

THE OFFICIAL

NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Costa Rica



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Projects Abroad

EDITORIAL

Pura Vida



"Pura vida." It's a phrase that is heard all over Costa Rica and one doesn't have to speak Spanish to understand it. It translates literally to "pure life" but this translation barely scratches the surface of what it really symbolizes. The title of a 1950's Mexican film set in Costa Rica called "Pura Vida" quickly became adopted as the country's motto. Today it can be found printed next to a toucan or a tree frog on t-shirts, baseball caps, coffee mugs and bits of coconut shell found in shops from the Pacific to the Caribbean.

Over the years, the culture has grown to embody the phrase. If you ask a person how he's doing, his answer will likely be "pura vida." If you say thank you for something, the response is a casual "pura vida." Similarly, when expressing thanks for something, "pura vida" is used. When greeting friends, "hola" isn't always necessary — simply "pura vida." Do you agree with what your friend just said? "Pura vida."

So what exactly does "pura vida" mean? Some say it means that everything is good or to forget about your problems.

In this sense, it is like the Costa Rican equivalent of "Hakuna Matata".

Others say that this definition is lazy and gives a bad impression of 'tico' culture. They suggest that it means living life in the best way that you can; that everything is exactly as it should be as you make it that way.

Hello everyone and saludos from Costa Rica! September is the "mes de la patria," or the month of the homeland, as Independence Day is celebrated on the 15 with parades all over the country, and most importantly, traditional food. September also marks the heart of the rainy season with heavy thunderstorms every afternoon. This means cooler temperatures in the mornings, and lots of mud and mosquitoes on our conservation project in Barra Honda. However, it's also the time of year that the sea turtles begin to build their nests on the beaches of both coasts. Leatherbacks can be found on Playa Grande, Olive Ridley's and Hawksbills around Playa Ostional, and Green sea turtles

on both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. This is also the ideal time of year to see the Humpback whale near Corcovado or Playa Dominical in the Pacific.

As always, I encourage each of you to follow us on facebook and instagram, and if you have any stories that you would like to have included in future newsletters, they can be emailed along with photos to leesteenbergen@projects-abroad.org
Pura Vida!

- **Lee Steenbergen**
Communications Officer,
Costa Rica

Country Update

Día de la patria: 193 years of independence

This year, 15th September marked the 193rd anniversary of Costa Rica becoming an independent state. In cities and pueblos all over the nation, local school children dressed in traditional attire and marched through the streets with drums, hand marimbas and national flags to commemorate the event.

Costa Rica, like the other countries in Central America, never fought a war for their independence from Spain. After the Mexican War for Independence at the beginning of the 19th century, Costa Rica became a province of the Federal Republic of Central America, where the capital was far away in Guatemala City. As a result of the distance and poor communication between the population in Costa Rica's central valley and the government in Guatemala, Costa Rica left the Federal Republic of Central America in 1841.



Today, Costa Rica is the most stable, progressive, and prosperous country in Central America, as well as one of the most developed countries in Latin America in terms of human development. It is also one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of environmental sustainability and conservation efforts. It became one of the first nations in the world to abolish its military, the first in Latin America to outlaw sport hunting, and it has made plans to be the first carbon-neutral country in the world by 2021. Additionally, it has consistently been awarded the title of "Happiest Country in the World" by the Happy Planet Index.

The flag of Costa Rica contains two blue horizontal stripes, two white horizontal stripes and a larger red stripe across the center. The blue stands for the sky, opportunities, idealism and perseverance. The white stands for peace, wisdom and happiness. Finally, the red stands for the blood shed by the nation's martyrs and for the warmth of the people.



Project Update

Micro-Finance: Macrobiotica, Esencia Vital

When micro-finance volunteers come to Costa Rica, one of the biggest differences that they notice between their work here and their work back in their home countries is the importance of personal relationships in business. Business partners in Costa Rica are friends first and colleagues later.

"It's not only business focused," says micro-finance intern, Antonia Scholler from Germany. "They want to know who you are. It's very personal," she says. "You really know the people that you're working with. It's important because it motivates you to work with a positive attitude and not just because of pressure."

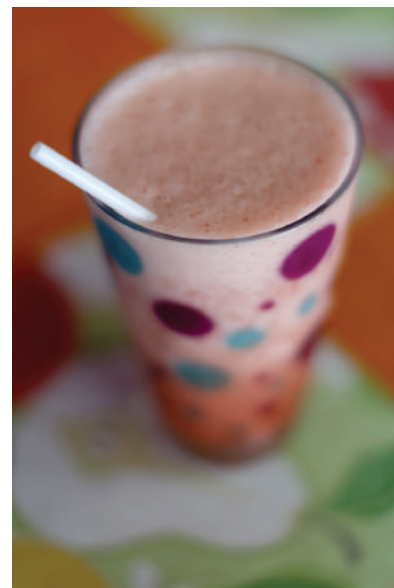
Sisters, Yendry and Elena Delgado, embody the idea of personalized business in their health shop, Esencia Vital, where several of our micro-finance volunteers are placed. "We always make sure that the people who come to Esencia Vital leave with something," says Yendry. "For us, it isn't just a business," she continues. "It's a place where people can come and we can have a chat and they can tell us things and just let go."

Esencia Vital was opened by the Delgado sisters in early 2012 as a health shop selling herbal supplements and natural remedies. They also recently added healthy drinks, juices, sandwiches and snacks to their inventory, turning the business into a sort of healthy coffee shop. "Here you can get food without a lot of chemicals and preservatives," says Yendry. "It's all natural. It's delicious and healthy."

Micro-finance volunteers have been working with Esencia Vital since the spring of 2014 when the first two volunteers were placed here.

"The volunteers first helped us to reform the physical appearance of the shop," says Yendry. "They helped us to paint the outside structure and to prepare the garden, and then they helped us to get a loan to buy the things that we needed to begin selling the drinks and snacks. Recently, they helped us set up a health fair with other small businesses here in Belen. One of them also helped us a lot with the inventory," she adds.

"We've always been a family that has taken in internationals," says Yendry. "And I was a volunteer myself so I liked the idea of being able to participate in the program, but this time on the other side," she adds. "And so we thought that with the introduction of snacks, it would



be a good idea to utilize the support of people from other parts of the world," she continues. "So it's based in Costa Rica but it has flavors from all over."

"When volunteers come to work with small businesses in Costa Rica, they should try to put themselves in another's shoes," says Yendry. "Many of the volunteers come from much more developed places and it's great. We appreciate their collaboration but we can't always go at the same pace as others. Don't get frustrated and don't think that we're not going to advance; we're just moving at a different rhythm."

"It's important that volunteers come with a very open mind and also with an open heart. The richest experiences that you're going to remember are those that come from sharing, living and interacting with other people," she concludes.

Photo Essay

Culinary Costa Rica: Comida Tica



- (1) Typical tico breakfast: Gallo pinto (rice and beans) with fried eggs, fresh fruit, toast, and coffee. (2) Pastries with various fillings. (3) Ceviche with lime and spices (4) Tamales with chicken and vegetables, in a banana leaf.