

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.

Spanish & Fun Immersion Program

Eduardo Calderon and Odilie Calvo are the charming couple who own and operate the Cultural Center Spanish & Fun Immersion Program in Los Angeles, Atenas. On a lovely afternoon, we sat and chatted over coffee and pastries.

Eduardo shared that when he and Odilie had traveled to see friends and family, they were always touched by the host's hospitality. They recalled the attention given to their comfort and enjoyment. They felt that they wanted to recreate this feeling for the students who enroll in their courses. Below is an excerpt of our interview.

AT: How long have you been offering this program here in Atenas?

OC: It's been about a year now.

AT: What made you choose Atenas as your location?

OC: We chose Atenas because we were looking for a tranquil place, with lush vegetation, warm people, and lots of space and Atenas has all that plus is known for its wonderful climate.

EC: We liked the rural, authentic feel of Villa Maria in Los Angeles. Nature and all her gifts, like the birds and monkeys, complete the setting.

AT: Tell us a little bit about the program:

OC: The main goal of the program is to provide the visitors with total immersion in Spanish in our culture. This means that home stays are arranged; that in addition to the 'classroom' learning that takes place, the student also learns customs and culture. We have cooking and Latin dance classes for our visitors and have a fun conversation club also.

We have found that living with host families provides the nuances of language that are not always possible to pick up on with just the 'dry' part of language learning. Our program is divided into three levels: Beginner I and II, Intermediate I and II, and Advanced I and II. Our students are given a placement test, written and verbal and we take it from there.

We also prepare for them, as part of the program, guided visits in Spanish to Tourist places as well as cultural spots in the Metropolitan area.

AT: What is the length of the program?

OC: Although, there is no fixed length, we do recommend a minimum of two weeks. Of course, we also offer one week courses for 'emergency' situations and can tailor lessons individually too. Our desire is to provide the student with what he/she needs or wants.

AT: How are the host families chosen:

OC: We conduct research in the zone and receive word-of-mouth referrals. Selection comes after a three-phase process:

1. We make a preliminary inspection, to ensure that the standards we hold for our student's comfort are possible in that home.

2. We ask for references, not focusing so much on financial aspects but rather on positive moral values.
3. We ask the host family to sign a contract where they acknowledge their rights and responsibilities and also those of the student.

AT: What happens next?

OC: When the host and student are matched up and have met, we follow up to make sure everything is going well. Our students and host families know that they have access to us 24/7.

AT: Are there particular types of families who are more inclined to host students?

OC: We have found that there are many female heads-of-households who find that this is a safe and rewarding way to supplement their income. We feel that people in Atenas really appreciate the visitor and go out of their way to make their home stays unforgettable experiences. They 'adopt' their student and vice versa.

EC: We are aware that the students feel good about knowing that they are contributing to the family's income. It adds to their sense of community.

AT: Now that you mention community, is there volunteering involved?

OC: Implicit in the student's contract is the performing of community service. Right now, we have volunteer opportunities at the local school and also at the orphanage. It is important that the student feel he is giving something to the community. We are working on making a small library at the local school and ask our students to bring a book to donate for this purpose. We feel that it is important for the school children to begin a relationship with books and reading at an early age.

AT: Is there anything else you would like us to know?:

OC: We'd like to point out that our teachers are professionals and experienced. We are really pleased because we have recently had a 'graduation' and that group of students is planning to come back soon for the next level! We'd also like to mention that people who reside here and don't need a host family are still welcome at our program. We would arrange different fees for them. Students are welcome to use all our facilities at the Center like: the swimming pool, high speed internet, hammocks, etc.

EC: We are working on special dancing classes, where aside from learning, you can make new friends and share beautiful afternoons. We'll keep the community informed on this subject. We would like for everyone to participate, to have fun!

For more information, please visit the website:

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Zoo Ave

By Dana Schlieman

The zoo in La Garita is a nice place to spend a few hours. Although the zoo contains mostly birds, other animals can be found there as well. These animals include monkeys, turtles, mountain lions, lizards, caimans and alligators.

Placed in a natural setting, the zoo is kind of like a rain forest; an altered rain forest. The weather is relatively cool, but not cold. All in all, a very enjoyable trip to take. In the case of birdwatchers, it is a place to study and watch hundreds of different species of birds. Animal lovers, such as me, can enjoy watching the numerous animals, taking pictures of them. The species all have their own way of acting when being watched by humans. Some of them just stare at their admirers; others show off by putting on a fascinating show. The monkeys are especially conceited, and they prove it by climbing ropes and posing for pictures.

The path that winds through the zoo leads you in a circle *from* the entrance, and back *to* the entrance. This path takes you to each and every one of the species in the zoo. People can pack a lunch and eat at a small table near the entrance. Also, one can buy special souvenirs at the little counter. Souvenirs might include animal puppets, posters, coloring books, etc. The atmosphere in the zoo might make you want to stay there all day, or come back frequently. Personally, I have been there more than five times, and I don't believe I could ever get bored.

The Zoo Ave is located in Dulce Nombre, La Garita, 2.5 kms. East of "Manolo's". It opens every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. including holidays. Their phone number is 433-8989. Admission fee for foreigners is \$15.00, other prices apply for residents and Citizens.