

ATENAS TODAY



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***ATENAS TODAY** is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 350 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at fredmac222@yahoo.com.*

Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, www.atenascatuca.com. Click on the English version and then [Atenas Today](#) on the business page.

La Trocha del Boyero

by *Atenas Today* staff reporter

Heading east on the main road toward San Jose, about 400 meters from the Coope you will see an old road that turns off on the right. This is *La Trocha del Boyero*, the “path of the ox cart driver”, and years ago it was the way to go between the center of Atenas and Rio Grande. Today this road will lead you to a secluded and charming restaurant, called simply “La Trocha.”

The restaurant has been created in what was the garden of the house of its owner, Lleana Rodriguez Ramos. She and her husband, Frank Valerio Quesada, operate the restaurant with the help of the daughter Maria, 18, and their son Frank Jr., 21. The property was originally owned by Lleana’s grandfather, who sold eggs and cheese to people who passed by on the road.

Lleana and Frank were born and raised in Atenas, but until recently they were living with their children on the Caribbean Coast near Limon. They were both working in a restaurant there when, as often happens, a random event changed the course of their lives. The woman who was the chef at the restaurant suddenly had to return to Nicaragua to care for her mother, and the restaurant was without a cook. The owners looked to Lleana, but she emphatically declined. Frank was the only other choice, and even though he knew little about cooking, he took over in order to keep the restaurant going.

And thus a natural talent was discovered. Frank’s cooking soon became famous in the area. He developed his own special version of rice and beans that included coconut, and I can attest to the subtle, delicious flavor of this concoction. Frank worked for 9 years as the chef in this restaurant, and stayed even after Lleana had moved back to Atenas to give their children access to better schools. However with the decline of the fruit business in the Limon area the restaurant was not doing well, and about a year ago Frank returned to Atenas.

Lleana and Frank’s original idea was to build a small rancho and sell take out food. It was due to the urging of neighbors who were familiar with Frank’s cooking that they decided to create a full service restaurant. Last October they acquired some beautiful old wood from a 100 year old house and began the construction of an open air pavilion with space to seat about 50 people. By Christmas the restaurant was ready for business.

La Trocha is open six days a week from 11am to 10pm (closed Mondays). There is a full bar, as well as a variety of inexpensive Costa Rican dishes. In addition to the rice and beans with coconut, the specialties include “filet la trocha” (fish with a shrimp sauce), pollo con coco (chicken with a coconut sauce), and lomito (one of the best steaks I have had in Costa Rica). The service is excellent and super friendly. Your waiter will likely be our friend Ramon, who used to work at Alida’s.

Finding the La Trocha road can be a little difficult in the dark. If you are heading west into Atenas there is a white sign on your right that points to the road on your left. However, heading east out of Atenas there is no sign. About 300 meters from the Coope you will see a bus stop on your right, and the road is on your right about 100 meters past the bus stop. The restaurant has plenty of secure parking. If you have a big group and want to make a reservation, the phone number is 446-0533 (be prepared to speak Spanish).

In order to encourage the English-speaking community to patronize their relatively new business, Lleana and Frank will give you a free glass of wine or a desert from now through the end of August if you mention this article in [Atenas Today](#).

Special thanks to Melanie Lesueur, who served as my translator during the interview for this article.

The Determined Diner Reports on Restaurants in Atenas

Every so often your culinary reporter, the Determined Diner, will write up an evaluation of various restaurants in and around Atenas. The object of this endeavor is to eat at lesser-known places and report the findings. The Determined Diner does not dine alone, nor does she critique alone. Conscientious volunteers are tasting, testing, and analyzing an amazing assortment of food all in the name of public service. We expect our research to last months, if not years. It's a tough job, but somebody has got to do it. This is DD's first report, based on lunchtime visits.

Over the past month, four restaurants were sampled. The first, Mejor Clima #1, isn't much to look at, but we were very impressed with the food. Located near "Los Rayos", aka the Dollar Store, you might have walked right past it without even noticing it. Okay, the tables and chairs do look a little worn (maybe because of the popularity of the place?), but the service is friendly and prompt, and the menu offers a few things you don't usually see in Atenas. Like Avocado Stuffed with Shrimp. This arrived atop a small salad and was dressed with fresh lime juice. Very good and very reasonably priced: c1300. Alongside the salad I tried a cup of Chicken Soup. I have to say that this one of the best chicken soups I've ever tasted; the broth was incredibly rich. My dining partner had a Gallo de Pescado, which came with fish, fried yucca and salad. He rated it "average." The restaurant offers burritos, which we heard were excellent but didn't try on this visit.

Next on the list is Cafeteria Sol y Luna, located just adjacent to the Seguro Social, on the road to Guisaro. Opened recently, this restaurant is clean and new, if a little sparsely decorated. There are no menus, and we were offered a choice to two casados: one with pork, one with chicken. The chicken came in a sauce with vegetables and was very good. The pork chop tasted more like ham according to our volunteer who ordered it, but she said it was tasty. The accompaniments were the usual side dishes: rice, beans and a small salad. All in all, we thought the food and service were good. If you're spending the day waiting at SS, this would be a good bet for lunch. Side note: the owner of the restaurant is also the co-owner of Jalapenos.

You'd have to be looking for Soda Picarita in order to find it. It's hidden away up some steps from the other sodas at the central market. What attracted us to it were the cute white lace tablecloths that covered each table. What wasn't so cute was the view of the bus parking lot, although it would be the perfect vantage point to keep an eye on your bus if you wanted to make sure it didn't leave without you. On the wall of the soda many dishes were listed: ravioli, steak, empanadas, ceviche and so on, but we were only offered two choices: tripe soup and casado. The soup didn't appeal, so we all had a casado with "carne mexicana." It was the typical casado except for the fact that it came with spaghetti as one of the side dishes. The carne was shredded beef with a mild tomato sauce. The reasonable price of c1200 included a drink. When we asked our server if and when those other entrees listed on the wall were available, she replied that sometimes they had all of them. I guess we hit an off-day.

Well-known by many locals is the Restaurante San Martin, adjacent to the park. This place changed hands a little while back and seems to be better because of that change. The buffet is still there with multiple entrees, vegetables and salads costing c1400 including a drink. (If you're in a hurry, this is the way to go. You could be in and out of there in 15 minutes depending on how fast you eat and how high you mound the plate). Our dining companions who tested the buffet reported the food as "typical" and "average." Those of us who ordered from the menu (hamburger, shrimp salad, fajita, and arroz con camerones) agreed with our friends' assessments. What we all really liked was the open, comfortable seating with a view of the park and the fact that 3 or 4 "servers" in clean white shirts hovered around the tables readily bringing drinks, condiments, or whatever else we needed. Here's the surprise: the restaurant is open until 10PM at night and does serve wine, but not beer.

Buen Provecho!