

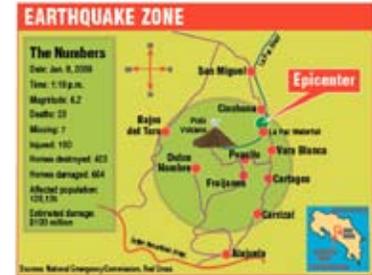
Paradise Post

News From Ojochal, Costa Rica
and Beyond

January 2009



And...the transport ministry said that by the end of the year, the entire 26 miles between Quepos and Dominical will be paved. The bridges are expected to be completed by the middle of 2009.



The Epicenter of the Jan. 2009 Earthquake

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Updates from the Osa

On January 8th Costa Rica suffered the worst earthquake in 150 years. Its magnitude was 6.1 and its impact was fairly localized north of the San Jose area (fortunately nowhere near us). 23 lives were lost and for many businesses and families in the area it was devastating. Costa Rica is pulling together and rebuilding has begun but there are still families in need. If you'd like to help please contact me.

There is a new shuttle from Ojochal to San Jose (as well as other areas of the country) running twice daily for those who'd prefer not to drive or take the bus, www.easyrider.com. Joe and Danette Terzano have opened Joe's Coffee Shop on the Playa Tortuga Road serving sandwiches, homemade breads, pastries, espresso, etc... and offer free wireless internet. La Fogata in Uvita is now serving pastas dishes in addition to chicken and pizza. Also, Ylang Ylang is a new Indonesian restaurant in town worth checking out. [Is my obsession with food obvious?]

Costa Rica is in relatively good shape to weather a slowdown but has not been immune to the downturn of the worldwide economy. The economy is expected to slow but continue to grow by 2.2% in 2009 and inflation is predicted to ease. The economy expanded by 2.9% in 2008 and the government ended the year with a budget surplus. Also, due to the tightening in credit available in the US, Costa Rican banks are beginning to offer more property financing options to foreigners, although they still require consumers to jump through several hoops to qualify.

JetBlue Airways has announced plans to start daily, nonstop service between Orlando, FL and San Jose, Costa Rica beginning March 26th subject to receiving Costa Rican government operating authority.



La Paz Waterfall Gardens on our visit Jan 6th just before the quake. Photo courtesy of Dave Shelton

7 million trees were planted in Costa Rica in 2008

According to the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Telecommunications (Minaet) Costa Rica planted more than 7 million trees last year. Of the total planted 55% are exotic species primarily teak and melina, often used in household construction, and 45% are native species including cedar, oak and almond.

The new trees help offset 2.3 million tons of carbon dioxide and brings Costa Rica a step closer to becoming carbon neutral. The goal for 2009 is to plant an additional 7 million.

A Visit to the Boruca Village:

By Steve Linder

As we drove further up the ridge I realized that even if we had wanted to turn around, the road was too narrow to even consider it. If we slid off the road on either side, we would surely plunge to our death. We were headed to the village of the Boruca Indians, one of the last indigenous tribes left in Costa Rica.

When the Spanish arrived in Costa Rica, there were very few native people to be found. Even before the Spanish had actually arrived, the diseases brought by the white man were already traveling down the isthmus of Central America. When the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, the Boruca Indians were fierce fighters and managed to escape the battle with the Spaniards. Today, the Boruca Indians celebrate each year with a Fiesta de los Diablitos, the festival of the little devils, which takes place early in February each year. During the festivities, the males of the tribe dress in carved wooden masks and the event begins with a battle against a masked bull, to symbolize fighting the spirits to save their homes.

The Boruca Indians are part of

the tribe of the Talamanca, named after the river located just below their reserve. The Boruca people live on land granted to them by the Costa Rican government in 1956 in one of the first indigenous land grants in Costa Rica known as the Reserve Boruca Terraba. Their land is located along the bank of the Terraba River as well as high atop the frontal ridge in the Talamanca mountain range, just south of the town of Palmar Sur. The Boruca tribe had it's own language although there are only a few elders who still speak it. The tribe has long been self-sufficient farming corn, coffee, beans, cassava, papaya, pigeon peas and rice. The Boruca tribes have chosen to live in isolation, raising money through sales of carved wooden masks and woven articles.

