

An Accidental Prepper

by [Mark Gullick](#) (September 2021)



Bonjour Monsieur Gauguin, Paul Gauguin, 1889

When I flew from London to Costa Rica in January 2016, on the day David Bowie died, I did not know I was beginning a self-imposed exile now over half a decade old. Whatever Dr. Johnson might have claimed, it *is* possible to be tired of London without being tired of life.

I had intended to move to England's southerly Kent coast after an acrimonious departure from employment. But I had met and become the travelling companion of an American woman on a visit to Paris and, when she called me from Virginia and heard of my plight, she invited me to a rain-forest chalet she owns in Costa Rica. It was possible, she said, to spend up to 90 days in the country on a standard tourist visa. So it was that I flew to what has been called 'the Switzerland of Central America'. I have, at the time of writing, failed to go home.

Along with Panama, Costa Rica forms the wasp-like waist that links the northern land mass of the Americas with South America proper. Its population of around 5 million people are largely, as you would expect, Roman Catholic. It is known for its rain-forests, its wildlife, and the resultant tourism industry, increasingly stressing eco-tourism.

As spurious as such league tables are, the country of the rich coast regularly tops the so-called 'world happiness league'. It also finds its way into the top five countries annually for *per capita* fatal car crashes, however, so there are two sides to every coin. Speaking of coins, it was Columbus who named the country the 'rich coast', and the national currency is the *colón*, Columbus' de-Latinised name.

The country covers around 0.3% of the world's land mass, but has 5% of all animal species and between 10% and 20% of all species of butterfly. The people call themselves *Ticos/Ticas*, there is a five-month rainy season and

Costa Rica has had no standing army since the bloody Civil War of 1948 (although the national anthem mentions that, if necessary, the farmers will use their agricultural tools on you, should you feel the need to invade). The electricity goes out perhaps once a week, and usually for no longer than 15 minutes. Water ditto, often and bafflingly after a night of heavy rain.

I am not a resident and my ability to stay here requires me to leave the country every 90 days. My rent is \$200 US dollars a month plus \$10 for electricity (much of Central America is semi-dollarised) for a perfectly serviceable apartment which has a courtyard the centre-piece of which is a 40-ft high coconut tree, and in which also grow bananas and limes.

The Pacific is at the end of my street, although I live two feet beneath it, and my apartment was flooded when a freak rain-storm at high tide meant the flood relief channels that crisscross the town backed up. There is a helpful sign on the street corner informing you which way to run should there be a tsunami and you have forgotten where the ocean is. I share the apartment with Missy, a calico cat who decided that moving in with me was some sort of positive career move.

I can't say I don't suffer from homesickness because I most certainly do, on occasion. But whereas two years ago I was vaguely considering returning to England, the last 18 months have made that more or less impossible. My country—and I consider myself English rather than British—seems to have become, under the covering fire of what Latin Americans call *la pandemia*, the Soviet Union with marginally better dental care plus Harrod's.

In the half-decade I have been away, two visits aside, Britain appears to have moved a good deal closer to authoritarianism than I would have thought possible. I remember something adults would say in the 1960s, when I was a boy, if they were defending a statement or opinion; *It's a free country, isn't*

it? No longer, apparently.

Hate-speech laws, the policing of social media (rather than Britain's streets), the absurd over-reaction to the COVID outbreak, a culture as wholesome as a rotten tooth, an increasingly powerful and thuggish police force (when they are not prancing around in rainbow make-up), Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ carnival, the death of the universities, mass immigration, the 'decolonisation' of the arts, and a host of other dysfunctional eruptions, has turned my country into a cross between Plato's *Republic*, Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, and Orwell's *1984*, with a dash of Huxley's *Brave New World* and a pinch of Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* for good measure.

Apart from anything else, if I return to England at the time of writing in anything other than a coffin, I would be forced to self-isolate in a hotel of the government's choosing, and not cheaply.

Costa Rica has dealt with the virus in a manner that should make the First World ashamed, and the country is in good hands. Just as the head of the World Health Organisation infamously has no medical degree, so too Costa Rica's *Ministro de Salud*, Daniel Salas, doesn't have one either. He has two, plus a background in professional epidemiology. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

There has been no lockdown. A few restaurants, bars and casinos closed for a while, but few faltered in the way pub and restaurant closures are running through Britain like a blight. There is no question of a vaccine passport. Masks must be worn in stores and public transport (buses only as there are no trains in earthquake country), but nowhere else. When I mentioned that stores began using hand sanitizer here early last year, friends in Europe had not yet seen the practice.

