cristal Ballena. This is a community and family day event and an evening benefit dinner event. The day event is free from 9:30 - 1:30 and will offer comida tipica (local Tico food) and a bake sale, raffle, carnival games and swimming. Throughout the day and night there will be an art exhibit upstairs as well. The evening event consists of a children's musical performance, buffet dinner, door prizes, raffle, auction and poker* to follow. The evening event will begin at 5pm.

Advanced tickets - 10,000 adults / 6,000 children

Door tickets - 12,000 adults / 8,000 children

* there is an extra fee to play in the poker tournament

Advanced purchase tickets will be on sale from February 14 on. Please contact them by email - escuelaverdecostaballena@gmail.com or call 2743-8214 during school hours to reserve or ask further questions.



Here's something you don't expect to see as you travel down mountain roads in southern Pacific Costa Rica. This jet has been trucked to this location in pieces and painstakingly reassembled. It's rumored that it will be a new restaurant, hopefully giving new meaning to 'airplane food'. The jet is located on the main road from Dominical to San Isidro, about 30 minutes north of our developments. Sky Chefs chicken or pasta anyone?



If you are looking to furnish your new home or simply liven things up by adding an accent here or there, Royal Palm Interiors is the place to go. It is truly a jewel in the jungle; located half-way between Uvita and Ojochal, opposite Hotel Cristal Ballena, it has furniture, fans and lighting, art and mirrors, drapery and even a bed and bath boutique featuring their luxurious bamboo sheet sets. Naturally every home also needs lamps and accessories, and they have a wonderful selection at every price point. If you need help putting it all together they can help there too; interior design services are available.

Royal Palm Interiors has suppliers from all over the world, and there are always new and interesting additions to their furniture and home décor collections. They have super-comfy sofas and sectionals, quality kiln-dried wood furniture and style selections from rustic to modern, to suit every taste. There are also great gift ideas to be found there too; purse hangers, jewelry holders, candles, vases and silk flowers, to name but a few.

If you have a new home and are looking for a home starter package, a full furniture package, or economical furnishings for your rental property, they have options available for every taste and every budget. Many other individual furniture items can also be ordered, and there are catalogues from which to choose; selections of bedroom, dining room and living room furniture are available plus the Castille line of quality outdoor furniture.

Royal Palm Interiors is your one-stop shopping destination on the Costa Ballena, for all your home furnishing and gift giving needs. The January "White Sale" is now on, so stop by for great savings on bedding, pillows, towels and much more.



The Expat Homeschool Dilemma

When moving overseas there are a lot of things to consider, and for families with school age children, one of the biggest issues is that of education. How will you ensure that your child has at least the same quality of education that he or she would receive if you remained in your own country? When thinking about this, at some point the possibility of homeschooling will probably cross your mind. Would it work for you and your family? Consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling below before exploring the matter more carefully.

The first thing you would need to consider is the legal situation of homeschooling in the country you are moving to. Some countries will support the idea, others will not. Will your child legally fall under the country's control, which means you will be bound by the laws surrounding education in that country? If you retain your current citizenship, your child was not born in that country and you are not a permanent resident of that country, then it's possible that your child's education falls outside their jurisdiction. Your own embassy in the new country will be able to give you guidance on this, along with the contact information for homeschooling organizations available within that country.

Once you have discovered that you can legally homeschool your child in your new country, you need to think about whether or not this is best for your child. The answer to this lies often with the age of the child. A younger child may fare better in school. Younger children are more adaptable and will soon fit into the class social structure. Older children, particularly those who tend to be introverted, may find it more difficult to break into the established social network of the class. A huge advantage of homeschooling in this situation is that once you have a curriculum to follow, your child can continue their education in the new country without having to worry about the other children in the class. A disadvantage of homeschooling is that they will miss out on much of the younger culture of their new country

because of lack of contact with children of their own age. You could however overcome this by enrolling your child in a youth organization or an extra-curricular sport where they will meet other children on a more informal level.

You also need to think about how you will adapt to being your child's teacher. How will you cope if your child refuses to do the school work? Do you have the patience to coax your child

back to their desk? One of the biggest disadvantages of homeschooling is that full responsibility for your child's education will fall on your shoulders, and it will be completely up to you to ensure that your child

is motivated to learn.

Although you have the advantage of being able to decide what hours in your week will be school hours, you will need to establish a firm routine in order to complete the required work each week so that your child's education stays at an appropriate level. Another big advantage is that you can use different methods of teaching, such as field trips, that schools are often not resourced enough to fund.

Homeschooling could prevent both you and your child learning the new language as quickly as you would if your child went to school among local children, and you were able to get out more among the local population. However, the trade off here is that you and your child will have a unique opportunity of spending time exploring the world and its issues together as you work through the educational curriculum.

If you are legally permitted to do so, the decision to homeschool your child is one you need to make yourself. Just because it works, or not, for someone else does not mean you will have the same result. Talk to your child, to their current teachers, and honestly assess your own personality before making a decision. You could even consider a trial period of homeschooling before the school term begins to see how it goes for both of you. Whether you initially decide to homeschool or not, keep in mind, too, that you can always change your mind if you find things don't work out.



