



**"The official Newsletter from Costa Rica"**

*Pura Vida...*



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# Christmas is coming...

## **Traditions Prayers and Ornaments**

Since the middle of November people in Costa Rica started to adorn their houses, business premises, as well as the streets of the city.

The cool winds start coming from the north and along with this delicious cold wind, winter ends (which lasts from May to November) and we enter the summer (which starts in early January and ends with the last days April).

Typical motifs used are wreaths, colored lights, bulbs decorating the Christmas tree ( you cannot miss ) with colorful ties and colored dots that give so much life to cypress Christmas , besides the usual trimmings as the Christmas bears , pastors , penguins, holiday cottages and our dear friend St. Nicholas and his famous reindeer.

And of course you cannot miss the traditional portal Christmas. With shepherds, sheep, streams, fountains, the manger, Joseph, the Virgin Mary, the ox, the mule and the Magi in their procession to the Portal Bethlehem.

The Child Jesus is placed on the 24th at midnight to dawn, after 25 families shared a dinner and gifts. Usually families gather at the home of their parents and talks. The family lives there until the 24<sup>th</sup>, at mid-night they start with prayers when the image of the Child Jesus is placed in the manger of each family.

After prayers of thanks, the Christmas dinner is made and distribute gifts of great people , because children's gifts brings the Child Jesus , and are not usually opened until December 25 only, when the little rise of their beds.

Also on December 24, it is customary to go to church to thank God for everything received, normally this is at 8:00 pm, this allows that the families are at home at midnight.

### **Typical food, Corn Furnaces and Mud.**

Typical meals of the day are the cake and raw corn (similar to a cake based on corn and other ingredients , only thicker longer and harder, which is cooked in a wood oven for added consistency to the mass ) made from corn cooked in clay ovens or electric furnaces, with individuals preferring always prepared in clay ovens. There is also the bread made with yeast, also cooked in clay ovens.

For dinner usually is prepared, pork, chicken or turkey, depending on the taste and budget of every family, It is always accompanied by white rice and a salad to accompany meat and of course cannot be missing on any table the traditional pork tamale.

This famous and delicious Christmas meal known as Ticos, pork tamales, are made from well-seasoned dough, cooking pork , chicken, rice , chili, and beans. The dough is prepared, as mentioned above, along with well-seasoned chicken broth and pork, being able to obtain a good ground. This is placed over banana leaves into small balls and on them the cooked rice and pork, chicken, chili, beans and green beans standing (that's the basics, some families put in other things like egg, raisins, depends on the taste of each client). After the dough has been "decorated "with the above ingredients the banana leaf is tied, leaving the tamale up and ready to be cooked.

Prepared; proceeds to cook tamales for 2 hours in the disk of the kitchen or fireplace or grill according to the taste of everyone, or according to their means.



After they are cooked, allow it to cool and warm while you eat them as a delicious mash.

Finally the Costa Rican children do not open gifts until the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>, they stay up all night on the 24<sup>th</sup> until midnight, receive gifts and take to the streets and corridors of their homes to share with family, friends and neighbors. Brought are gifts from God for the child.

We are not lovers of the turkey, the traditional food that is made in Christmas celebrations is: rice with chicken, lacking the pork tamales, of course there are many recipes made with rice, chicken and pork but never turkey.



**Social Time with Volunteers Sabine Spoler and Kari Viken.**

On Wednesday, the 13<sup>th</sup>, the volunteers Sabine Spoler, Kari Viken and I as part of the staff, had a nice time together sharing a delicious ice cream from one of the best Ice cream shops in the city, its name is “Nino’s Gelato Italiano”.

I want to say thanks to them for being there and, I had a such a nice time, and now missing you, Sabine Spoler, but hoping that you have best forever.





## Teaching Lessons at “Rodeito” and “Rincon de la Vieja” Schools.

In the middle of November some of our volunteers in program, Therese Jensen and Katharina Lenz, one of them from Germany and another one from Denmark, had the opportunity to be part of a nice day at these 2 schools located near to Liberia city.

