

Paradise Post

News From Ojochal, Costa Rica
and Beyond



July 2008

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Updates from the Osa

The biggest news this quarter is the new indoor soccer field and farmer's market in Uvita, Feria Rincon de Uvita. The facility is frequented by Costa Ricans, expats as well as tourists. You can read more on page 2.

Costa Rica has been named as one of the top ethical destinations for travelers by Ethical Traveler, www.ethicaltraveler.org and despite the downturn in the US economy tourism is still continuing to climb. The National Chamber of Tourism has reported that during the first 6 months of this year 1.03 million foreign tourists visited Costa Rica, an increase of 12.5% over the same period last year. The figures were generated using arrival data from the country's 2 main international airports, Juan Santamaría west of San José and Daniel Oduber in Liberia. Juan Santamaría reported an increase in traffic of 13.1% and Daniel Oduber grew by 9.7%. Arrivals via cruise ships were added to these numbers. The US generated the largest number of tourists followed by Europe.

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Our new Farmer's Market

Standard & Poor's Increases Costa Rica's Risk Rating to Positive

Standard & Poor's (S&P) has announced an improvement in Costa Rica's risk rating from stable to positive in response to Costa Rica's good fiscal policy management and overall economic policy which has led to a reduction in public debt and positive fiscal results without affecting public investment and expenditures in social programs.

S&P indicated that the revised outlook is the result of a substantial reduction of Costa Rica's public debt burden, which improved the country's fiscal profile and its ability to handle its obligations. The firm pointed out that a strong growth of tax revenue, coupled with the growth of the economy, have contributed to slashing debt as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is expected to go even lower in 2008. S&P also said that the country's increased exchange flexibility could reduce its vulnerability to sudden external shocks.

Regarding Costa Rica's future outlook, S&P indicated that the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) could boost attraction of investment into the country and specialization over the next few years.

Standard & Poor's is a leading provider of financial market intelligence. The world's foremost source of credit ratings, indices, investment research, risk evaluation and data, Standard & Poor's provides financial decision-makers with the intelligence they need to feel confident about their decisions.

Costa Rica's Insurance Monopoly to End

The 84 year old insurance monopoly run by the Instituto Nacional de Seguros (INS) in Costa Rica will be officially open to competition this coming September. President Oscar Arias signed the bill enacting the changes on July 22nd.

The law permits INS to begin operating internationally and to capitalize its profits. Also, the law creates an insurance regulator who will define when new entrants will be allowed to begin operations within Costa Rica. Businesses wishing to

sell personal insurance will require a 3 million dollar minimum in capital in order to operate in the country. Where re-insurers are concerned, in order to come into the market, they will need to have a minimum of 10 million dollars in capital. 4% of all of the collected payments from insurance sales will go toward financing the firefighters.

Lifting the INS monopoly is one of the requirements of the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the US (CAFTA), which Costa Rica signed in October 2007.



Steve and Debby enjoying an iced coffee

Alain and Virginia who are building their house in Ojochal have opened a new mini café adjacent to the Crocodile center at the entrance to town. Often you'll see locals enjoying a quick pick me up and chatting or relaxing with some reading. Cafésito offers breakfast and lunch including local coffees, toasts and granola. They offer delicious sandwiches made with marinated eggplant, pork, ham or cheese. Each sandwich comes with a small bean or carrot salad; both are quite good. They bake their own sourdough and wheat bread which is used in the café and is also available for purchase by the loaf.



The Mamón Chino

Found at our local Farmer's Market

About the second week of July a bright red spiky fruit about the size of a golf ball starts appearing in local farmer's markets. This signals the beginning of the Mamón Chino season here in Costa Rica. The mamón chino, which is native to southeast Asia is called *Rambutan* in Indonesian or Malay which literally means *hairy* or *hairy fruit* caused by the 'hair' that covers this fruit. In Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, it is known as *mamón chino* and was introduced to this country by agricultural officials some years back as an alternative to the citrus orchards which were in danger of being wiped out by a crop plague borne in Panama.

To eat the spiky red or yellow fruit it is held between the fingers and the top is bitten (or cut into with one's fingernail) just enough to remove the hard outer shell. Inside is a sweet, pulpy mass surrounding a big seed. The fruit flesh is translucent, whitish or very pale pink, with a sweet, mildly acidic flavour. The seed, has a bitter flavor to it and is believed to be somewhat toxic to the human body.