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Homeschooling in Costa Rica

If you are not a Costa Rica citizen and the child is not a Costa Rica citizen, it does not matter. In other words, if you are a foreigner with a child spending time in Costa Rica, the government there will allow you to educate your child at home. If the child is not a Costa Rica citizen, they don't care if he goes to school or not. It's strictly your business.

Homeschooling in our area

There is an organization called the Waldorf homeschooling group, a small group in the Uvita area along the central Pacific coast. Uvita is the next town north of Ojochal.

Teachers are more proficient in English

Two years ago the Education Ministry instilled a program to improve the level of English proficiency among Costa Rica's English teachers and it's been paying off.

Previously more than 30% of Costa Rica's English teachers were categorized as beginners with 1,200 out of 3,200 with insufficient knowledge to teach the language. Studies also showed that just over 10% of high school students had achieved an intermediate level or higher.

In 2008 the program launched and two thirds of the country's English teachers have undergone training. Currently 95% are speaking at intermediate or higher levels. For students, the aim is for 100% of high school graduates to have reached an intermediate level or higher by 2017.

Costa Rica understands that English-speaking visitors and investors are a driving force in Costa Rica's economy. The U.S. is Costa Rica's chief importer. And no nationality comes close to the number of Americans who vacation or retire there.

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Wow, 2011 sure got here fast, seems like just yesterday it was summer. Business continues for us at a record pace. We ran 6 discovery tours in January and have 6 more running in February with nearly all close to sellout. The nice weather is finally here, record rains in November resulted in a month of cancelled tours as flooding made some roads un-passable.

More and more owners are moving into town full time. Winter always brings lots of people to town but more so this year than ever it seems. Must be those Baby Boomers finally starting to get out of Dodge or the record snow up north. We had a wonderful visit by Ronan McMahon, famed real estate scout for International Living. We offered a special tour in March for International Living's Real Estate Trend Alert

group (March 5-8) that sold out in record time. We still have room on our January 31st through February 3rd tour if anyone wants to come last minute.

We're working on a complete revision of our website to make it look more professional. I have mixed feelings, I kind of like the humble non-commercial approach it portrays, same with our video.

We recently released a new group of lots with great ocean views in our Suenos del Tropic phase in Chontales. They are priced from \$85k to \$150k and some of the lots are larger than our other lots in Suenos Del Tropic.

We've signed long-term advertising agreements with a host of new media markets including International Living, Escape Artist, Expat Exchange,



Inside Costa Rica and AM Costa Rica. We continue to run full page ads in International Living magazine as well. We are the major sponsor of the "Ultimate Event" being held by International Living in Quito, Ecuador in February. I'm looking forward to seeing some of you there.

Stephen Linder

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Dispute over San Juan River Continues

One of the only countries in the developed world without an armed forces, the peace-loving country of Costa Rica again finds itself in a tiresome conflict with Nicaragua who has attempted to intimidate the Costa Rican government with its military presence.

The Isla Calero is to blame for the nearly two hundred-year dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua over the rights to the San Juan River. After Nicaraguan troops set up camp on what Costa Rica determined to be its part of the river several months ago, a heated dispute began and continues into 2011.

Despite Costa Rica's desire to come to a peaceful agreement as to which country owns the Isla Calero, Nicaraguan forces began to set up a temporary base on October 21, 2010. The following month, Secretary General of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, responded by stressing the importance of resolving the issue without violence of any kind, a recommendation that strongly resonated with citizens of Costa Rica.

An outraged Costa Rican ambassador to the OAS, Enrique Castillo, demanded that all Nicaraguan troops leave the area claimed by Costa Rica im-

mediately, stating that their occupation was a violation of national sovereignty. The Nicaraguan ambassador denied any acts of aggression toward Costa Rica and stated that the soldiers would remain, claiming that they were simply building a canal in an area he claimed to be Nicaraguan territory.

In early 2011, when Costa Rica went to the U.N. demanding that the troops be withdrawn, the official heading up the canal project claimed that he "Googled" the area to determine where to begin working and simply removed the Costa Rican flag marking the area. Apparently, Google has fixed the small, but not insignificant 3-km mistake on the map that incited a new twist on an old argument, but had no hope of repairing the long-standing rivalry between the two Central American countries.

Despite a 2009 order by the International Court of Justice for the two brother countries to essentially share the river, enabling Costa Rica to use the waterway for travel and export purposes, there seems to be no hope for altruism on the part of Nicaragua who refuses to remove its police and military officials. Costa Ricans view their presence as unnecessary and insulting at the least and potentially even a provocation of

violence.

As a secondary concern, Costa Rica would also like Nicaragua to halt the dredging of the river, an act they perceive as environmentally destructive and an impediment to water flow into the Costa Rican-owned portion of the Colorado River. What Nicaragua sees as a "minor cleaning operation," Costa Rica recognizes as a threat to their national security and prosperity.

While Nicaraguan officials deny any wrongdoing and refuse to comply with Costa Rica's peaceful requests, officials remain hopeful that the situation can be resolved in the courts. Edgar Ugalde Alvarez, Costa Rican ambassador to Columbia, insists that the absence of any violence related to this dispute has been a result of Costa Rica's "responsible approach...not to answer force with force."

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