

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.

Atenas Today Interviews Jan Yatsko
local artist

AT: Tell me about how you came to be living in Atenas, Costa Rica.

Jan: My husband Tom and I were avid bicyclers. Fifteen years ago we started coming to this beautiful country and exploring it on bicycles. We have been everywhere, except Osa. But they were short trips, and we always had to return to our home and jobs in Pennsylvania.

AT: What happened to break this pattern?

Jan: One year we went on a bicycle trip down the Baja. On trips like that you have a lot of time to think about things. At the end of the trip I looked at my husband with a serious face and said, "I am ready for a change."

AT: What was his reaction?

Jan: We laugh about it now, but his first thought was, "Oh my god, she wants out of the marriage!"

AT: After that, I guess he was relieved when all you wanted to do was move to Costa Rica.

Jan: Well, yes. At that point I didn't know where I wanted to go, but I was tired of doing craft shows and one of my unfulfilled desires was to live in a foreign country. When we talked about it, we realized that we knew and loved Costa Rica, and that was the obvious place.

AT: You were a crafts person?

Jan: Yes. I studied art at a state university near where I grew up in Pennsylvania. When I graduated there were no jobs in art education, so I started designing and making products for the gift market. For twenty five years I sold my work at retail shows and wholesale gift shows. Art has always been one of my passions, and here in Costa Rica I enjoy painting scenes of the tico daily life.

AT: Are you selling your paintings?

Jan: Yes. I have them in galleries and gift stores, like *Regalame and Orinoco*.

AT: Are you living here full time?

Jan: No. We are here about 7 months of the year. Tom has become an international recruiter. He has client companies in the U.S. who pay him to find them good seasonal workers from Costa Rica, so we have homes in both places.

AT: How did he develop this business?

Jan: Tom realized there was a need for an employment service that would provide quality seasonal workers for the agriculture and tourist industries in the U.S. He also knew that in order to be able to select good people he would have to become fluent in Spanish. So we took three months off and enrolled in an intensive Spanish program in Costa Rica. This was 9 years ago.

AT: Did you learn Spanish by living with Costa Rican families?

Jan: Yes. During our studies in a Spanish language school, we lived with separate Costa Rican families so we both would have the opportunity to practice what we learned. Even when we were with each other, we forced ourselves to speak only Spanish.

AT: Really? All the time?

Jan: Well... there were a few times when we had misunderstandings that had to be corrected in English.

AT: Are you still in contact with your Costa Rican families?

Jan: Very much so. My Costa Rican “mom” is my first Tica friend and now I have many. It is only recently that I have begun to get more involved with the English-speaking community here. The Ticas tend to be so involved with their children that they don’t have much time to socialize.

AT: Given the current attitude in the U.S. I imagine it is difficult for Tom to get visas for Costa Rican workers.

Jan: Indeed it is. The big obstacle is that the US government hasn’t put into place the necessary avenues to allow US companies to hire the amount of legal workers that are needed to maintain our economy and their businesses. The companies also have to prove that the jobs are seasonal and that they can’t fill all of their job positions with US citizens. Despite all of this, we can tell you lots of success stories as a result of what Tom has done for the Costa Rican workers as well as the US companies.

AT: What other activities are you involved in here?

Jan: Over the past six years, I have organized art-oriented tours of Costa Rica. A group of 5 to 10 people participate in these ten day tours where I take them to visit art studios, galleries, villages where indigenous people are creating art, and other similar places around the country. I provide transportation, accommodations, food and workshops. It is mainly for tourists but this year I have a participant that is now living in Grecia.

AT: It sounds very different from the normal tourist tour.

Jan: For sure. It is a travel and learn experience. I also try to add different things to each year’s tour. For example, participants on the February 2008 tour will take a ride in an old train from Rio Grande in Atenas to Caldera on the coast. It will be lots of fun!

AT: Do people paint and do other art projects as part of the tour?

Jan: Yes. Everyone works at their own ability level. I have developed a series of mini workshops that I teach during the tour that enables anyone to create a travel art journal. An art journal is a way of experimenting and expressing yourself artistically in a small format and it is a visual and written collection of your thoughts, feelings and observations during the trip. I have also developed one day workshops which I will be offering soon on “Nature Journaling” and “Creating Your Own Postcards from Costa Rica”.

AT: How can people find out about upcoming tours?

Jan: By going to my website, www.janyatsko.com.

AT: What else will they find on your website?

Jan: Well, you can see some of my paintings. You can also read my latest article about Costa Rican art, nature, culture or food under the heading Pura Vida Costa Rica.

AT: It has been said that there is a lack of emphasis on art in Costa Rica, especially in comparison with Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Do you think this is true?

Jan: Yes, and I am trying to promote art in Atenas through a couple of my own projects. First, I have taught informal art/craft classes to the kids in my neighborhood. Next, I asked local Tico and foreign artists to donate their work to add color and life to the interior of the Atenas Health Clinic. Future projects at the clinic are murals designed by school students and an outdoor sculpture. Also, an idea of mine is brewing for a community art project in the park.

AT: You are obviously a very busy person.

Jan: I love what I do.

Life Philosophy Quotes

from Lee Rodriguez

What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?

Gandhi

I have resolved that from this day on, I will do all the business I can honestly, have all the fun I can reasonably, do all the good I can willingly, and save my digestion by thinking pleasantly.

Robert Louis Stevenson

He who would make serious use of his life must always act as though he had a long time to live and schedule his time as though he were about to die.

Emile Littré