

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 Marietta Arce

President of the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce (CATUCA)

AT: **What exactly is CATUCA?**

Marietta: CATUCA is a private, non-profit organization made up of about 40 members from Atenas. Our mission is to promote the area, improve our quality of life, preserve our traditions, and provide opportunities for training with a focus on sustainability and tourism.

AT: **Are you part of a larger organization?**

Marietta: We are affiliated with the National Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR), but are independent and receive no funding from them. We are often held as an example of a successful chamber of tourism by the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT), whose focus has recently turned to the rural areas of the country to develop unexplored and important sustainable tourism revenue.

AT: **What are some of your projects?**

Marietta: We are very pleased that our annual Climate Fair in April is now part of the National Development Plan for the region. This is an important source of income for us and we sponsor the fair in the park as both an attraction and an opportunity for local artists to sell their work. We have been active in landscaping and placing signs around town, as well as in supporting recycling and the Blue Flag Program. We work to raise awareness of the citizen's rights and responsibilities in the county. We sponsor and promote cultural activities such as concerts and dance recitals, and we are always on the lookout for opportunities to learn about other cultures, such as when we hosted a German dance group and placed them locally with families for a few days in exchange for a presentation to the community.

AT: **Are there any members from the Ex Patriot community in your group?**

Marietta: We are pleased to have many expat individuals and businesses in our group, including Atenas Today, Kay's Gringo Postres, Rick's Coffees of Atenas, Jalapeños, Apartamentos Atenas, Cabinas Paraiso Verde. We would like to see more involvement from the expat community and are looking for opportunities to reach out to this important demographic group. We feel we have much to learn and to contribute to each other and since we are all residents of this same town, we need to work together and address our many issues. I hope that people who are interested will contact me.

AT: **I imagine that language is the main barrier. However, your English is perfect. Where did you learn it?**

Marietta: I was born in Costa Rica, but my family moved to New York in 1963, when I was 8 years old.

AT: **How did that come about?**

Marietta: My father worked for a shipping company in San Jose. My mother came from a very poor family and was determined to make a better life for her children. When my father's company opened a branch office in New York City, my mother urged him to apply for a job there. He got the job, and we joined him six months later.

AT: **Do you have brothers and sisters?**

Marietta: I have an older sister, and a brother and a sister who are younger.

AT: **Did any of you speak English when you arrived in New York?**

Marietta: None. The only words I knew were “I don’t know”. We had no family and no friends in the U.S. It was a classic case of my mother believing in the American Dream and driving us to make it happen. From the day we arrived in Brooklyn she would not let us speak Spanish in the house, and we hardly ever ate gallo pinto!

AT: Did you go to school immediately?

Marietta: For sure. That was our salvation. We arrived at Christmas time during the school holiday and started school in January. My mother wanted us to go to the Catholic school, but they insisted on putting us back a year because of the language issue. Mother would not hear of it. Her kids were not going to lose time. So we went to the public school, and by June we were all fluent in English.

AT: What about your mother?

Marietta: She was determined and learned English from and with us. In Costa Rica she had studied to become a social worker, and she worked full time in that capacity in Brooklyn, plus she managed to get an advanced degree from Fordham University. I remember helping her prepare her thesis by reading an English text book into a tape recorder so that she could listen to it while she did her housework.

AT: How long did you live and go to school in Brooklyn?

Marietta: Eventually we transferred to the Catholic school, which I attended through high school. At that point I was rebelling from my parents and wanted to leave home to go to college. They refused but did let me return to Costa Rica for a 3 month visit after my high school graduation. When I got here I loved it, enrolled at the Centro Cultural-Norteamericano and was awarded a diploma as a bilingual office clerk. I took the admissions exam and wanted to go to the university in San Jose.

AT: Did you?

Marietta: No. I managed to stay for almost ten months but my parents put a lot of pressure on me to return to New York. They wanted us to be together as a family. My older sister was in Nursing School, my younger brother was a junior in High School, and my little sister was 13 and needed support. My mom was also worried that my absence might cause me to lose my ‘green card,’ and that thought terrified her. She felt that being a permanent resident in the United States was a privilege that I was not sufficiently appreciating. Today, I agree with her thoughts, but back then I just wanted to be independent.

