

Paradise Post

News From Ojochal, Costa Ballena,
Costa Rica and Beyond

November 2022



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Updates from the Osa

We've got a lot to write about this quarter and things are looking great. I was in Costa Rica in July and part of August and within a week's time we saw three turtles laying eggs on the beach. The weather was beautiful with bright skies during the day and showers late afternoon. With our groups we saw several types of monkeys, macaws, toucans, crocodiles, sloths and so many other wonderful creatures I can't name.

There are new people moving in regularly now. Many new homes are complete and it's been very exciting to talk to owners about the process. There's a lot of enthusiasm in town and it's infectious.

Now as we approach high season, the snowbirds are returning and it's getting tougher to get things like restaurant reservations. The Ventanas Plaza, in front of town, is changing too, as new commercial clients have nearly filled the plaza. The most exciting new shop to open is called Fossil. They

specialize in furniture and decor made from petrified wood. See the story and links later on in the newsletter.

We've got a number of tours available this winter, including our normal 4 day Costa Rica property tours, our 10 day Panama Costa Rica tour, as well as a new offering to Medellin, Colombia. See the new tours listed on page 3 & 6. This is a great time to visit Costa Rica and tours fill fast. Come find out why Costa Rica continues to be a top contender in the best places to live outside the US.

Steve is also considering offering tours to Marrakech, Morocco, the Riviera Maya, as well as a tour to Cuba. Email me if any of these would be of interest to you. The dollar is strong right now so why not take advantage and travel while it's a bargain.

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Costa Rica is the Safest Country in Latin America, and #2 in all of the Americas

According to the recent 2022 Global Peace Index (GPI), Costa Rica has become the most peaceful country in Latin America. The country is the second safest in all of the Americas, with only Canada being ranked higher. Costa Rica ranked 38th worldwide, while Canada was 12th. The US ranked 129th. The least peaceful countries in the world were Afganastan, Yemen, Syria, Russia and South Sudan.

The GPI evaluates multiple factors when determining the rankings. The analysts look at things such as; violent demonstrations, access to weapons, homicides and terrorist acts. They also take into account the functioning of government, civil liberties,

literacy rates and gender equality. The report noted that after a continuous decline the world became slightly more peaceful compared to last year. Steve Killelea, of the Institute for Economics and Peace, stated "What comes across dramatically in this year's results and the six year trend is a shift in global priorities. Nations have become externally more peaceful as they compete through economic, rather than military means."

The safest country in the world is Iceland. You can find more information here:

<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/>



Warner Rojas:
Congratulations to the first
Costa Rican to reach the top
of Mount Everest!

Costa Rica Remains the Happiest Place on Earth

The 2019 Happy Planet Index (HPI) was released in 2020 and for the fifth time Costa Rica ranked first as the happiest country on earth. Costa Rica has the second highest life expectancy in the Americas, experiences well-being higher than many richer nations and a per capita ecological footprint 1/3 the size of the USA's.

Costa Rica's life expectancy at 79.3 is higher than the USA which is 77.5 and 4.1 years lower than that of Japan which has the highest life expectancy in the world.

Costa Rica has promoted sustainability in its policies and produces 99% of all its energy from renewable sources such as hydro-electric, wind, and geothermal power. The country has reversed deforestation and committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2023.

In 2021, life expectancy worldwide fell, as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. but the net result on happiness was that many people chose to slow down, which was a plus.

The HPI blends subjective and objective data to build a picture of progress within a country. The Index uses global data on life expectancy, experienced well-being and ecological footprint to rank countries. It asks the question: "How much well-being is achieved per unit of resource consumption?" You can find more information here: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>

Recreational Marijuana Use Bill signed by President Rodrigo Chaves

Marijuana possession was decriminalized back in 2018, however the sale of marijuana can be punished criminally. In March of 2022, the use of medical marijuana was approved in Costa Rica. On October 6, 2022, President Rodrigo Chaves signed a bill to allow the recreational use of marijuana, The bill to approve recreational use must now be approved by the legislature.