Recently the public utility ICE has been trying to build a dam in the Terraba River just below the location of the Boruca tribe's reserve along the river. The dam would flood the area now home to many of the tribe.

The construction of the proposed Boruca hydroelectric dam would require many of the tribe to relocate. As in the past, the Boruca Indians continue to fight a battle to save their lands from being taken from them by outsiders.

A visit to the Boruca village atop the Talamanca ridge is a breathtaking experience. It is an easy day trip from the southern region of Costa Rica but making the visit requires 4 wheel drive and is not for the squeamish or those afraid of heights.



How pure is our water?

The water supplied to the town of Ojochal comes from an artesian well high in the mountains. We know it's delicious and have heard it tests purer than Evian sourced from the French Alps. We've just gotten a more precise measurement of just how pure it is.

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) refers to the combined content of all inorganic and organic substances contained in a liquid. It's expressed in units of mg per unit volume of water,

also referred to as parts per million (ppm). TDS is directly related to the purity of water and the quality of water purification systems. It affects everything that consumes, lives in, or uses water.

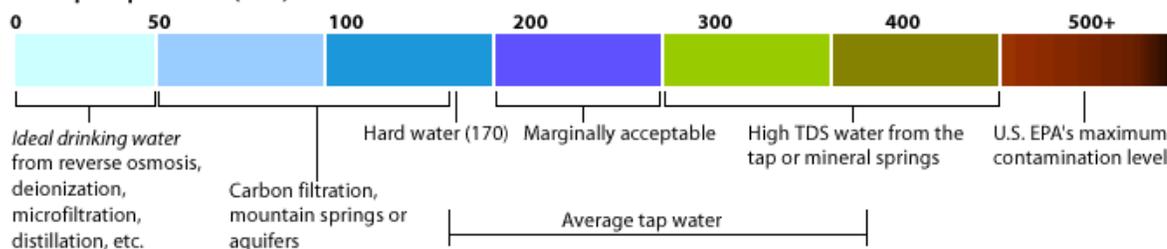
Some dissolved solids come from organic sources such as leaves, silt, plankton, and industrial waste and sewage. More harmful sources come from runoff from fertilizers and pesticides used on lawns and farms. Water may also pick up metals such as lead or copper as they travel through

pipes used to distribute water to consumers.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established a secondary water quality standard of no more than 500mg/L (500ppm) to provide for palatability and safety of drinking water.

The Ojochal town water tests at about 63 ppm. and water regularly checked in Phase 5 consistently remains between 57-59 ppm.

TDS in parts per million (PPM)





There's a new restaurant in town that has everyone quite excited. Ylang Ylang, our new Indonesian option, opened on the Calle de las Estrellas a couple of months ago. The proprietors Hans and Caroline have owned property in Ojochal since March of 2007 and made the move to Costa Rica in March of 2008.

Caroline was born in Indonesia (Jakarta) and they both are coming to us from Holland. In Holland they owned a company in the computer software industry. Caroline has always had a passion for cooking and she's been a student of authentic Indonesian cooking for quite some time. They felt that Ojochal would embrace something new and unique to the area so decided to open an Indonesian restaurant. The location is along a mountain ridge off

of the Costanera where you can enjoy a fabulous sunset ocean view while enjoying a tasty meal.

In addition to cooking they love horses. "In Holland we made a lot of trips with our horses and carriages. We hope we can pick up this hobby again in this area", states Hans. Swieber, their beloved dog, completes the family.

