

Costa Rica Growth Amidst Global Crisis

New San Jose – Caldera Highway Offers Road to Growth

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After years of anticipation, the new highway to the central Pacific Coast from San Jose will be completed very shortly. The completion of this magnificent modern highway will make traveling between San José and the central Pacific coast as well as the Pacific port of Caldera, a dream. Not to mention saving close to 80 minutes in driving time. The first phase of the highway has been inaugurated by the current ministra de Transportes (Minister of Transport), Karla González, in May.

This first of 3 phases of the highway, runs between the Sabana and Santa Ana, and is known as the autopista Prospero Fernandez, has been completely resurfaced, with all bridges widened and several pedestrian overpasses have been added along the route, as well as bus merging lanes at bus stops along the highway.

The new highway starts at the at the east end of the Sabana Park, home of the fabulous new National Stadium currently under construction, passing through Escazu, Santa Ana, then it scoots through the mountains ending up in Orotina, the central Pacific coast and on to the port of Caldera.

Traveling to Caldera from San José today takes about 2 hours on the Interamericana Norte. On this new highway, travel will be only 45 minutes. That means that travel to beach towns like Jaco and Quepos/Manuel Antonio is also reduced greatly, 45 minutes to Jaco and less than 2 hours to Quepos/Manuel Antonio.

The second phase, which is expected to be finished by December; weaves through the mountains connecting towns like La Guacima, Turrucares, Siquiaries and Orotina. Machinery and work crews have been busy, on and off, for years moving earth and building the 14 bridges along this section of the route. Work in some sections is a 24hour a day schedule.

This section will also have a "Centro de Control de Operaciones" (Operations Control Centre) located in the area of the Rio Grande, which will house ambulance, tow trucks, fire fighting equipment and a new Policía de Transito (traffic police) station.

The new highway will also include a rest stop and emergency telephones, a new concept in Costa Rica.

The third phase is between Orotina and Caldera. Work on that section is being completed, as the route becomes 4 lanes from the current 2, with the bridges being widened and reinforced. This third phase is expected to be finished by early 2010.

Once finished, the San José - Caldera highway will be a marvel for tourism and locals. As part of the plan to cover the costs of the vast highway improvements, it will be a pay-toll highway.

The cost of a complete trip between San Jose and Caldera will cost ₡1.900, (\$3.50 approx) each way. Buses will pay ₡3.790 (\$6.70). The savings in fuel and time should more than offset the expense for any user.

The highway is being constructed and will be operated & maintained by the consortium, Autopistas del Sol, under concession from the Ministerio de Obras Publicas y Transportes.