Costa Rica is Region's Best Country for Raising Children

Save the Children recently ranked Costa Rica 13th out of 80 Tier II countries on their *Mother's Index* and 3rd out of 81 on their *Children's Index*. This 13th annual study documents conditions for mothers and children in 165 countries and shows where mothers fare best and where they face the greatest hardships. Their studies have shown that providing mothers with access to education, economic opportunities and maternal and child health care give them and their children the best

chance to survive and thrive. The study pointed out that wealth and healthy children don't necessarily go hand in hand. Costa Rica, Brazil and Chile are 3 countries performing better on child nutrition than their national wealth may suggest. You can find the full results here: [Save the children website here](#)



	Costa Rica	Belize	Ecuador	Panama	USA
% of births attended by skilled health personnel	99%	95%	98%	89%	n/a
% of women using modern contraception	72%	31%	59%	54%	73%
Female life expectancy	82	78	79	79	81
Expected # of years of formal school	12	13	12	14	18
Ratio of female to male income	.46	.43	.51	.58	.62
Participation of women in government	39%	11%	32%	9%	17%
Under 5 mortality rate per 1000	10	17	20	20	8
% of children under 5 moderately or severely underweight	1	4	6	4	n/a
% of pop. with access to safe drinking water	97%	98%	94%	93%	n/a
Mother's Index Rank (out of 80 countries, 43 for the USA)	13	42	20	24	25
Women's Index Rank (out of 81 countries, 43 for the USA)	20	51	30	22	19
Children's Index Rank (out of 83 countries, 44 for the USA)	3	24	33	32	31

Residency Papers Can Now Be Renewed at the Post Office

What was recently a bit of a headache has been greatly simplified. Foreign residents in Costa Rica are now able to renew their residency cedula (official residency document) at several post offices in the country. In a joint program between the immigration service and the post office the country has not only made the process simpler but also faster.

Previously it was necessary for residents to travel to immigration's main office in San Jose. The first phase of the program added 12 new locations situated around the central valley and before the end of 2022 there will be a total of 60 post offices around the country able to provide renewed residency status.

4 day Costa Rica Property Tours

We have a number of 4 day tours scheduled during the next 3 months. Our 4 day tour is all-inclusive, including airport transfers, 3 nights lodging, transport to and from our guest house from San Jose, all meals (except on the day you arrive). The cost of these tours is \$350 per single or \$600 per couple. Come see why our developments in the southern pacific region of Costa Rica continue to be so popular.

Here are the tour dates:

- December 6 - 9
- December 18 - 21
- January 1 - 4 New Years
- January 17 - 20. 2023
- February 5 - 8
- February 21 - 24
- March 14 - 17
- April 18 - 21

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Upcoming Tourism tours to Medellin, Colombia

Colombia is becoming more popular as a retirement destination for North Americans, so we are offering two new tours to Colombia. One with tourism and real estate, and another adventure tourism tour for guys only. The first, open to all, is February 4 - 11, 90% tourism with a bit of property too, seeing sights in Medellin and the surrounding area. We'll visit Poblado, Lleras, Envigado, Botero Park, the Museum of Antioquia, Guatape', Comuna 13, el Centro, and more. 7 days, all-inclusive.

The second tour, March 4 - 11, is a guys only tour, including ATV tour, zip line, Comuna 13, Guatape' w/optional helicopter ride, waterfall hike, nightlife and more. The cost of either tour is \$1450 per person and includes all transportation, lodging, meals, activity and entrance fees.

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10 Day Panama to Costa Rica Tour

We have a 10 day tour starting in Panama City, Panama and ending in San Jose Costa Rica, dates of January 14th to January 23. This tour is 90% tourism but we do stop at our guest house in Ojochal for a full on property tour for one full day, to show you why our project has been so succesful. We start in Panama, visit Casco Viejo, the Panama Canal, then on the Santiago de Vasquez, Boquete & David Panama before crossing into Costa Rica. We take a river cruise, a day property tour, visit Dominical, Manuel Antonio national park, a quick tour of Jaco, then on to San Jose. We'll visit La Paz Waterfall Gardens and the Doka coffee plantation. This is a very popular tour and we still have space for 3 couples. \$3,400 per couple, \$2,200 per single, all inclusive.

