

The Reluctant Resident

By Richard Sheppard

This Costa Rican life is truly paradise. El Mejor Clima del Mundo is even better than advertised. Weather is never a worry. We are surrounded with sweeping views. The Ticos are genuinely good-hearted people. Being retired and not having to work, ices the cake.

It didn't come easily. My life in Atlanta was comfortable. I had a lovely house and garden and my children and grand children lived nearby. I took pleasure in my work, as I had become my own boss. It was rewarding because for all the problems that continually resurfaced, I had a simple set of solutions. I took pride in no longer having to slay new dragons. The trick was in avoiding them in the first place.

At home there was a place for everything and everything was in its place. There was a predictable reliability to the course of the day. I had a tasty dinner at a consistent time. Weekends took care of themselves. Our friends, of many years, were there. I was content.

Over the last 15 years my wife and I vacationed several times in Costa Rica. She loved it. I was impressed, but mildly. After her friend moved to Atenas, there was a lot of discussion about moving to Costa Rica. On and on it went, until one day the bombshell hit. "We're selling everything and moving to Costa Rica. I'm going. You can stay here if you like." My reaction was: "Oh great, so now we go off to Costa Rica to die?" Why on earth would I leave this lovely life that has taken so long to build? Why move to a third world country where I don't even know the language? How do I communicate? What about tropical diseases! What would I do all day?

After a few days I realized that I could easily squelch this crazy idea. I would take a look at the numbers! The numbers would dismiss this foolish dream and shift the focus back to earth. So I set up a spreadsheet and ran it. The resulting numbers were too good. Obviously I had made an error. I reran the spreadsheet. No, it was true. The numbers were that good. The numbers were convincing. I was caught in my own trap.

So here we are. It is early morning. I sit here on my veranda in my Sarchi Rocker and look out across the valley. The clouds are fluffy and white. The sky is blue. A gentle breeze is blowing. The mountains cast shadows in Monet grays and encircle our views in deep blues and greens. The cows graze on the green hillsides like clumps of Velcro. Fears have become joys. Everything is strange and new. Every action is an adventure. Learning a new language is fun. The things I called fears are now the joys of my life. My reluctance to move here seemed to make sense at the time. Now, I can't quite remember why I was so adamant about not wanting to retire. It's a true change of mind. Wake up and smell the bromeliads!

We live in a house that we could not have afforded in the States. Our garden is lush. Our social life is enhanced by people who have also been drawn to a different way of life, who appreciate a cow holding up traffic or a horse parked in front of a bank. The cost of living is a small fraction of what it was and life is so much richer. And as for not having anything to do, I've got too much to do! I have to budget my time. And if I don't get it done, well, that's OK too. Pura Vida!