While the fruit can be preserved into a syrup or cooked down to a sweet sauce, most of us settle for buying a bag of fresh fruit, tearing through the outside skin and enjoying the delicious flesh one mouthful at a time. Just be careful where you toss the seeds as seedlings of this fair sized tree have been known to sprout up a couple of months after the



fruit has gone.

If you are down in the Costa Ballena area and would like to try this and many other exotic fruits, vegetables and food items, we invite you to

join us for Uvita's new farmer's market – FERIA Rincon de Uvita- which takes place each Saturday from 8-1 at El Rincon de Uvita the new soccer field/sports complex across the Costanera from the Banco Costa Rica (BCR) in central Uvita. This market was put together as a community event designed to introduce area consumers to the farmers, artisans and other micro-enterprises of the southern pacific zone. Its goals include providing sales opportunities for local small farmers, supplying our community with high quality, nutritious foods and promoting a local sustainable economy that conveys the quality, variety and value of Costa Rica's harvest. We have on offer delicious fruits and vegetables, (many organic, all local) free-range meat and dairy, bulk staples, natural home and personal care products and loads of other ethically produced items. In addition there is a diverse array of gift and artisan items providing beautiful and ethical keepsakes for residents and visitors alike.

We welcome you to come down - bring your friends, family and guests – and enjoy what is always a fun gathering day. For more information feel free to contact us at 8365 4040 or chirrihomegrown@gmail.com

Restaurant Las Terrazas – Uvita

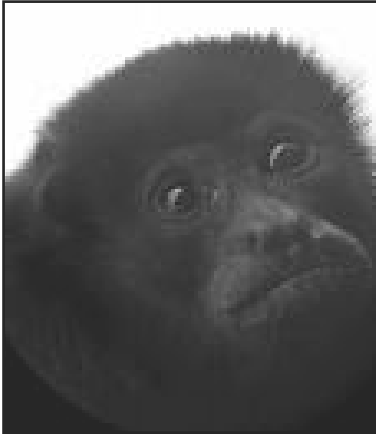
If you want to find a unique place to take your friends, try the new Las Terrazas de Ballena restaurant and lounge. Formally known as the Balcon de Uvita, watch for signs on the Costanera almost across from the gas station in Uvita. You'll need a 4x4 to get there and the drive up is not for the timid. What you will find is a delightful location with a fantastic ocean view. Dishes include tuna, lamb, chicken and beef as well as a few vegetarian options. Be sure to try their "Bento Box" allowing

the diner to sample any four main courses as one dish. The atmosphere is elegant casual and they have a full bar as well. The restaurant also shows full length feature films in a cozy outdoor theatre where you can watch the sun set, followed by a Hollywood set. Movies run weekly at 7:30. To find out when and what's playing, call ahead at 2743-8034. There are also three bungalows available for rent on the property as well as an attractive pool.



The Howler Monkey

The Loudest Land Animal in the World



Occasionally seen and often heard in the Ojochal area howler monkeys are among the largest new world monkeys. They grow to be about 2 to 4 feet tall and weigh from 8 to 22 pounds. The males are black and the females are a shade of brown. Their prehensile tails are strong enough to support the monkey's entire body weight although they usually hold onto branches with at least 2 hands and tail at all times.

As the name suggests, howlers make distinctive and somewhat

frightening loud barking whoops or roars which may be heard as far as 3 miles away. Male howler monkeys use their big voices to defend their turf. Howls by one troop are answered by other males within earshot. Everyone starts and ends the day by checking out where their nearest competitors are. In this way, they protect the food in their territory. In areas where there are fewer troops they will be far less vocal.

Howlers are native to South and Central American forests and generally live in troops of around 18 or fewer individuals. Surprisingly they spend very little time socializing with each other. They live in groups where the number of females is greater than the number of males. Groups may have only one male or several males. The females are easy to get along with and rarely fight. The males, on the other hand, are quite driven by a chain of command and dominance. The boss decides where the group will eat and sleep, and doesn't put up with any insubordination. Juveniles emigrate from their groups so neither

adult males nor adults females in a group are typically related.

Howlers are slow moving and rest 80% of the time spending most of their lives in the forest canopy. They're vegetarians and eat leaves, fruit, flowers and nuts and have a lifespan of around 20 years.

Threats to howlers include being hunted for food and captivity. However, howlers make undesirable pets and don't taste good (just kidding, they're delicious... no really we're just kidding). They do not thrive in captivity and become quite surly.