Some policies seem baffling, but Signor Salas's method is far

from madness. At one point, non-essential driving was banned between 10pm and 5am. What difference could that possibly make to viral transmission? None of itself, but in a country with a mere 150 or so ICU units, and the aforementioned skill Costa Ricans have in mangling themselves in car crashes, Salas wanted the beds free for a possible COVID surge. This is a Left-of-center country and I am not a Left-of-center person, but policy on COVID has been refreshingly clear, sensible and consistent, unlike Britain, where Johnson's confederacy of dunces panic and scrabble to make the optics look good rather than consider the populace and the economy.

As for the political climate in the UK, should I go back to England permanently, I would almost certainly come to the attention of the police. For the last five years, my lawyer (who doubles as my Spanish teacher) believes I would be immune from prosecution for online hate speech in the UK because the Costa Rican constitution protects free speech even for non-residents. So, it seems that I can write that there are only two genders while here in Central America, but not in Croydon, near where I grew up in south London. But my online misdemeanors, by the standards of the current 'woke' *junta*, go back 20 years, and I have always written under my real name. If the internet were a crime scene, it would have my DNA sprinkled all over it.

So I shall stay here, if it's all the same to the country of my birth. Britain is heading to a very unpleasant place, and whether it comes out the other side during my lifetime (I am 60) is doubtful. Costa Rica is pleasant enough, and of course the weather is equatorial, although I am not much of a chap for the beach.

Latin America has also the added attraction of refusing to take its 'woke' medicine. Yes, gay marriage has been legalized in Costa Rica—with an eye to tourism—and there is a little rainbow tag at the mast of bi-lingual national newspaper *The Tico Times* during Pride Month (which now seems to run all year

in Britain, the USA and Europe, like Black History Month), but if anyone tried pulling down a statue of a historical figure here they would risk getting beaten up with the police in attendance merely to watch with approval, and perhaps help. Costa Ricans love their country.

So, no CRT in Costa Rican classrooms. You can see the fate of 'woke' in Latin America by noting what happened to the absurdist verbal construction 'Latinx', its having trickled down from *Yanqui* academies and been roundly rejected south of El Paso.

Latinos mostly accept being called Latinos, and when some woke, white, academic sociologist at a Californian university decides they should be re-branded as 'Latinx', they are understandably less than thrilled. And this is not because they object to change *qua* change. The 1990s saw the replacement of 'Hispanic' with 'Latino', the former being seen as too deferential to Spain.

Fortunately for Spanish-speakers who prefer their language not to be tweaked to ideological perfection by middle-class, *gringo* lecturers, there exists the Real Academia Española, which oversees the Spanish language from Madrid, and which treated 'Latinx' and 'Latine' with the contempt Latinos believe those curios deserve. Would there were an equivalent for the English language.

So, while woke US corporations, entertainment and news outlets and—naturally—academics have championed the word 'Latinx,' Pew Research claims that just 3% of Latinos use it, and only 20% have even heard of it. The counter-argument could be, of course, that when the other 80% hear about it, they'll embrace its usage with glee, but it is more likely that the 3% who do use it do so to get an easy laugh in a bar in David or Buenos Aires.

Costa Rica's biggest problem—apart from the IMF making

coughing noises about wanting its money back, as with the rest of Latin America—is that the COVID shambles in Europe and the USA cut the country's precious tourist trade by a reported 40% last season. This is the knock-on effect of travel bans, and countries such as Thailand have taken a far worse economic blow.

However, although Costa Rica is not an easy country to immigrate to, I also have a feeling that, if the USA should have a depression that turns it into dustbowl 2.0, a lot more refugees might be travelling in the less fashionable direction across the Mexico border in the years to come, and relocating to Central America. Aside from the glorious sunshine, your dollar is good here, your children will not be taught in school that there are dozens of genders, and if you Tweet that all lives matter, no policemen will visit your home. As Costa Ricans say, *Pura vida!*