

# 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](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).*

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

Atenas Today Interviews Pablo Arias Gonzalez  
*local attorney*

**AT: You are one of only two attorneys in Atenas who speak English. How did you learn it so well?**

Pablo: Like all Costa Ricans, I studied English in school, but I learned to speak it during the six months I spent in Minnesota.

**AT: How did you happen to go to Minnesota?**

Pablo: My family hosted American students who had come to Atenas to learn Spanish, and they invited me to visit them in Minnesota.

**AT: So you grew up in Atenas?**

Pablo: Yes. This is my hometown. I was born here in 1980, the youngest of 8 children. My parents and grandparents still live within a few hundred yards of where we are sitting in my office.

**AT: Where did you go to school?**

Pablo: I went to the public schools in Atenas through high school, and then I went to the University of Costa Rica in San Jose.

**AT: Did you always want to be a lawyer?**

Pablo: I was interested in both law and topography. When I first applied to the university, I could not get into the law school. They take only a limited number of students into this program each year. So for the first year I majored in topography and surveying. But it did not really appeal to me, and in my second year I was able to transfer into the law school.

**AT: So you got your law degree from the University of Costa Rica?**

Pablo: At that time, no. In my senior year with only 7 classes to go, my mother became ill with cancer, and since I was the only child still living at home, I dropped out of school to take care of her. Fortunately she recovered, and has been cancer free now for five years.

**AT: I am happy to hear that. You were good to help her in that way.**

Pablo: It is not that unusual in Costa Rica. And as it turned out that time away from school really helped me in my career.

**AT: How so?**

Pablo: While I was at home I worked part time as a tour guide and made friends with several young people in the U.S. More importantly, one day my mother saw an ad seeking families willing to take in North American students. She decided that would be a good thing for her and me to do at that time. We hosted two girls from Minnesota for 3 months, and their parents came for a two week visit. This was the family that invited me to visit the U.S. and learn English. Now that English is bringing me many clients in Atenas.

**AT: Tell me about your visit to Minnesota.**

Pablo: My friends lived in a rural area outside of St. Cloud. They had invited me for a two week visit, but I had another friend who was in Indiana, and I planned to go there and get a temporary job. So I bought a ticket with a return trip in 6 months. My grandfather loaned me the money. I arrived in Minnesota with \$1500 to last me 6 months.

**AT: Did you get to Indiana?**

Pablo: No. I tried to contact my friend there but got no response. At the end of my two week visit I thought I was going to have to return to Costa Rica, but the family I was with offered to let me stay with them and work on their farm and at their church. They were incredibly good to me, and since they spoke no Spanish, that's how I learned English.

**AT: What other parts of the U.S. did you see?**

Pablo: Well, the famous Mall of America is only a little over an hour from St. Cloud. I think it is still one of the largest shopping malls in the world. I went there several times, but never saw it all.

**AT: What did you think of the goods and the prices compared with Costa Rica?**

Pablo: The variety and choices were, of course, much more than we have in Costa Rica, especially in terms of higher quality items. The prices of the better items seemed about the same as here.

**AT: Where else did you visit?**

Pablo: I knew people in Chicago and Los Angeles from my work as a tourist guide, and I was able to visit them. My host family paid for the plane ticket to California so I could do that.

**AT: Did you like living in the U.S.?**

Pablo: As they say, it is a great place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. Costa Rica, especially Atenas, is my home, and after six months I was ready to come back.

**AT: Why do you like it better here?**

Pablo: I like being near all my friends and family. In the U.S. your work is the most important thing, and everyone moves around a lot. Here we have a quieter, less stressful life, close to people we have known all our lives.

**AT: So you returned to Costa Rica and finished your law school?**

Pablo: Yes. I went to school and worked at the same time until I passed the bar in January, 2005.

**AT: What was your first legal job?**

Pablo: From March of 2005 until May of 2006 I worked for the agency of the Costa Rican government that is supposed to make land available for poor people. It was under the Pacheco administration, and when he left office, new people were brought in to take over.

**AT: How did you find this experience?**

Pablo: I did not like the political aspects of it. Friends of people in government were always coming in asking for special treatment. Our legal office was very strict about following the rules, and we were not very popular with a lot of people.

**AT: What happened next?**

Pablo: I decided to open my own office in Atenas. This building that we are in was a run down, empty house, and I was able to rent the whole building for what a small office would have cost me. With help from my family and friends, I have fixed it up for my office, and added an internet café and a souvenir shop..

**AT: What kind of law do you practice?**

Pablo: I focus on real estate and other issues that face new comers to Costa Rica. The fact that I speak English enables me to help people buy land, houses, and cars, and to get things like utilities, insurance, permits, etc

**AT: Do you find that foreigners really need legal help when they decide to live here?**

Pablo: Definitely. For example, until you become an official resident, usually you need a Costa Rican corporation to be able to open a bank account and get utilities. Another example is the need for a Costa Rican will if you own property here. It is very difficult to execute a will from another country in Costa Rica.

**AT: What other hidden legal problems tend to trip people up?**

Pablo: A big one is what happens when your passport expires and you get a new one with a new number. All the corporation papers and other documents you set up using your old number need to be officially updated. I keep track of these issues and notify my clients when things need to be done.

**AT: Do you help people get their residencies?**

Pablo: No, I have decided to stay away from that mess. It is incredibly time consuming and frustrating. I prefer working with people on problems where I can show them results in a reasonable time.

**AT: If some wants help with litigation should they come to you?**

Pablo: Again, I have to say no. I like to work with people and mediate problems without going to the courts.

**AT: What about things like auto accidents?**

Pablo: I am happy to help with things like this where people need help communicating and following the legal process. I strive to have an ongoing relationship with my clients and encourage them to consult with me on any issue.

**AT: How do you charge for your services? Do you have an hourly rate?**

Pablo: In Costa Rica most legal work is charged according to the job done. The legal association publishes minimum rates that lawyers are supposed to charge for things like purchase contracts, wills, etc. I tend to charge a little less than the minimum.

**AT: What about social life in Atenas for young, unmarried people like yourself?**

Pablo: I have many unmarried friends in Atenas. Just as in the U.S., people are getting married at an older age. Many of my high school friends are still here and unmarried. One friend sings in restaurants and sometimes we follow him around. We have a good time. Life is good in Atenas for everyone.

**AT: How can people contact you?**

Pablo: You can drop by my office/store/café anytime. It is on the street that runs in front of the church, about one block east of the park. My office phone is 446-7711. My cell phone is 835-7490. My email is; [ariaspa77@hotmail.com](mailto:ariaspa77@hotmail.com).

**AT: Pura Vida.**

Pablo: De acuerdo.