At the Rincon de la Vieja's school, they shared a pretty day with the kids doing different activities. The idea was born when “Gilbert”, a teacher of the school, looked for a motivation strategy in order to make students work in class, he told them “if you behave in a good way and study a lot for the exams you will have a special gift, which is a volunteer visit from a different country”.

The students start to be more motivate and did an excellent job, they felt really happy to have this unique chance, to be with people from another countries.

The second opportunity was at the Rodeito School. This time our volunteers Jasper Müller and Alexander Lahusen, both from Germany, were part of a nice day with kids as well, where they could have the opportunity to share an English class , and also have a nice time in the river and more.

Finally I just want to say thank you to them for their participation on these special days.



### *PRO Volunteer Story, Sabine Spoler*

***Hello everybody,***

My name is Sabine Spoler and I'm from Holland. I came to Costa Rica almost three months ago and started working for Project Abroad. My project was called: 'Teaching teachers'.

In Holland I'm a teacher in primary school. I teach children with special needs, these children have different disorders, such as: ADHD, ADD, ASD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc. I've been doing this work for fourteen years now and I was ready for a new challenge in my life. I took a sabbatical of six months and decided to do volunteer work for three months, and after that do some travelling.



On Google I found the Projects Abroad site. Immediately I got a good feeling about the project, because it was also for professionals, and there was proper guidance and enough challenge. That was very important to me. I signed up for the project and the preparations got started!

On august 26<sup>th</sup> I got my introduction. I got all the information about the project and the city, Liberia. They showed me around and showed me all the important places in the city.

The next day I was introduced to Max Arias, he was my co-worker for the next three months.

He is a supervisor for the English teachers. He is a busy man, who works really hard and is participating in many working groups and he is 'famous' by many teachers. He organizes courses, trainings and coaches the teachers to improve their teaching

skills in the English lessons. He is working for the MEP, Ministerio Educacion de Pública.

My role, for the three months, would be to guide the English teachers who have difficulty with the children in their classes that needed special attention, the children with the different disorders. Max told me that there are many teachers who don't know how to deal with children who needs special attention. He finds it an added value that a specialist from abroad is here to help the teachers, so that the children who need special care, can learn better. I was so excited, couldn't wait to get started!

I also participated in what is called, 'conversation clubs'. In the conversations club some English teachers were participating. This club is organized by other volunteers from another project, and they are helping the English teachers to improve their English. They organize a day with different activities and presentations, which will take place once a month. My role was to guide them and I helped them to improve their English skills and/or teaching skills. In addition, I was joining Max as he was going to visit different schools to observe the teachers. After the visit we talked about the lesson and gave the teacher some feedback. It was nice to see the teachers work and I could share my knowledge with them.

To let the English teachers know who I was and why I was here, I started writing an email. I've tried to write it in a 'careful' way, because I didn't want to be pushy or arrogant, didn't want to sound as somebody who knows better. I believe that all teachers are colleagues and all teachers have certain knowledge they can share with each other.

There were a few teachers, only four out of 25, who responded on my email, telling me that they could use my help. I was so happy!! Even though there were not many, some teachers wanted my help and that gave me a good feeling. I started to make appointments and visited them at the schools. The teachers had to describe their problem to me and try to make an observation question. After the observation I sat down with the teacher and talked about the child and the problems they experienced



in the classes. Together we tried to search for a solution and thought about how to help the child. Speaking about everything was good and effective, because we both were trying to help. When I ended my visit, I made sure that the teacher would get a report about the observation and the recommendations we talked about. Two or three weeks later I went to visit the teacher again, to see if the recommendations were useful and if she needed more help or not.

During my visits in the schools, many teachers told me that they were struggling with the order and finding it hard to keep the class under control and that they really need some help with that. And of course... I would help them. So we started making appointments, which was hard sometimes, because of all the different activities that were happening in the school.

