

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.

A poem by Jordan, age 8:

If you were a giraffe
And I were your neck
I'd let you look around
So that you could see above the trees

If you were a bird
And I were your sky
I'd let you fly
So that you could be with the clouds

Riding the *Tico Train* by *Atenas Today* staff reporter

Do you like the clickity clack of train wheels? Do you like seeing the scenery away from roads and cars? Do you like moving through little villages and waving back to kids in their backyards? Do you like being among Costa Rican families enjoying a holiday? If so, the *Tren a la Tica* is for you.

Every Saturday and Sunday during the Costa Rican “summer”, a five car train leaves San Jose at 7:00 am, bound for Caldera on the Pacific Coast. It arrives at the Atenas station in Rio Grande at approximately 8:30am and at Caldera at between 11:00am and 11:30am, depending on how many stops it makes to pick up passengers. The return trip begins promptly at 4:00pm, and drops you off in Rio Grande at around 6:30pm.



Each car has small but comfortably padded two-person, facing seats for about 50 people. On Saturday, February 24, when we made the trip, the train was full of happy Tico families, with only a handful of Gringos. At a cost of only 7,000 colones for natives and residents, the *Tren a la Tica* is a popular way to go to the beach for a day.

The train is staffed by attractive young people who are happy to practice their English and are always asking if need anything and if you like their train. You are served a free fruit cocktail and juice, and you can purchase other drinks and snacks.



As we all know, the country between Jan Jose and the Pacific Ocean is very mountainous and not an easy route for a railroad. However it is very good coffee country, and a way was needed to get that coffee to the port of Puntarenas. The railroad was begun in 1897 and completed in 1910. Its 91 kilometers are cut into the sides of mountains and bridged over chasms, the most challenging of which was the 93 meter high, 208 meter long span over the Rio Grande River. Shortly before you get to Caldera, when you think you are out of the mountains, there is a 300 meter tunnel. You are suddenly plunged into pitch blackness that seems to last forever. The kids scream and love it.

Originally there were 32 stations along the line, with Atenas being about in the middle. They have names like Tubo Tico, Lizano, Electriona, Balsa, Poncho Mora, Quebradas, Concepcion, Hacienda Vieja, and Maria. Now almost all of these stations are abandoned, and the train stops at only a few of them. On our trip there were no stops between Atenas and Caldera, even though we passed through functioning stations in places like Escobal and Orotina. On the return trip we did stop in Orotina.

It is very interesting seeing these old communities. People built their houses facing the tracks, and they all come out to waive as the train rumbles through their front yards. Outside the villages you see only untamed nature, with the exception of an occasional glimpse of the new Colon to Orotina highway, with its impressive bridges.



Since we knew the trip from Atenas to Caldera was going to take two and half hours, we all brought books to read. Forget it. The ride in the old cars, on the old tracks, was too bumpy for any reading. In fact it was so rough that several of us felt a twinge of motion sickness. In my case a forward facing seat adjacent to the open window solved the problem, and there was so much to see I did not want to read anyway. The best views when you are going west toward the beach are on the left side; coming back, of course, it is the reverse.

Several times during the trip you are entertained by a musicians and dancers in the aisle.



When you arrive in Caldera you can either walk five minutes to the beach, or you can pay 1,500 colones to take the twenty minute bus ride to Puntarenas. With all the shipping and industrial activity around Caldera, the beach is not that attractive, so we decided to go to Puntarenas for lunch.

At the end of the Puntarenas peninsula there is a nice beach and a wide “boardwalk” flanked by restaurants and souvenir stands. There were no tourist ships docked in the harbor that day, but there were thousands of Ticos enjoying their weekend. You could rent a small “bathhouse” for 300 colones to change into your bathing suit. We spent a pleasant four hours having lunch and shopping before getting the bus back to the train.

To ride the *Tren a la Tica* you must make reservations and purchase tickets in advance. The ticket office may be reached at 233-3300, and there are agents who speak English. Tickets cost 6,950 colones for residents, and 20,000 colones for non-residents. You can pay by depositing the money to the account of *Ticotraintour S.A.*, number 001-025-2405-8 at the Bank of Costa Rica. The hostess on the train will then have your name on her list when the train arrives in Atenas. Because of the popularity of the train, it is a good idea to make reservations several weeks in advance.

More pictures from our trip may be viewed by downloading the separate file called “train trip pictures.”