

# Ricardo's Spanish Coaching Dispatch

## “Chaos in Costa Rica”

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I am down in Costa Rica today on a business trip. In fact, I've been down here with my family for almost two weeks. Dos semanas.

The typical Costa Rican food is outstanding. On Sunday afternoon, we took a family drive up into the mountains (well, it's pretty much all mountains here unless you're on the coast), anyway, we had lunch at this amazing place with a great view, awesome breeze and the best *pollo al carbón* I think I've ever had. *Al carbón* or *A la leña* is food that is cooked over an open wood fire. ¡Es comida deliciosa!

Amidst the natural beauty, wonderful food and amazingly nice people, there is chaos.

The most obvious place there is chaos is on the roads. Somehow, all of these wonderfully nice people turn into Evil Knieval on the roads. It is highly chaotic. Buses, cars, motorcycles, motoras as we say, pedestrians, vendors, and sometimes even animals, all seem to converge into the roads, and sometimes even onto main highways.

To top it off there are thousands and thousands of potholes that seem to run throughout the entire country. Then, throw in the perpetual ability to drive off a cliff at any time if you're not paying attention and you can clearly feel the chaotic situation that it is. Even a new highway that was just built had to be closed recently due to poor construction. It is now open, but who knows next week, well, you get the idea. It is the ideal driving environment for people like me with Attention Deficit Disorder. It is the ADD driver paradise. You never lack something to keep you interested that's for sure.

It does feel very chaotic on the roads here ... for a few days. Then, somehow, almost miraculously, you actually start to get used to it. You accept it for what it is and you learn to merge into it.

So you ask, what's the application here to my Spanish? And here it is.

Anytime something is new and we're out of our comfort zone it feels weird. It may even feel chaotic. It can also sometimes feel overwhelming.

For you, learning Spanish, might feel like getting on the roads here in Costa Rica. New patterns of pronunciation, different ways to structure the words, the speed of the language, hitting potholes in your own learning every now and again.

One of the things I learned this past week is how tiring it is just to take a one hour drive somewhere. The convergence of chaos requires a high level of focus. Also, the potholes in the road make you feel like you're being ground up like the wonderful coffee here. We say *molido en español*. *Molido* means “ground” in the sense of *café molido* or *carne molida* (ground beef).

Well, after a one hour trip, *me siento como carne molida*. I feel like ground beef. My body is tired, I am tired, my family is tired. Then, to top it off, at the end of any family outing, to get to our apartment, we drive out into a barrio, onto a short dirt road, and then up a pretty steep hill on a narrow driveway that requires **TOTAL** focus or you won't get home. The view, or we might say, the final result, is worth it! (By the way, check out the short video on this page to see the view around our apartment. You'll see what I mean.)

Anyway, and back to the point, that's how learning something new can be. It can make you feel tired and ground up. Have you ever felt this way with your Spanish? You will no doubt find that it is even harder to speak or understand well when you are physically tired. This is normal. Has learning Spanish sometimes felt chaotic and tiring to you? If so, take heart, that feeling is normal for most people when they experience something entirely new to them.

Chaos in Costa Rica has taught me once again to have empathy for every new Spanish learner who enters our program. Trust me, the beauty of our program is that at some point in the journey, you actually do calm down, get in a learning groove, and learn to enjoy the wonderful views along the way. You just have to keep driving the car long enough to get comfortable.

*Ahora, disfrute el viaje, y las vistas, mi amigo.* Now, enjoy the journey, and the views, my friend.

**¡Adelante!**