After a while I've noticed that some teachers were always cancelling my appointments. I made new ones, but they cancelled it again. I began to realize that these teachers maybe didn't want my help anymore and I wondered why. Did it have something to do with the way I responded to them? Did I make them feel uncomfortable? Was I too pushy? Asking myself many questions because in the beginning the teachers were so enthusiastic when they heard about me, and now they didn't want my help anymore. Talking about it with some people, I found out that the teachers maybe felt criticized by me, maybe they were embarrassed or felt uncertain about their teaching.

It makes me sad that it went like this, that I couldn't help more teachers. I wanted to help more teachers so that they would have more knowledge and useful tools to help the special need children.

Realizing that there were no new appointments for the next few weeks, I started thinking about another project. And I found one!!

Project abroad makes it possible for Tico's to join an English course. This course is giving by volunteers of Project Abroad. Every Tuesday and Thursday the Tico's participate and volunteers teach them English. In total the course will take three months.

I'm one of the volunteers who teach the Tico's. It's so much fun! You'll get to know the Tico's and you'll get to practice your Spanish too. Spending time with them is great and they are really trying to learn English. They are so motivated and that gave me so much energy.

Many volunteers were enthusiastic about the teaching program and they were very motivated preparing a good lesson. Many times they found it hard to find a subject, because they didn't always know about planning or how a lesson is built. And the 'volunteers teachers' changes many times during the course, because there project ends or they went to school longer and couldn't make it on time.

Observing all of this and realizing that the course needs some structure in the lessons, brought me to a new project. As a teacher I think it's very important that the lessons are given from a certain base. There must be a constructive order in the lessons and you'll need the right materials or tools to make the lesson more effective. I found a good document to work from. In this document were many lessons described and I started reading the lessons and trying to adjust them and make the right materials, tools or activities. It was a big job, with many blisters on my hand from all the cutting and pasting, many hours behind Google, searching for good pictures to use for flashcards. 60 lessons needed to be prepared, but I made it.

And now...in the office of Projects Abroad are many folders which contains lessons plans with all the materials the volunteers can use at all the lessons. When the volunteers start teaching the Tico's next year, there is now a good base and hopefully the Tico's are speaking a little English after 60 lessons. Let's hope this project will last long and that all the volunteers are enjoying teaching English to the Tico's!!

## ***Conservation Article***

### **Scarlet Macaw**

This bird is one of our "flag species" of the park, we saved one baby macaw last year, and now all is ready for the start of this project again.

Eduardo Artavia , our biologist said that having building project management in some populations of Area, macaw intended to study the ecology of this bird nesting and also through a system of surveillance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for all the breeding season, we tried the effectiveness of the mitigation project looting of nests.

During the project review, within the nests was a constant, "the nest number 1 had 11 eggs and in the nest number 2 had a honey comb, and was impossible to check the eggs".

### **Reforestation using native species**

Reforestation is one of the most important activities in the Barra Honda National Park, since July we have been planting native trees around the National Park, also in communities and at schools. In total we planted about 2000 trees, this has great significance for our goal is the protection and conservation of the environment.



### **Environmental education program**

This is one of the jobs volunteers and Barra Honda National Park are happy about, because we are very proud to teach children about environmental education topics. We're done for this year with good news, now the children of the surrounding schools, Barra Honda National Park, have new knowledge on issues such as forest fires, biodiversity, natural resources, and how to protect our natural resources.



### **Permanent transect**

This was a hard job in the last days, the volunteers and the staff were in the forest for many hours working in the permanent transect, now we have finished marking the trees. This was part of the final project of Jocelyn Alvarado (Student from Costa Rica) however, now we have two permanent transect to compile research for many years.



### **Biodigester**

In this month, we worked doing trails in the biodigester and the nursery garden. This is part of the jobs that Jose Mario has for this project, we need to have easy access to the nursery garden and also to the bio digester.

***Anthony Ruiz***

***Conservation Manager***