They serve 7 main courses including Rendang which is beef boiled in coconut milk with lemongrass, onion, garlic, ginger koenjit and roasted coconut and they serve filet of fish with sambal ketjap sauce. They also serve vegetables like sambal goreng kool, boentjes sambal, smoor aubergine and atjar to completes the main course (I guess you need to be Indonesian to know what any of these are. Trust me they're all delicious). They're happy to

accommodate a vegetarian diet and starters and desserts are available. Prices for a 3 course meal run \$25-\$30. Wine and beer is also available. They're open Thursday - Sunday from 11:30 am - 9 pm and they can be reached at 506-2786-5054 or info@costaricatime.eu.



Hans and Caroline

The Casado:

When you want to eat like a married man

Throughout the country you'll find small family run roadside diners called sodas offering a mix of typical Costa Rica dishes, the most common being the casado. A casado is a complete meal usually consisting of rice, beans, fried plantains (similar to bananas), tortillas, a small salad and a choice of chicken, beef, pork or fish. Oftentimes vegetarian casados are available as well. The term originated with clients wanting to eat like married men when they're on the road and this is what Costa Ricans customarily eat

in their own homes for lunch and/or dinner.

Casados are usually inexpensive (\$3-\$5) and quite filling and because the mixture of rice and beans makes a complete protein, quite healthy. Casados may also come with yucca, cheese or pasta. Tabletops are also never complete without a bottle of Lizano sauce which is made of vegetables and spices. It's a brown sauce used to enhance the flavor of foods. A trip to Costa Rica is not complete without eating like a local at least once.



Plantains

The plantain, firmer and lower in sugar than the banana, has been consumed since prehistory. Unlike bananas they are not eaten raw, rather they are boiled, fried or steamed. Plantains can be used for cooking at any stage of ripeness. As the plantain ripens, it becomes sweeter and its color changes from green to yellow to black, just like its cousin the banana. Green plantains are firm and starchy, and resemble potatoes in flavor. Yellow plantains are softer and starchy but sweet. In Costa Rica fried plantains may be called patacones.

World Class Health Care in Costa Rica

In the most recent worldwide health care assessment from the The World Health Organization (WHO) Costa Rica ranked a step above the United States. Costa Rica also outranks the US in terms of lifespan. For a country with a population of just over 4 million and spending less than a 10% of what is spent in the US for health care the facts are startling.

Costa Rica's universal health care is considered to be the best health care system in Latin America. Private care providers are affordable and world class. Most speak excellent English and, after receiving their basic medical training in Costa Rica, travel far and wide seeking specialized training from the finest teaching hospitals in the world, often becoming certified in their specialties, in the countries where they receive their advanced training. It's not uncommon to find doctors and dentists speaking several languages fluently.

Costa Rica nationalized its health care system shortly after abolishing their military in 1948. Through Costa Rican Social Security (CCSS) commonly known as the Caja all Costa Rican citizens receive free medical treatment at many hospitals and clinics. There are ten major public hospitals affiliated with the Caja. For non-emergencies and everyday medical care, small clinics are located in almost every community. Foreigners with residency in Costa Rica can access the CCSS plan by paying a small contribution based on their income.

Residents (both national and foreign) can also buy health insurance from the state monopoly (INS) which has recently opened to international competition due to the passing of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Currently, private medical insurance costs about \$50-\$100 monthly per person, depending on age, gender and other factors. With INS insurance you can access all hospitals. Without insurance you will often find paying in cash will get you a discount and credit cards are widely accepted. A visit to a general practitioner will cost between \$25 and \$50. Medicare

is considering offering coverage to Americans in Costa Rica.

Costa Rica is also noted for medical tourism. It has quickly become one of the top destinations in the world for cosmetic surgery, dentistry or operations such as hip and knee replacements. In fact, cosmetic surgery, for example, is so affordable that the total cost of a medical vacation in Costa Rica including airfare, accommodations and a few days of sightseeing is often far less than the procedure alone would cost in the United States. Plastic surgeries cost a third or even a fourth of what they do in the US, without compromising quality or results. Not that we're saying you need it (we think you look fabulous) a face lift in Costa Rica costs around \$3,000 while the same procedure in the US costs anywhere from \$7,000 to \$15,000.