Despite the volume of their howl, it's difficult to try to find a troop of howler monkeys in the wild. They hang out in the treetops where younger, greener leaves are abundant. However, if you do find yourself in the rainforest and it seems that an unusually large amount of fruit is falling from above or a fine spray of urine rains down on your head (yuck) you will know you are close. But please make sure you step aside before looking up.

Parrots and Parakeets of Costa Rica

Parrots and parakeets are gregarious birds and are rarely seen alone. They're intelligent and are quite noisy in the early morning and again in the late afternoon as they move about in large groups. We often see large flocks of parrots flying from tree to tree around Ojochal numbering in the 100's. Many species mate for life and will be seen flying in pairs. The central and southern Pacific regions of Costa Rica are home to the majority of both parrots and parakeets found within the county. The Corcovado Reserve, located in the Osa peninsula, contains many birds, as does the southern coastal plain. The Carara Biological Reserve, located about 45 miles south west of San Jose, is a popular place to spot numerous types of parrots, parakeets and macaws.

Many parrot populations worldwide are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss and collection for the pet trade. The loss of nest trees and chick poaching can drastically reduce

reproductive success. However, due to the long life span of many parrots, populations are unlikely to become extinct rapidly even with complete reproductive failure. Since 1975, an international agreement known as CITES, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, has helped to protect native populations of threatened and endangered species by limiting trade in these animals. These days, parrots and parakeets sold at pet stores are raised domestically by Aviculturalists however some species are difficult to breed in captivity and unfortunately are still sought by collectors.

There are about 16 types of parrots and parakeets seen frequently within Costa Rica as well as two types of Macaws. Of the parakeets, common varieties include the Orange Chinned, the Brown Throated, the Orange Fronted, the Sulfur Winged, the Olive Throated and the Crimson Fronted Parakeet. Parrots include the Yellow Naped, the

Red Lored, the Mealy Parrot, the White Fronted, the White Crowned, the Blue Headed, the Brown Hooded Parrot and the Red Fronted Parrotlet. Macaws of Costa Rica include the Scarlet Macaw and the Green Macaw. Since Parrots seek fruits and nuts for their diet, various fruit trees, almond and macadamia nut trees have been planted along the beaches of southern Costa Rica to provide ample sources of food for these feathered friends.

Zoo Ave, located in Alejuela, Costa Rica, is the largest aviary zoo and breeder in Costa Rica. The organization breeds birds for release to help replenish and re-establish wild bird populations throughout Costa Rica and sponsored a large public awareness program in Costa Rica to discourage the caging of wild birds as pets.



Red-ored Parrot

The Importance of Palm Oil to the Costa Rica Economy

Have you wondered what's with the endless miles of palm forests while driving the Costanera? The history of palm oil cultivation in Costa Rica is closely related to the history of the United Fruit Company. African oil palms were planted to help diversify the holdings of United Fruit, a company formed through the merger of two US businessmen, Preston and Keith, in 1897. Palm oil is derived from the African oil palm, which was introduced into the Americas in the mid 1900's. Although initially experimental, palm oil production took hold and the United Fruit Company continued to plant additional hectare of oil palms, specifically in the Quepos area. United Fruit eventually sold its palm and banana holdings in Costa Rica to Chiquita Banana, who sold off the Palma Tica subsidiary in 1995. Palma Tica is now owned by the Numar group and specializes in the cultivar, production and processing of palm oil.

Both United Fruit and later Chiquita banana suffered from a blight that decimated banana cultivation in Costa Rica. At the time, African oil palms were planted to replace bananas. These companies pioneered commercial oil palm production in the Americas. Today, oil palm is grown mainly in the southwestern regions of Costa Rica. Palm Tica, the largest producer of palm oil in Costa Rica, supports local collaboratives and is now recognized as the leader in palm cultivation in the Americas. The company has developed a number of hybrids that produce more oil and are shorter and hence easier to harvest



Oil palms can be harvested within 2-3 years of planting. The plants produce for 20-30 years and can produce up to 30 metric tons of fruit bunches per hectare annually. The oil is extracted by harvesting the seed pods, which can weigh well over 100 pounds. Each pod contains upwards to 4000 seeds. Once the pods are cut from the tree, they are gathered into carts and brought out of the fields by donkey, oxen and tractors. At the processing mill, the pods are steamed and the seeds and fleshy mesocarp are separated. The seeds are run through grinders to remove the oil bearing flesh from the seed. The kernels are pressed to remove the palm oil and a variety of purification processes are employed to finish the process. The palm oil is loaded into tank trucks for distribution. During production and rendering of palm oil, nearly all of the material is usable in some form.

