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SHOPPING IN ARENAL

There are three grocery stores on “Main Street” Nuevo Arenal. The largest, Super Compro, has a nice produce section and a wide selection of local foods and brands. You will find some American brands here (especially toiletries) and we have recently added a meat and fish counter with a good selection of fresh products.

A few doors down and across the street is Super Chavez. Don’t let their size fool you. While they are very light on the produce, they carry pre-packaged chicken, one step pancake batter, chocolate chips, peanut butter, raisins and lots of other “gringo foods”. They are also very nice and will try to order things for you if they don’t have them. They are open later as well.

There is another little store near Super Chavez (Super Economico) with later hours, a little of everything and a nice selection of bread. Try to use local currency if possible.

Buying Produce

All produce must be weighed by a store employee before it is brought to the cashier. Bananas and plantains are the exception and do not have to be weighed, nor do pre-packaged items with PLU stickers. If there is no-one at the produce scale, go to the meat department.

Buying Meat

Remember way back when you had to go to the butcher or the meat counter for your meat? That’s how it is still done here. The “Carniceria del Lago” in town is the place to go for beef, sausages and pork. The chicken is smoked. It turns pink when you cook it and tastes like a hot dog. Go to Super Chavez or Super Compro for chicken.

Buying Gasoline

There is one gas station in Arenal and about once a month, it runs out of gas. Do not run your tank down to empty! You won’t make it to the neighboring town. All gas stations are full-service. Tipping is appreciated.

SHOPPING IN TILARAN

About 30 minutes away is a larger, more functional town called Tilaran. This is where you will find everything from Doritos to computers. The best grocery shopping we have found yet is Mega Super. They have a great selection of produce and meat, fresh and frozen seafood, light and sugar-free items, American products, kitchen items, Queso Tico – about the closest you will get to an American grocery store.

For baked goods, visit Musmani. A self service bakery, it boasts all kinds of bread, pastries, donuts, cookies, coffee, cappuccino etc. If you are trying to stick to the Atkins diet don't even walk through the door.

Please bear in mind that most store employees do not speak English. Be patient, be polite and refer to the Spanish dictionaries and phrase books we have provided for your use.

FOOD 101

Do not attempt to stick to a diet while visiting Costa Rica! Costa Rican “Comidas Tipicas” (typical foods), unlike their Mexican cousins, are not spicy. They are soulful, simple, comforting and prepared with love. Bread is a staple, as are beans and rice. Here are some things you must try before heading home:

PLANTAINS

Similar to bananas, Ticos eat them super-ripe and cooked in oil. Served this way, they are known as “platanitos Maduros” (sweet plantains). They are also made into chips for snacking, like potato chips.

QUESO TICO

A soft, mild, locally made cheese. It is also served for breakfast in many restaurants, as are sweet plantains.

CHARRASCO

A wonderfully tender cut of beef usually served with chimichurri sauce (made with parsley, olive oil, garlic – que rico!)

GUAVA

A fruit with the sweetness of strawberry and the tartness of raspberry used in juice, marmalade, jelly, pastry fillings, pastes, cookies and candies. It is everywhere in Latin America and one of our favorite foods on the planet. Try the marmalade with cream cheese on crackers or as part of a PB & J – Nectar of the gods!

MANGO

You'll either love it or hate it – we love it!

PAPAYA

Much tastier here than it is in the States. It smells better too.

TRES LECHES

Literally translated “Three Milks”, it is a moist, spongy cake soaked in a sweet milk sauce with a wonderful frosting. Our general rule is that if it isn't chocolate, it isn't worth the calories. Tres Leches is the exception to our rule.

SOFRITO

A cooking base, made from tomatoes, onions, bell peppers and garlic. If you will be cooking at home during your stay, try using sofrito for soups, stews and sauces.

GALLO PINTO

A mixture of black beans, rice and cilantro. Like spaghetti sauce, everyone makes it differently and it's always good.