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Finding a Retirement Property - 101

What is most important in retirement? Surveys show freedom from financial worries as a top concern in retirement. Next is flexibility, and then activities like family, travel, gardening, volunteering, a sense of community, playing golf, oceanfront living, adventure, access to healthcare, walking, and active lifestyle. We all have different ideas of the perfect retirement. Many of us are baby boomers. Our life expectancy is long and retirement often means "fixed income". We don't want to worry about running out of money. According to an AARP survey, our biggest concern is having enough discretionary income to enjoy our life in retirement.

We bought our 1st "retirement" property in Rotunda West, FL, a large retirement community on the west coast of Florida, and we learned a BIG LESSON. Most "retirement properties" have zero rental appeal. We initially didn't plan to rent out our retirement home but quickly realized that **we could have** if it were in a more popular area for vacationers. We had friends living nearby, in Boca Grande, FL that could rent their house whenever they wanted, and make a substantial amount per night.. This gave them income and flexibility. Owning a property that you can rent out short term makes that property into an income stream, not an expense.

The next "retirement" property we bought was in Key West FL. The 2nd BIG LESSON we learned was that some vacation properties have high cost of ownership, are seasonal, have rental restrictions and might be subject to natural disasters, (like hurricanes, for example). Key West has some of the highest insurance rates in the US, very stringent rental restrictions and high ownership costs. We loved living there but the high cost of living was tough to justify. Furthermore, we were limited in renting, with a one-month rental minimum strictly enforced in Key West.

Having learned a few things about where best to own a retirement home, the next "retirement" property we bought was in Costa Rica. Here we had low cost of ownership (property taxes, management fees, insurance costs, HOA) and high vacation rental demand. We've since bought a second "vacation" property in Playa del Carmen, MX, and are looking at a 3rd in Medellin, Colombia. We still own our Key West home but now have alternate places to stay when we want to rent our house in Key West, again subject to a one-month minimum rental period, by city mandate. Owning retirement property outside the US has some significant advantages. The cost of ownership is often much lower than in the US and many areas are also popular vacation destination. Many of you are thinking, I have no interest in retiring outside the US or renting my home. But if you plan your retirement with flexibility, you may end up with much more disposable income to do other things with.

Costs: The main advantage of owning outside the US is the lower cost of ownership. Property taxes, insurance costs, healthcare costs, capital gains, and tax on rental income are often significantly lower outside the US. US per capita cost for healthcare, for example, is the highest in the world, at \$11,077 per person, with the next highest country Switzerland, paying less than 2/3rds of what we pay. Many popular retirement countries; Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador and Spain, pay a fraction of what we pay per capita, for healthcare, yet life expectancies and quality of life indexes rank many higher than the US. Costa Rica, for example, pays just \$1,337 per capita for healthcare costs, yet average life expectancy is almost 2 years longer than in the US. Quality of life indexes rank Costa Rica significantly higher than the US. In fact, Costa Rica has topped the "Happy Planet" index 5 times in the last 10 years.

