

Entwined with legend

Despite all the streamlined architectural sophistication and urban chic scaling the hills around San Rafael de Escazú, the town still maintains its reputation as the "City of Witches." It's so entrenched that the municipal flag and the town seal (displayed on Town Hall) each sport a broom-mounted witch, and the local soccer team is called Las Brujas (The Witches).

Despite the legends of good sorcerers, Escazú, located about 9 kilometers west of San Jose, has become an upscale enclave including residences of the U.S. and British Ambassadors and trendy bars and restaurants. Over the years newly arrived foreigners from North America, South America, and Europe have claimed it as home. The town, which means 'resting place' in an early indigenous language, pre-dates the capital because it formed at a junction of Indian trails and attracted visitors from far regions even then.

Adding to the sorcery theme are chilling, mythical figures generally appearing before errant husbands and drunkards, or others depicting girls who were led astray. Derived from indigenous myths, these tales still spook naughty children into more acceptable behavior. Allegedly, cautious locals still secretly consult modern day hexes before making important decisions in their lives or careers, or for extra help in affairs of the heart.

Possibly the area's most celebrated ghost is the unfortunate, but enigmatic Tulevieja (literally, old veiled hat). Those claiming to have seen her often describe the figure as a hideous half-naked hag sometimes with a chicken's body. She roams the night-darkened lanes and peers through windows in search of the illegitimate baby she starved to death. The Tulevieja reportedly could not be caught because she was stronger than twenty horses.

However, according to a more recent counter-legendary twist, a young Escazú daredevil, Liborio Constantino de Jesus Fernández Delgado, (happily, don Tuto Yoyo for short) who lived for a hundred winters until 1988, tied her up with a magic vine that grows in the Escazú hills by the enchanted Piedra Blanca (White Stone).

He tamed the probably furious crone and would parade her around Escazú like his pet dog. While the Tulevieja, along with don Tuto Yoyo, have basically melted into the collective memory, a group of archaeologists excavating near the Piedra Blanca may have lent some creditability to the myth. They unearthed a petrified segment of vine.

John Wieland, partner/owner, Coldwell Banker Vesta Group, pointed out that Escazu continues to intrigue, tales notwithstanding, and attract because many of the locations, including properties his office has listed, are prized for their scenic vistas. "One has to see them to believe them, especially at night when the lights look like sparkling jewels."