

# ATENAS TODAY



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**Issue No. 37**

*May 22, 2008*

***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.*

## **ONLY SLIGHTLY PERFECT**

*By John Barricks*

**Were you raised with loving care,  
To be modest, optimistic and open to life,  
Tho life be only slightly perfect?**

**Are you connected and empathetic,  
Filled with humor and grit, the curiosity of a  
child,  
But only slightly perfect?**

**Are you a mostly content ectomorph,  
Ever craving to know more than is possible,  
Feeling only slightly perfect?**

**Do you enjoy intelligent movies that move you,  
Embrace the arts that fulfill you and leave you  
Feeling only slightly perfect?**

**Do friends say you're empty of boast and pose,  
With a feminine grace-under-fire poise,  
Tho only slightly perfect?**

**Is your conversation comfortable on matters trivial,  
As well as State affairs of momentous moment,  
Tho feeling only slightly perfect?**

**To me, your candid answers seem absolutely per-  
fect,  
As – you may have guessed – I also qualify as  
being  
...Only slightly perfect.**

# Fishing In and Around Costa Rica

*by G. Martin Lively*

Fly fishing in the Talamanca Mountains.

A gin clear creek tumbles over polished boulders forming small, deep pools now and then. In the shadows of each such quiet place can be seen finning forms waiting for the stream to deliver delicious morsels. If it weren't for the cloud forest lining the banks and the brilliant red, orange and yellow bromeliads in bloom one would think they were in Colorado or Northern California, but the stream is the Rio Savegre near the town of San Gerardo de Dota, about 80 kilometers south of San Jose, Costa Rica.

My first Central American trout fell for a Sierra King, a dry fly imitating the ubiquitous deer fly or house fly. Eight thick inches with an oversized head and kyped jaw, it was a male rainbow in full spawning colors. Brilliant as any crown jewel he was probably, like me, a Californian. Most rainbows around the world are from the first hatchery on the McCloud River above Lake Shasta and I read somewhere that these Tico Trout started out from there too. Originally planted by sportsman they were soon netted from the streams for pond raising and sale to fancy San Jose restaurants and markets. Many escaped back into the flowing water feeding their fattening pens and now can be found in the Rio Toro Amarillo, the Rio Macho and the upper reaches of many famous white water canoe rivers.

I didn't want to kill him, but I did want Jean to see him so I threaded a thin, hooked branch through his gills and laid him on the ferns beside me while I tried for a larger relative. Mistake! Concentrating on my casting I failed to notice the tiny dog that had followed me down from the hotel as it ate my prize. Well, some others came to net that morning and I did keep one for show and tell at breakfast, but none were as pretty as the puppy's breakfast.

The above trip was twenty years ago in 1988 and I have been back several times since then, and plan to go again soon. It has become easier. The Savegre Mountain Hotel now provides stream access, fishing equipment and a guide for two for \$60. See <http://www.savegre.co.cr/indexeng.html> on the net, or call Tel: +506-4740-1028

## Surf Snook near Parrita

solomon says " Use a white lead head jig as big as your gear will allow, white bear hair with a white and red plastic tail work best." Solomon said that, or something like it in Spanish, as we stood waist deep in the Pacific near the mouth of the Pirris River. He always narrated in that fashion, starting each bit of advice or story with " Solomon dice."

I was lucky to meet him. He had fished the ocean and river there for his lifetime and knew the currents, tides, moon phases and everything else. He could also cast his bucktail from a simple plastic, hand held spool further than I could cast mine using a graphite rod and spinning reel. We both caught snook six to eight pounds, and I kept one for dinner and gave him the others doubling his income for the day. What could be better?

Son Geoff and I fished the ocean side of a sandbar on the south side of the river mouth. That's Geoff is the lower left of the above photo, still casting into the last rays of the sun. From Parrita you drive to Palo Seco and when the main road hits the beach you turn left to find a hotel or right to get almost to the river mouth. If locals are fishing you came at the right time. By the way I never saw any of them fish the river side of the spit, maybe that had something to do with the saltwater crocodiles.