The palm oil is used in a variety of products from cooking oils and

margarines, ice cream and cream filling. Palm oil is also a major ingredient in cosmetics, block soaps and shampoos. The nuts in the center of the palm kernel are ground and used for livestock feed and the fatty acid oils are used in agricultural applications, mold releases, candle making, waterproofing and as an energy supplement in the feed of pigs and birds. Palm oil is also used in the chemical and livestock industries. Malaysia is the largest producer of palm oil worldwide. Palm oil is the second largest oil crop worldwide, second only to soybean oil, which it is expected to surpass in the next decade. Palm oil contains 16 times the carotene found in carrots and is important in combating vitamin A deficiencies in developing countries. Palm oil cultivation is highly efficient, producing 10 times more oil per hectare than soybean. Palm oil may become a huge ingredient in bio diesel. Large users of palm oil include Nestle, Proctor and Gamble, Heinz, Cargill and Cadbury Sweppes. Unilever recently stopped using palm oil and encouraged other multinationals to look at the devastation palm oil cultivation has caused to the rain forest and other sensitive environments around the world. Focus on the corporate plantation, deforestation, land acquisition and both child and international migrant labor issues continue to provide sporadic bad press to Palm Tica. MINEA has cited the company a number of times for environmental degradation. Anyone who has seen the rendering plant in full production will be shocked at the acrid black smoke spewing from the operation.

Intel in Costa Rica

The economy of Costa Rica, like that of all other countries in Central America, was originally based on agriculture. Costa Rica has since significantly expanded into manufacturing. Intel led the way and decided to invest in Costa Rica in 1996 and chose to locate its \$300 million semiconductor assembly plant in this small county. The opening of the plant in 1998 spurred high growth and an influx of high tech companies.

It's been 10 years since Intel came to Costa Rica where they currently produce 99% of their processors and employ over 3,500 people full time over 4 plants. Intel's investment also has reached far into local communities affecting education, the country's knowledge base, workplace standards and business culture. Why Costa Rica? After analysis of Intel's decision process it's been concluded that Costa Rica was chosen because it offered tax incentives for companies satisfying certain conditions,

the high education level of the labor force, a stable political environment and a relatively corruption-free environment. Electronics is now the country's largest manufacturing sector with Intel as the largest player. The industry as a whole employs 12,000 and exports \$1.65 billion in products yearly.



Welcome to the Neighborhood

Claire and Tony were both born and educated in England, married in 1984 and lived in a 175 year old cottage in the heart of the countryside - a truly beautiful place that they both adored.

In 1986 Tony was offered a job in the USA, which he accepted and they moved to Maryland in September of that year - a considerable change for them, but they instantly loved the country and the people, who made them very welcome. They became citizens in 2001.

In 1993, they achieved "the American Dream" by buying the company Tony worked for! After 15 years, they decided it was time to sell and completed the sale in April this



year. They "retired" to Florida to a condo they had bought in 2001. It was time to assess again!!

After meeting Steve Linder at the Tampa Home show, they decided to check out Costa Rica and made travel arrangements for July - they felt it was "a beautiful country indeed" and decided right away to purchase land and build a house!! Scary proposition, but they feel confident it is the right thing to do. They felt that the community was very welcoming and they met lots of really lovely people.

They have 3 children (Tony's from a previous marriage), 2 in England and 1 in Maryland and 5 grandchildren. They're both looking forward to making new friends in Costa Rica.

If you'd like to contact a new owner or would like to be introduced in an upcoming newsletter please contact us at info@PacificLots.com or at 305-295-0137.

El Paraiso Properties – Vacation Rentals and Property Management Services

Nancy and Mike Adams originally from Calgary Alberta, Canada are new to our area and founded a vacation rental company. They offer long and short term rentals in and around the beautiful town of Ojochal. They come from a background of property management and homebuilding and offer a full range of services providing everything from advertising and rent collection to security and landscaping. They perform regular maintenance, cleaning and more.