There are challenges to owning foreign property. The locals may speak another language, there may be immigration restrictions, accessibility might be an issue in terms of flights, cost to fly, etc. Political changes are possible that might affect the value of your investment, there's also a possibility of currency fluctuations and there's not an MLS as we are used to. That's why we picked countries with solid ties to the US and strong, stable economies. Though they may be more expensive than other places, the stability gives me peace of mind about the value of our investment and the ability to rent if when we want to. We prefer buying in popular vacation areas that are less expensive to own. Living in a country with a lower GNP per capita, is a great way to make your retirement dollars go further. The Mexican Riviera is a vacation destination for lots of countries, not just the US, and since Mexico is a strong trading partner to the US, the Mexican Peso stays pretty stable. Costa Rica is in the same situation, with the US being it's largest trading partner, with 38% of its imports and 42% of exports from between the two countries. Popular vacation areas in both Costa Rica and Mexico are not cheap, but the cost of ownership (property taxes, insurance, domestic help, etc.) are significantly cheaper than the US. Making sound decisions about buying property abroad is a complex issue. Considerations include safety, accessibility (flights, distance, cost), quality of life, political stability, economic outlook, language barriers, currency fluctuations, environmental risks and the list goes on. But the advantages of living abroad often outweigh the risks. Remember, financial freedom (the cost of living, taxes, healthcare costs, etc.) is often the top concern in your ability to relax and enjoy life in retirement, so choosing the right retirement destination is important. I look for popular vacation areas, lots of activities, strong expat communities, great healthcare, and a high return on my investment through a combination of rental income and appreciation.. I will admit I've always been a nomad and love to travel, so the thought of living in Florida, North Carolina or Arizona for the rest of my life is not the retirement of my dreams. I relish the adventure of living abroad. The world is small, we can visit the grandkids when we want and use the rental income from our properties to travel, cruise or short stay wherever we want..





Villa for Sale in Ojochal Acacia model 3/2 with Pool

Bargain priced at \$285,000

The Acacia Model is the best of the units, a single story, 3 bedroom, 2 bath, complete with a tiled pool. With custom built solid wood cabinets and quartz counters, the unit comes fully landscaped and should provide nice rental income when you aren't using it yourself. It is **READY TO MOVE IN**, but does not include appliances. This unit has wonderful finishes, floating vanities and beautiful kitchen cabinetry. The unit comes with split AC units in each of the bedrooms. There's a nice appliance and/or furnishing package available if you are interested in turn key.



[Click here now to go to a reservation form for this villa](#)

Costa Rica Exports Increase

For the year 2021, Costa Rica's exports grew by 24.5% over 2020 Data released by PROCOMER (Foreign Trade Corporation of Costa Rica) showed that medical devices, particularly the manufacture of needles, catheters, and prosthetic devices grew by 54.7%, agriculture grew by 7.3% and manufacturing by 19%.

Banana exports declined a bit. 20 years ago that would have been a tragedy for the country but now with diversification it wasn't crucial. One fruit that's experiencing a boom are Costa Rican Pineapples. Also Mango consumption in the USA has grown substantially and Costa Rica supplied the USA with 4.5% of the tropical fruit for the first half of 2021. Mexico was the top supplier, with nearly 65% of total US mango imports.

According to PROCOMER, Costa Rica exports more than 4000 products with the USA being the major importer but there has been substantial growth

with Holland and Belgium. Free Trade Agreements exist with The US, Canada, China, The European Union, Dominican Republic, Peru, South Korea and Singapore. 25 foreign companies have made investments in the country in recent years

Costa Rica's top exports are: medical equipment, bananas, pineapples, coffee, melons, ornamental plants, sugar, textiles and electronic components.



Intel is a major employer in Costa Rica

Learn how to Travel for Free



Having flown over a million miles just on American Airlines and having had a career involving travel for most of my life, I've learned a ton of travel hacks and secrets that enable me to travel largely for FREE. On urging from friends and clients, I finally wrote an e-book on the subject, that I now offer for sale online. It's priced at \$99 but I guarantee if you don't think it was worth the money, I will cheerfully refund your entire payment. For more information, click on the link below.

<https://www.topsecrettravel.com>

Learn from an Expert, I've visited 42 countries on 5 continents

I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list

GDP growth in Costa Rica nearly 8% in 2021

According to Nomura Securities International Costa Rica's economy will expand faster than earlier forecasts and will outpace inflation. GDP climbed 7.8% in 2021, which is an increase from the earlier forecast of 4%. "For the first time in recent memory, Costa Rica is poised to show real GDP growth that exceeds its inflation rate (1.73% in 2021). This speaks volumes about Costa Rica's macroeconomic stability."