Jean and I were staying at La Isla Hotel (506)-2258-8020

[http://www.infoturistica.com/hospedajes/hotel\\_laisla.html](http://www.infoturistica.com/hospedajes/hotel_laisla.html)

which we found by driving along the Palo Seco strip out of Parrita, a small town on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica about XX miles south of Jaco, the Josefino beach town. Our dentist in Escazu had told us he had heard good things about surf fishing in that area. He was right. The first time we approached the beach a teenager on a bicycle was coming from the beach with a fish hanging on each side of his handlebars. Both the pargo and the snook were dragging their tails on the road! I became so excited I forgot we needed to check into a hotel. I was ready to start casting.

La Isla Hotel is like many vacation resorts in Costa Rica, sized for overflow crowds at Christmas and Easter and all but empty the rest of the year. We have stayed there many times and

although the restaurant seats over a hundred there were never more than three other couples or families there. The hotel is great for personal service including cooking my snook for the three of us and a guest, and trading four meals with all the trimmings for the rest of the fillets.

In addition to fishing the surf you can ask the hotel to arrange for a boat and guide and do some inshore trolling and casting with the same equipment and lures you use in the North for big largemouth and small stripers. Grandson Tim and I caught Sierra or Spanish Mackerel in this manner.

## Roosterfish and a Pair of Pargo: Golfito



I had heard of good sailfishing out of Golfito and it was time for a steam bath anyway so out of the temperate Avacado Mountains and south to the former banana port and current free market town of Golfito, Costa Rica.

The drive down was uneventfull, cool and foggy at the crest, the area known as the Cerro de la Muerte; called that not because of the landfalls which often reduce the two lane road to less than one with deadly dropoffs, but because it gets so cold that stranded travelers sometimes died from hypothermia. Trucks and curves make transit slow but soon we dropped down to the coast and into the grubby port town of Golfito.

The travel guide Costa Rica by Christopher Baker, a Moon Handbook (our favorite for Costa Rica) gave the Hotel y Restaurante el Gran Ceibo a good write-up and, since it was the first lodging we came to we checked in and immediately hit the pool. [http://www.1-costaricalink.com/hotels\\_puntarenas\\_costa\\_rica/hotel\\_el\\_gran\\_ceibo\\_costa\\_rica.htm](http://www.1-costaricalink.com/hotels_puntarenas_costa_rica/hotel_el_gran_ceibo_costa_rica.htm)

An early dinner at the Banana Bay Marina put me in touch with Skipper Bobby McGuinness. He

had a charter the next day who was looking for another fisherman. Don wanted to flyfish and I wanted to see that. We agreed to meet there at the Banana Bay Marina at dawn the next day.

McGuinness knows the waters well, we stopped at the mouth of the bay to catch bait and then turned south, trolling just beyond the waves and stopping to cast to rocky outcroppings. Each of us picked up a couple of small pargo, but nothing to brag about.

[http://www.fishcostarica.com/bobby\\_mcguinness.html](http://www.fishcostarica.com/bobby_mcguinness.html)

We headed further south and were almost into Panamanian waters when the skipper was able to triangulate a spot in the ocean from two landmarks. He threw two netsfull of baitfish out from the stern and soon the water exploded. We were over an undersea mountain that made it almost to the surface, miles from sea it was a gathering place for baitfish, rockfish and marauding predators. As the skipper circled the mount don cast a huge white streamer fly and I tossed a hooked baitfish. We circled, cast, hooked and caught lots of fish over the next hour or so. Don and I each took a pair of dogtooth snappers and each released a good size roosterfish or Pez Gallo.

Our fishing was interrupted by a storm and we ran directly into it forever. The small bimini top provided no protection from the horizontal rain and we were drenched completely. I leaned back against the drivers bench and white knuckle gripped the stainless steel uprights as the small walk around, center console pounded its way back to port.

Sailfishing is what Golfito is most known for and both out of Banana Bay Marina and the Sailfish Rancho across the bay one can charter experts at both conventional and fly fishing. Hope to write about that later.

### [Fish here like you fish at home](#)

There is nothing really complicated about fishing in Costa Rica. Just fish here as you do back home. That is, the trolling rigs you use for bluefish on the East Coast or salmon on the west coast will work in the Pacific for tuna, dorado, wahoo, sierra mackeral and more. Surface skipping lures for larger fish including sailfish and marline are easy to find in the few good

fishing tackle shops.