AT: Did you end up going to college in New York?

Marietta: By the time I got back it was too late to get into the fall semester, so I got a job and went to a community college at night. I lived at home, but paid rent for my own room and board and felt good about it because I was independent. Eventually I got a degree in secretarial sciences.

AT: What about your social life?

Marietta: In 1976 when I was almost twenty one I married a Puerto Rican man who was twelve years older. The marriage lasted seven years, and for the final one we lived in Puerto Rico. He made the mistake of letting me get a driver’s license, and that changed my life. I was free to go where I wanted, and do what I wanted, and I realized I didn’t need to be the submissive wife. Fortunately we did not have any children. We divorced and I returned to New York. My parents had always made it clear that I was welcome to come home anytime.

AT: So you moved back in with them?

Marietta: Yes, but it was different. I was 28 and treated as an adult. We got along great and did many things together. I returned to work for an export management company and eventually worked out my schedule with them so that I could work part time and go to school full time to get a bachelor’s degree in industrial psychology.

AT: When did your husband, Scott, come into the picture?

Marietta: Scott worked at the export management company, and I had known him for some time. At one point he got married, but it didn't work out and after he was divorced we began seeing each other. In 1991 we were married and came to Costa Rica on our honeymoon.

AT: What did Scott think about Costa Rica?

Marietta: He absolutely loved it. Immediately after that first trip he asked my family to keep an eye out for some land we could buy for a retirement home. They did, and in 1993 we purchased this property in Atenas.

AT: And here you are, but Scott is not retired.

Marietta: Right. After our two children were born we decided we could not afford to live in New York City and send them to good schools. Scott's job was such that he could do much of it from Costa Rica as well as New York, and he wouldn't mind commuting as much as necessary if we could live in Costa Rica. When he was in New York he could stay in my parent's house. And after my experience having a working mother, I wanted to be at home with my kids, which I could do in Costa Rica, but could not afford to do in New York.

AT: When did you move?

Marietta: We came in June 1999, in time for our oldest child to enter 2nd grade in a private school in Costa Rica.

AT: What private school did you send him to?

Marietta: We tried several private schools for both of the kids over the next few years. Unfortunately, even though I was willing to drive them every day to San Jose or wherever, the schools were disappointing. They were expensive, although not nearly as much as in New York, and in my opinion they were too disorganized and socially competitive. I am a believer in a more individualistic approach to education and feel that the adults we expose our children to should reflect the values we try instill in them. Unfortunately, that was not always the case.

AT: So what did you do?

Marietta: I decided on the home school approach. They are now enrolled in an accredited school in Vermont and work on line with teachers there. Assignments are submitted on line, and tests taken. My role is to oversee their progress, answer questions, and make sure they are spending the proper amount of time on their studies.

AT: What about their social activities? Do they miss being with other kids?

Marietta: A big part of my commitment is to make sure they have plenty of activities with other kids, activities that they choose, with kids that they like. For example, our son, Derek, is into baseball in a big way and plays with a team in San Jose. It means a lot of driving for us, but we don't mind; children grow up quickly. Dana (our daughter) takes art classes once a week in Guachipelin so she has the opportunity to spend time with other young budding artists.

AT: So it has been a successful experience so far.

Marietta: For us, yes. It suits my values and personality, and we are fortunate that our kids have no learning or motivational problems. It might not work so well for someone else.

AT: How has the commuting worked out for Scott?

Marietta: In the beginning he had to spend two thirds of his time in New York. Now he is here more than half the time. In another two years he plans to retire. We feel we made the right decision.

Election 2008

by Diane Holman

Music from the green house floods the morning.

I am so happy I feel I may float off into the atmosphere.

The ideology that drove me from my country lies in shards
about my feet.

The world breathes a collective sigh of relief: we are made
to be free.

Por lo tanto, gracias, Barack Obama, for leading us to freedom.