The Property Management Plan is \$189 per month and includes:



Beautiful Rental Home Available

3 random security checks per week
3 exterior maintenance checks
3 interior maintenance checks
Utility payments
Emergency service and repairs

Additional Services include:
Full maid service - \$75
Basic interior cleaning service - \$36
Pool care (chemicals are extra) - \$23
Exterior power washing - \$65
Landscaping care - \$50
Additional security checks - \$25 per visit

The Vacation Rental Services:
Long Term / 6 months or more – 10% of rack rate
Short Term/ 6 months or less – 15% of rack rate

The plan includes:
Rent collection
Customer orientation
Web site promotion
Customer emergency assistance

For more info please see their website at www.elparaisoproperties.com or send an email to info@elparaisoproperties.com

New Employee

Christopher Matthews is one of the newest employees of Ventana del Pacifico. He's joining us from Atlanta, GA where he's lived all of his life. He worked in the IT field for 15 years, primarily on the hardware and networking side of things for companies such as Ford Aerospace, Hewlett Packard, Bellsouth and EDS.

He's been coming to Costa Rica for over 10 years, and finally decided to move here full time 3 years ago. He's worked in the Real Estate and Mortgage Financing fields since the move. It was through a business relationship he fostered while working for a Mortgage Broker that opened the door for him to come work with VDP. Christopher's main job here is to offer construction financing to all previous and future VDP clients, however he has also become an integral part of the Sales Department, aiding in the client property tours. For more information about financing you can reach him at chris@windowntothepacific.com.



Three more months have gone by and it seems like just yesterday when we were working on the last newsletter. We just returned from Costa Rica from our 8 day July country and property tour. Our next tour is Sept. 18-27 and space is still available but filling up fast. Each trip brings new friends and great memories for us all. We were able to spend some extra time on this past trip touring houses we've recently built and I must say I was totally impressed with the quality of construction and artistry of design. A renter at one of our homes commented that these are truly custom homes as he proudly walked us through the home. He said you get twice the house at half the price of other custom home builders. Here is a photo of the kitchen. Not only did the house look beautiful but the views were gorgeous everywhere you looked.



We met with the new finance manager Chris as well as the new construction quality control and woodshop manager Marco. Kristina and I are beginning construction on our phase 9 lot so we also spent time meeting with Robert Larouche to discuss

final design ideas and site work plans.

We took lots of pictures of the new bridges and road work on the Costanera highway between Quepos and Dominical and can say we were very pleased with how things are progressing. We also stopped by the new Hospital de Osa and are happy to report they are now fully staffed and the old hospital in Cortes is officially closed. There are 23 departments with 7 medical specialists, 10 general practice doctors and 30 nurses. Anyone is entitled to use the new hospital including non-residents and tourists. We visited the new indoor soccer field in Uvita and Marcel van Willigen told me that Ventana del Pacifico now has a company soccer team that competes there on Thurs. nights. This same facility is now home to a new Sat. market, which we also visited.

We went to see the site of the future southern region international airport to see what was going on and although we saw no new progress, we did see the site where the longest runway in Central America is slated to be built. We also visited the staff at the existing airport in Palmar Sur who were very excited about the new airport. We hope to get more info on the new airport and will report more as things progress. We also noticed a greater number of Europeans in Costa Rica, a trend that will continue to strengthen the economy. The dollar has recently strengthened against the colon, increasing our purchasing power per dollar by 7%.

Stephen Linder

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Children in their leisure time in Costa Rica



Children in their leisure time in the US

*True enjoyment
comes from activity
of the mind and
exercise of the body;
the two are united.
- Alexander von
Humboldt*

Land and Construction Finance Options are Available

There are some new finance options available to clients interested in purchasing land or ready to build a home. For land only financing qualification is not needed. A 10% deposit is required to reserve a lot with an additional 10% due in 45 days. The balance can be financed for up to 3 years at a 10% annual simple interest rate. The loan is completely open and can be paid off at any time without penalty or further interest. Payments may be made monthly, bi-monthly or

quarterly. A \$250 administration charge will be added to the first payment to set up land financing. If no financing is required and full payment is made within 45 days of contract signing, a 5% discount will apply.

To finance land plus construction or construction only qualification is required. Loans will be available for up to 75% of the appraised value, or if the land is fully paid for, 100% of the construction. Qualification takes into account credit score, debt

to income ratio, etc.... Interest rates will likely range from 8.25% - 9% based on current market conditions. The documents required and process for approval is very similar to the mortgage process in the US and Canada and approval or denial will be provided within 3-5 business days. There are some closing costs involved. For more information please contact Christopher Matthews at chris@windowtothepacific.com or Steve Linder at Steve@PacificLots.com.