In fresh water lakes and streams use the same gear and lures that you use for largemouth and smallmouth bass - here you will catch guapote and guapatillo. Popping bugs on a flyrod like you use for bream, bluegill, pumpkinseeds and the like will drive the mojarra wild too. They are like bluegills on steroids and are really fun. Another fish that takes surface lures or flies is the machaca or sabalito, little tarpon. It looks like a small tarpon, leaps like all tarpon but be careful it has teeth like a pirana which is uses to eat fruit and nuts as they fall into the water. Lake Arenal and the rivers feeding it are on the tourist trail, bring your gear.

Surf casting with lead head jigs and mirror lures as is done on both coasts of the US for stripers or rockfish will work in tropical waters, but will result in snook and snappers. Just get beyond the first wave into the trough. I like the river mouths and am partial to the Parrita area.

Trout are trout, especially the rainbow trout; they came from the McCloud River in Northern California and behave here just as they do in Oregon and New Jersey. They are smaller, so stick to small lures and flies. Rivers holding trout include the Savegre, the Toro Amarillo, and most of the headwaters of the famous rafting rivers.

Tarpon are different, maybe not for Floridians, but for me. I have yet to catch one. There are famous lodges in the Northeast of Costa Rica at the Rio San Juan and Rio Parismina, and tarpon can be found in the Southeast too. Juar Google Jim DiBerardinis, he's the Wheeling College guy who found them there and has developed a fishing service.

### [Trout near Boquete, Panama](#)

Raise Atenas about a thousand feet, decrease the population by 1/3rd and run a trout stream through it - Welcome to Boquete, Panama!

We tried to keep this Shangri-La a secret, but both Fortune and Conde Nast Traveler magazines picked Boquete as a "best place to retire" and the boom was on. A quarter acre building lot at the end of a cul de sac with view to the distant Pacific that we passed on at \$6,000 just sold for \$80,000, two hectares down the hill a bit that was \$10,000 went for \$2,000,000. The BOOM is on. Three new hotels have been built or are in construction and Bed and Breakfasts have

sprouted in the hills. There always was a pizza parlor, but now there are a few, and Papa Rico's is great and has Italian entrées like lasagna too. Machu Pichu is the new Peruvian restaurant and it is upscale, pricey and worth it.

Jean and I visited recently and stayed at Pension Marilos, <http://www.pension-marilos.com/> where our family has vacationed since it was built in the 1950's. It is a charming and spotlessly clean inn, made warm by both a fireplace and Frankie who's Mom built the place. My stepmother was born in the Canal Zone and went to Boquete to get out of the heat of Panama's humid lowlands. Boquete is degrees cooler than Atenas and a sweater is needed in the morning and evening.

Trout are not stocked in the Caldera River, but they should be. One has to drive about fifteen minutes out of town and up in the hills to a National Park, and then walk in two or three kilometers to fish that part of the river close enough to the trout hatchery and raising ponds to hold escaped fish. Local Indians told me that 14 inch and up rainbow trout were available, but that the river was difficult to fish. In the photos linked below is a picture of the river closer to town showing an abandoned castle.

**In addition to the usual plaza Boquete has a public flower park, and a huge private flower garden open to the public. There is an annual orchid exhibition in February and a Jazz Festival during the summer. The fishing off the coast is equal to that found off of Costa Rica and there are many fewer boats plying the waters. A few years ago I caught a good size roosterfish and two huge snappers in the Pacific right on the border. Lot's to do and see.**

Although on the map you see the Pacific Ocean quite near David, the entire coast is mangrove and you have to drive an hour or so SE from David to get to Playa Las Lajas where some development is just starting. When International flights start arriving at David the condominiums will line the beautiful beaches, and I might just buy one since Boquete is so close to escape the heat.

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To get to Boquete you drive 52 kilometers from the Border to David and then look for the sign to Boquete which is 38 kilometers up the volcanic mountain. To take your Costa Rica car into Panama you will need to bring your car ownership and registration papers to



the Registro in Alajuela and get a Permiso a Salir for the car. Make a copy of all of that for the Nicaraguan Customs authorities. ( Helpers on both sides of the border will walk you through the process and they are worth the usual \$5 tip. When the customs official mentions that it is hot and that he would really like a Coke, it is really a dollar he is looking for.)

### El Castillo, San Juan River Nicaragua

Mark your calendar -September 13, 14 & 15

because that's when the tarpon tournament at El Castillo on the San Juan River in Nicaragua will occur. Hundred plus pound silver kings are there over a hundred miles from the sea and a three day fiesta celebrates them.

