

Hi there.



My name is Helen and up until September 2019, I was living in Herefordshire and working in the South West of England and Wales for a major retailer. As my 64th birthday fast approached I was constantly asking myself if I wished to or even if I could

continue life at this pace?  
The answer was a resounding NO.

So, in brief, I gave half my things away; put the remainder into storage; gave notice at work and within weeks flew to the Pacific coast of Costa Rica to live.



I currently live in the jungle, near to the River Baru, 2 kilometres outside the small town of Dominical. A place which centres around surfing and tourism.

I live in a small two bed house elevated and in the jungle. My daily visitors are numerous coloured birds; a Coati called Colin, who eats up leftover food (named after my late father who ate in the same way) an Agouti called Alan and numerous beautifully coloured Iguanas.



**Colin the Coati**



My daily guest is a free-range Parakeet whom I've called Freddie (after Freddie parrot-faced Davies some may recall). He flies in at will and sometimes is most welcome in the current climate and other times, as the photo indicates - is not. All the animals and views in the photos are taken from my house. I thank my lucky stars I am in such a wonderful place.

**Pilates with Freddie on my shoulder**

When Anne (Editor) - whom I've known for 30 years, asked me to write about the effect of the Coronavirus on Costa Rica and in particular the community in which I live, I thought well that's simple - Costa Rica is devastated and, like many countries of the world it is closed. But it's so much more than that isn't it?

As I write, Costa Rica, with a population of 5 million, has 435 cases of Covid-19 recorded with two deaths and 13 persons in Intensive care. At the beginning of March, as other countries started to report the effects of the Virus, the Government took a hard stand.

← It closed the Beaches, the National parks and many public areas.

A week or so later it closed the borders to both Nicaragua in the North and Panama to the South and eventually, bar a few pick up missions, closed the airport to main traffic.

All bars, restaurants, shops were closed except for supermarket/ food shops. Two weeks ago, as Easter approached, a curfew was put in place which has now tightened to 5pm to 5am.



Additionally, transport has been severely controlled and, dependent on the last letter of your number plate, you can only travel 5am to 5pm on three designated days for the next fortnight.



In the area that I live, there is only one main road, the coastal road called the 'Costnera' and it is the main road through Costa Rica to Panama. All the other roads in the area are somewhat sub-standard so if anyone want to go anywhere then they need to travel down this road. The traffic is therefore easily controlled and police checkpoints have been set up at the river bridges. There are severe, on the spot fines should anyone be driving on the day they are not designated and number plates are seized with heavy recovery penalties (this is normal practice even for a parking violation).

So those are the rules and regulations but what effect has this on the local community? It is quite traumatic. Most of the locals (called Ticos and Ticas) are linked in some way to tourism.

There is no tourism.

They are, for the best part, unemployed, with no social or government assistance.

The businesses that relied on the local weekly farmers markets have formed cooperatives and gone online with deliveries where possible. Restaurants have either closed or are takeaway only. The two small supermarkets are open but with a strict cleansing and people managing regime in place. The nearest bank and chemists are 22 miles away anyway and the bus service now non-existent. Licensed taxis are the only real method of transport available if like me, a car is not an option.

So, what was a thriving, though very laid-back tourist area, resembles a ghost town and people, for the best part, are staying inside their family compounds and like me and like you, are trying to manage the situation as best they can.

Community support is and continues to be crucial. Charities to collect and disseminate food and other essentials to those locally in need have been organised by key business personnel in the area. They are doing a great job and I, like other expats and locals regularly donate what we can do that the families that need the support, receive it. Many Facebook and Just Giving groups have evolved to make this work. Others are giving their time to sort and deliver to these families.

As DIY has boomed in the UK, so it has in Costa Rica. In my community hammer, saws and drills accompany the birdsong. (not good but understandable). New tin roof houses are evolving as I speak as families take the time to expand their homes.

As for me, I am half way between self-isolating and self- distancing. (were they ever words before the virus?). I have a friend who has a truck and once a week, until now we have been going to the supermarket, 22 miles away. We get alcohol-sprayed in; the trolley handle is cleansed; we get given gloves and now squeaky clean we do our shopping.

Post shop, the process is reversed. Distancing inside is observed at all times. There has been no rush to grasp certain items except for the hand sanitizers which quadrupled in price and became extinct. Overall, the supermarkets are doing their level best to help whilst maintaining a good level of service.



The bonus and lifeline for me is that my friend also is my Pilates teacher and twice a week, observing social distancing at all times, she comes to the house and I have a Pilates class. Apart from Maree and people in the distance, I see no-one in person. Like yourselves, social media has been a godsend and I never thought I would say that.

Through WhatsApp and FaceTime I am able to maintain contact with the outside world from my jungle home. I regularly speak to Anne and to my other friends and relatives and that keeps me sane.

Yes, I have the most wonderful of environments to wake up to in this stressful time but behind it all I, and the community here, are suffering from the same ramifications and fears as the rest of the world and I pray that we will all come through this, better and stronger people.

*Helen*