Numerous clinics and hospitals offer special package deals and there are many agencies in the US who specialize in putting patients in touch with doctors in Costa Rica. The well respected CIMA, for example, offers a complete physical check up including x-rays, lab work, stress test, bone density test, eye exam, pap smear, etc... for only \$385.

Costa Rica has over 30 hospitals and more than 250 clinics throughout the country. The best hospitals in San Jose are CIMA (JCI certified and ranked in the top 3 of all hospitals in Central America), Clinica Biblica (also JCI certified) and Hospital Nacional de Ninos (considered to be the best children's hospital in all of Central America).

The Hospital de Osa is the closest hospital to our area. It's located in the town of Cortez on the Costanera. It's Costa Rica's newest hospital (not for long though) and is a modern facility of 85,000 square feet. The hospital features a state of the art emergency room, pediatrics wing, a neurology



Hospital CIMA



Clinica Biblica

center, and an obstetrics and gynecology center. There are 23 departments with 7 medical specialists, 10 general practitioners and 30 nurses.

Prescription drugs in Costa Rica are sold by brand name, many of them being local brands (Costa Rica is home to many pharmaceutical companies). Drugs originating in Costa Rica are inexpensive however some drugs which have been imported may be more expensive than in the US. Most pharmaceuticals can be purchased over the counter without a prescription. Many drugs (like birth control pills, high cholesterol medication, migraine medicine, etc...) are available in Costa Rica without a prescription, and pharmacists can easily and accurately diagnose and treat many common problems. If it is not an emergency, the first course of action is to head to your neighborhood pharmacy, and consult with the pharmacist (referred to as doctor or doctora) about your ailment.

"Time and health are two precious assets that we don't recognize and appreciate until they have been depleted."

Denis Waitley

Although Costa Rica does not have any alligators, American Crocodiles can be found in several areas of the country including the Sierpe River. Crocs are usually 10-12 ft at maturity but can grow to 23 ft. Their eyes, ears, and nostrils are on the tops of their heads so when they are submerged in water, they are the only parts of them visible above the surface. Because their teeth are attached to the outside of the jaw they are visible even when the crocodile's mouth is closed. The longevity of crocs has not yet been determined however there is a male crocodile at the Australian Zoo estimated at 134 yrs.

Crocs are good parents, particularly the mothers. When the time comes, baby crocs must break their egg shells quickly or they will suffocate. Each hatchling has a horny growth at the tip of its snout to cut a hole in its shell. When a mother notices that a baby is having a hard time hatching, she

takes the egg into her mouth and gently squeezes it to break the shell. Upon hatching, the young call to the mother who digs them out and gently transports them to the water in her mouth. Croc embryos do not have sex chromosomes. Sex is determined by temp. Eggs that are incubated above 93° produce males, and below 86° produce females, in between will produce both sexes. Parental protection of eggs and hatchlings is unusual for reptiles, but crocs have a high degree of involvement with their young. Mothers are known to share nests and nurture each other's hatchlings. Hatchlings are vulnerable to many different predators, and croc adults are extremely protective of them. Both males and females respond aggressively to hatchling distress calls. But even with careful nurturing, only 1 in 10 survive to become an adult.

They hunt about once a week, usually at night. They can go without

eating for more than a year which causes them to lose all their excess weight. Crocs' stomachs contain the highest volume of acidic gastric juices of any vertebrate, which allows them to digest even bones and shells. At any given time, an adult croc's stomach may contain 10 to 15 lbs. of rocks which not only aid digestion; they also help them submerge quickly and float with a minimum of body showing above the water line. Their diet includes primarily aquatic animals and occasionally birds and mammals up to the size of deer.

Crocs are an endangered species because they have been relentlessly killed in the past. They are an ancient lineage, and are believed to have changed little since the time of the dinosaurs. They are believed to be 200 million years old whereas dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago; crocs survived great extinction events.



The Terraba Sierpe National Wetlands Mangrove Forest Reserve

The Terraba Sierpe National Wetlands consist of 66,850 acres and encompass the largest mangrove forest in Costa Rica. The reserve was founded in 1994 and protects the extensive river mouth delta systems, estuaries and wetlands between the Terraba and Sierpe Rivers on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, north of Drake Bay.