My sister Terry Lucas and a friend Jim Black and I traveled there on a visa renewal jaunt last month. The fishing at this time of year was poor but the towns of San Carlos, Boca del Sabalo, and El Castillo and the riverside beauty during the boat trips was spectacular. Three seats wide and ten rows long, the river buses took us from Los Chiles, Costa Rica to San Carlos, Nicaragua and then on to The Sabalos Lodge which is well described at <http://www.sabaloslodge.com/english>

The proprietor of the Lodge is a retired Sandinista Major who after retirement raised poison dart frogs and other colorful amphibians for export to the US and Europe. His headquarters is now a nine bungalow hotel right on the banks of the San Juan River five minutes from Boca de Sabalo. The thatched huts have modern bathrooms and porches right over the river. In addition to fully netted double beds, hammocks are strung at each bungalow and at the riverside, totally open Hammocks Bar. Lots of insects swarm to light bulbs but we found no biting insects at all. Meals are a bit pricey but are nicely served in a pretty little dining room.

Jim and I fished one day from the Lodge to El Castillo and back. We saw a few huge tarpon roll but there were just taunting us and inviting us to the tournament in September. We got a few smaller fish on smaller lures, but the Solentiname Islands are much better for guapote, managuense and machaca. Six inch medium diving Rapalas in tiger stripe/fire belly or white with red head for the tarpon, and Big Os in the same colors for smaller fish were what we trolled for. Our guide Hamilton lives in El Castillo and we stopped there for coffee and to see the Castle. The town hugs the riverside below the fortification built to combat pirates who had

stop at the rapids there on there way to pillage Nicaraguan cities from Lake Nicaragua.

Our trip back repeated the two boat rides and was equally full of birds ( I saw green, white, and blue herons, both sizes of green kingfisher, cormorants and anhingas, blue grey and red rumped tanagers, Baltimore orioles, and flycatchers and honey creepers of every shade as well as several varieties of hummingbirds.) There were also caimans and congo monkeys and basilisks. The boats stop not only at hotels, but at simple rough hewn homes on stilts which house local farmers and cowboys. Photo opportunities abound.

So, load your camera\* and take the three day visa trip - or rig your rods and get ready for huge tarpon in September.

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Border crossings at Los Chiles and San Carlos are less congested than most, but equally bureaucratic - have your up to date passport and a pen ready to fill out Customs and Immigration forms on both sides. United States citizens do not need a Nicaraguan visa and may proceed directly to the Costa Rica Immigration Office which is about three blocks from the dock at Los Chiles. In San Carlos both immigrations and Customs are right at the dock.

< \* photos can be found at <http://picasaweb.google.com/gmlively/EICastillo>

### [Solentiname Islands, Lake Nicaragua](#)

The fishing in Lake Cocibolca is great. Second in size in Latin America only to Lake Titicaca, it covers approximately 8,624 sq km and, like a sea, features high winds, crashing waves, and even sharks. My friend Jim and I caught lots of guapote up to five pounds, managuense or jaguar cichlid in the two pound range, and very colorful mojarra every one of them around a pound. Both casting and trolling Big O's and Fat Raps worked, as did casting chartreuse and white spinner baits with bronze willow leaf spinners. Next time I will bring my fly rods and lots of small and medium popping bugs. The little islands surrounding the larger, populated islands provided far more action than Lake Arenal at it's best many years ago. I can't wait to go back.

We stayed at the Hotel Cabañas Paraiso\* on San Fernando Island in the Solentiname Archipelago which is about two hours by boat from San Carlos, Nicaragua, in the far eastern part of Lake Nicaragua or Lake Cocibolca as it is called locally. Eduardo, his mother Maria Magdalena Pineda and the fishing guide/hotel worker Jose took wonderful care of us. Meals were simple home style Central American fare featuring rice and beans and a cabbage salad with tomatoes,

carrots, cucumbers and either chicken, beef or - best of all, of course- your own just caught deep fried fish!