Costa Rica Great for Outsourcing

Costa Rica is considered one of the top 10 emerging cities for outsourcing, according to Tholons Inc. Nearly 300 high-tech and medical device companies, 24% being Fortune 100 companies, have established successful operations in Costa Rica and are still growing. Costa Rica ranks second among Latin American countries in the 'Enabling Trade Index', and made an impressive leap of 25 positions in the 'Ease of Doing Business Index' between 2015 and 2016, positioning at No.58 - among the top third of countries.

Considerations When Comparing Areas and Developers in Costa Rica

With any development be sure to ask the following questions, (there have been a lot of failed projects in Costa Rica)

- Is the developer financially stable?
- Is any of the development funded by loans (potential for default)?
- Is the infrastructure complete (road, water, electric)?
- What is the track record and history of the development?
- Is your potential purchase in a development or stand alone, is it secure when you are not there?
- If you will be building, do you have a reliable, experienced, financially sound builder?
- Are there time limits that you must comply to, can you build your own home or hire any builder of your choice?
- Is the development sustainable? Is there adequate legal water supply, are there environmental issues?
- Are their environmental permits in hand (Minae, SETENA) from the regulatory overseers?
- What services are available from the developer/builder? Rental management? Property management? Residency assistance? Landscape services? Pool design/build?, Interior design? Help with banking?
- Is there a resale market readily available?
- How is the property zoned, farm zoning, residential zoning, mixed use, commercial, en condominio, can you do what you want?
- Is there an HOA and CC&R's? HOA's in Costa Rica are important to ensure funds are available for future maintenance but be sure they are reasonable, ours average about \$300 per year
- How large is the expat community? Are there services readily available: shopping, domestic help, gardening, pool cleaning, things to do?
- How safe and secure is the community, the development and the individual property?
- How far away are healthcare services and what level and quality of service is available?
- Are there ample restaurants, retail, activities?
- How accessible is the area by air, bus, taxi, car, 4 wheel drive or 2 wheel drive? Drive time from International airport?
- Stability of the government, currency, democracy, property rights, banking system? Political stability?
- What is the level of income in the area compared to you, will you be a target, rich and poor in the community and the local crime rate.
- What is the social community like, unemployment level, opportunities, happy people?
- Economic conditions within the country and area in particular, GDP rate, Inflation rate?
- How is the cost of living, things like housing, food, property tax, cost of healthcare, insurance?
- What is the future outlook of the area you are considering? Accessibility, infrastructure, major projects, healthcare?
- Any environmental issues, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornados, flooding, dry spells, fires, rain, ocean rise, cold, hot, ?



Don't let a nice gated entrance fool you. These are failed developments in Costa Rica.

Petrified Wood Furniture is Coming!

A new store has opened named "Fossil" in the Ventanas Plaza in Ojochal, right on the Costanera Highway, that specializes in home decor, furniture, accessories and even landscape items made from petrified wood. The proprietor, Jamie O'Brien, is proud of his new store and inventory. From pedestal sinks to expansive bathtubs, floor and wall tiles, to chairs, benches, dining room tables, and countertops, the company helps customers bring their vision of an ideal home to life through stunning raw materials and exemplary craftsmanship. Stop by and see their new products and be sure to welcome Jamie to the neighborhood. See www.fossilinc.com for more information and hours.

What's on your bucket list?

UPCOMING TOURS

4 Day Costa Rica

Property Tour Dates

\$350 per person

includes all meals, lodging, activity and entrance fees and transportation, except airfare

December 6 - 9

December 18 - 21

January 1 - 4 New Years

January 17 - 20. 2023

February 5 - 8

February 21 - 24

March 14 - 17

April 25 - 28

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Panama Costa Rica

10 Day Tour Date

\$2,200 single, \$3,400 couple

January 14 - 23

includes all meals, lodging, activity and entrance fees and transportation, except airfare

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Medellin, Colombia

7 Day Tour

\$1,450 per person

includes all meals, lodging, activity and entrance fees and transportation, except airfare

February 4 - 11 Open to All

March 4 - 11 Guys Only

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Home Sites in Chontales

Here's a sampling from our new Vista Sin Fin development, STUNNING ocean views... You have to see them to appreciate them!