Most visitors pass through this area to access the lodges in the Corcovado but the mangrove forest is more than a through-point. The mangroves are abundant with birds including herons (boat-billed, green-backed, tiger-throated, great blue and little blue), egrets, pelicans, osprey, roseate spoonbills, black-necked stilts, mangrove black hawks, kingfishers, and occasionally mangrove hummingbirds. In fact the last time we were there we saw a pair of scarlet macaws. More than 55 species of fish and mollusks are found in the waters and many species of reptiles including crocodiles, caimans, boa constrictors (considered lucky), iguanas and lizards are found lazing on the shorelines. Monkeys including howler, capuchin and squirrel can also often be

seen in the tree tops above.

Mangroves are trees and shrubs which grow in brackish water. Mangrove forests are the most important coastal ecosystem along the Pacific coast of Central America and the Terraba-Sierpe Wetlands is considered the most significant and biodiverse mangrove swamp in the world. Mangroves are an important breeding ground for many species and provide protection for immature (small not foolish) fish. Mangrove vegetation also plays an important role in erosion protection and maintaining water quality. The mangroves filter toxic contaminants from the water.

The river contains a large amount of floating water hyacinth, a plant introduced to the river by the United Fruit Company to help filter out the chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides used in the cultivation of bananas. Due to the downward flow of the river, about an hour's worth of these floating plants reach the ocean each day and die in the salt water. Water Hyacinth is used in many water treatment plants in the US in the final phases of

processing.

Many of the canals connect and interweave (some provide irrigation for nearby banana plantations) and can be explored on boat tours departing from Sierpe. The mouth of the Sierpe River is considered to be one of the most dangerous points along this area of the Pacific coastline due to rogue waves that suddenly appear. These 'freak waves' can easily swamp a boat and are caused by the massive volume of water that rushes down from the mountains, colliding with the incoming ocean current. Local folklore tells of a pirate ship, carrying a fortune in gold, which sank near the mouth of the Sierpe River possibly by one of these rogue waves.

To tour this diverse ecosystem we suggest you contact Jorge Uribe Marin at the popular restaurant Las Vegas in Sierpe. He provides bilingual naturalists and captains for day or evening tours. Information can be found at www.perladelsur.net.

Well here we are in 2009, the world economic markets are in turmoil and Obama is the new president of the US. What does that all mean to you and me? As unemployment goes up and the values of our investments go down, Costa Rica looks more and more attractive. The low cost of living, the low cost and high quality of health care, the high quality of life and the fact that Costa Rica's economy has proved very resilient to the economic problems seen worldwide, continues to attract attention (and envy) of many developed countries.

We've very excited to announce that we've opened up a new phase Los Brisas de Ojochal which we're calling the Beverly Hills of Costa Rica. The large lots are zoned as commercial or residential and most have spectacular ocean views. There are only a few lots in this development and they are already beginning to sell.

Within our developments, we finished the year on par with sales in 2007 although we are getting more financed purchases and less "cash" buyers taking advantage of the 5% discount. Prices have remained stable though we are still seeing increases

in value of great ocean view parcels. We have had more people visiting the properties than ever and we have more new construction starts than ever as well. We hear more and more people citing interest in Costa Rica to offset losses in their retirement savings, home equity and other investments. Costa Rican property has not lost value like the US market. We also hear more comments about the lower cost of living, health care and taxes. I guess that's why Kristina and I bought there in the first place so I shouldn't be surprised.



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Why Gravel Roads?

First of all, we spend less time driving than I ever did when living in the US and we actually prefer the gravel roads over blacktop. Gravel roads keep speed limits down, they absorb water, don't absorb or reflect heat, are easily re-graded when they get rough and remind us of a bygone era. We'd prefer if they never pave our paradise, though we do appreciate the fact that all the major roads and highways are paved.

The January Tour Group