Jim and I left Atenas, Costa Rica, around 9:am on a Friday and, after stopping for the best wire whisked hot chocolate in the world in Zarcero, were in San Carlos (Quesada) by 11:30am for gas and sandwiches before continuing North to Los Chiles. We had read the last boat from Los Chiles to San Carlos, Nicaragua left at 3:30pm so we wanted to be there by 2:30pm to have time to find the Nicaraguan Visa Office and the boat and ticket offices. With a US passport there is no fee for the Nicaragua visa and the process took five minutes. The dock is three blocks from there and the stop in between at Costa Rica Immigration (\$7 exit tax) took about 20 minutes because of the line of Nicaraguan travelers headed home for Semana Santa. Luggage was never inspected and we were told to board the boat and pay the ticket cost (\$10) when underway. I dropped Jim and the luggage at the dock and drove back to the Rancho Eco Directa Hotel where they agreed to keep my car in their guarded parking lot for a dollar a night.

Our 3:30pm boat left somewhat after four pm. It was the last boat of the day and it waited for those in immigration and a little longer for a few who were "on their way" to the dock. A row of opposing bench seats lined the long narrow boat holding about 24 people. The hour on the Rio Frio was a birding experience; we saw ospreys, green herons, great blue herons, regal white herons, green kingfishers, cormorants and anhingas, as well as scores of other wading and insect catching birds.

As the river widened and a huge lake came apparent through the trees many of the Nicaraguans exclaimed in pride "Cocibolca, nuestra mar dulce." We were at the confluence of the Rio Frio and the Rio San Juan and on the other side of the Rio San Juan perched San Carlos, Nicaragua, its fort and three cannon protecting Nicaragua from invasion via the San Juan River.

Customs and Immigration were fast and informal and located right at the dock. It was there that we got the bad news. We had missed the last \$10 trip to the Solentiname Islands. Eduardo from Hotel Villa Paraiso knew that we would, and he was there with his launch. The run from San Carlos to San Fernando Island is \$100 via water taxi and that is not bad if there are a lot of passengers (the boat holds a dozen), but it was only the two of us! \$50! Ah the price of adventure fishing.

The sun was lowering, but still hot and the canvas top shaded us and the four, triple wide seats

with backrest. Its last rays turned to a rosy gold sunset silhouetting the islands with San Fernando dead ahead.

We were shown to our rooms and their array of generator, battery and solar ceiling lights. The generator lights and ceiling fan ran only from 8pm 'til 11pm. The solar light was available of course during the day and the generator also recharged the battery light which was available at all times, hopefully. A simple Central American casado filled us up and got us ready for the agreed 6:30am fishing trip the next morning.

Excitement prevailed and I did not need my wristwatch alarm to wake me at 5:30am, I was ready at 5. Jim was awake also when I knocked on his door and soon Jose took us down the short flight of stairs to the dock and out to the islets surrounding the bigger island we stayed on. We trolled medium diving, short, fat bodied lures of many makes - and they all worked. In the first hour we each caught a half a dozen nice fish, each more brilliantly colored than the last. We stopped to cast and Eduardo showed up in a second boat bringing coffee and some pan dulce. He joined us and the four of us fished, alternating trolling and casting to likely looking shoreline places for another hour and a half. Lots of fish.

After a breakfast of gallo pinto and scrambled eggs we visited the local art cooperative and Solentiname Museum. Primitive oil painting and smooth, bright colored balsa animals were the features. (Next time I bring more cash, the paintings were gorgeous and priced at less than half their Costa Rican equivalents.) Siestas and then the lake called. Another two and half hours like the morning, except this time I caught a BIG ONE. It was a five pounder, called lagunero here and guapote in Costa Rica. The scientific name for this large, fresh water cichlid is *Parachromis Doyii*. Aquarists call it the Wolf Cichlid which tells you something about its aggressive nature.

Dinner Saturday featured our own caught fish which were deep fried whole. Rico and delicious!

Sunday it was pack up and reverse the boat trips back to San Carlos and Los Chiles and then we were on the road to home. Lots of big trucks on the two lane highway especially on the mountain curves makes time estimates unreliable, but I would say that it was about two and half hours from Los Chiles to San Carlos (Quesada) and another hour and a half from there to Atenas. Leave time for frequent rest and refreshment stops.

Great trip. Great fishing. (Next time from San Carlos I will boat down the San Juan River a couple of hours to El Castillo. I hear the Sabalo Lodge is nice and the San Juan River in that area offers one of the few places in the world to fish a river for tarpon. Stay tuned.)

Even if you don't fish, the Solentiname Islands offer a great 72 get away from Costa Rica for visa renewal purposes. The wildlife, art and river boating adventure are worth it.

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