These lots are from 1/3 of an acre to 3/4 acres and will go fast.... The roads are in and these are basically ready to build on.

Ocean View 7 / Mountain View 7	\$173500
Ocean View 9 / Mountain View 10	\$184700
Ocean View 9 / Mountain View 10	\$201700
Ocean View 8 / Mountain View 9	\$186700
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$242300
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$228800
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$270600
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 8	\$163100
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$152600
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$171300
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$199700
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$244400
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$206300
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$206300
Ocean View 5 / Mountain View 9	\$187700
Ocean View 10 / Mountain View 10	\$316500



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Things are looking great outside the US for Expats from North America. With a historically strong dollar, this is a great time to travel and to purchase property outside the US. This past year I visited a lot of countries in search of other properties for us to acquire for our personal use, rental or resale and just to have fun traveling. Early in 2022 I ran two tours from Costa Rica to Panama and Panama to Costa Rica. I was surprised at the volume of purchases on those two tours, seems lots of North Americans are looking for better horizons outside of the US and Canada.

In April I went to Guatemala with a friend. This was my third trip to Guatemala. We visited Antigua, Penajechal, Chi Chi Castanango and Puerto San Jose, on the Pacific coast. One of the highlights was climbing an active volcano. Guatemala is a bit rough around the edges but I still enjoy traveling there.

In June Kristina & I went to Mexico to our condo in Playa Del Carmen. We toured around the Yucatan Peninsula, visiting some famous Archeological ruins including Chichen-Itza. Coba, and Tulum. We spent some time in Merida as well as Las Coloradas/Rio Lagartos on the northern shore of the Yucatan. This area is known for the pink lakes caused by micro-organisms in the salt ponds the area is famous for.

In July I went to Cuba, touring around "in support of the Cuban people". In May, 2022, President Biden relaxed some of the harsh restrictions put on Cuba by President Trump. Biden eased restrictions on flights and remittances of money to Cuba and has reinstated the Cuban immigration lottery.

Cuba has long suffered from the US embargo as well as the recent Covid19 Pandemic. As a result, the number of illegal Cuban migrants coming to the US nearly tripled in the first half of 2022, as the Cuban people struggle to find basic necessities. The embargo has isolated Cuba and though Cuba is an ally of President Maduro, of Venezuela, Cuba is not the terrorist state depicted by Donald Trump. If we want to encourage democracy in Cuba, we should continue to build diplomatic relations and ease restrictions.

In August I went to Medellin, Colombia. I have a few friends living there and had a great visit. Colombia is becoming a popular tourist destination, doubling tourism from 2012 to 2019, leading up to the Pandemic. Colombia is one of the most biodiverse nations on the planet, with over 1,900 species of birds. With coasts on both the Atlantic and Pacific, and the mountainous Andean region or the tropical Amazonia region, Colombia has much to offer in ecotourism.

Medellin was once considered the most dangerous city in the world, but is now considered safer than many US cities. The municipal government built a public transportation system that is world class and Colombia's GDP was up over 10% in 2021, the highest increase since 1906. Founded in 1616, Medellin is the second largest city in Colombia and supports a burgeoning textile, manufacturing and industrial base, as well as a large producer of flowers and orchids. In June Colombia elected their first leftist president, Gustavo Petro, and their first black vice president, Francia Marquez.

Ten Months ago I also went to Morocco. In the 1990's I had 10 Moroccan employees and almost all of them came to visit me while I was in Marrakech. I toured the Atlas mountains, the Agafar desert and Marrakech, home to the walled Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

