

# DESTINATION GUIDE

# Costa Rica





## COSTA RICA CENTRAL AMERICA

Immerse yourself in the tranquility of balancing on a surfboard or yoga mat, exploring bat-filled caves, or trekking up misty volcanic peaks in Costa Rica. Just relax and savor the adventure.



## A B O U T

# COSTA RICA

Costa Rica, situated in Central America, stands out as one of the most popular international destinations globally, with tourism being a key source of income. This democratic and peaceful country has been without a military since 1948. Despite its small size, covering only 0.03 percent of the Earth's surface, Costa Rica proudly hosts 5 percent of the world's biodiversity. A remarkable 26 percent of the nation consists of conservation and natural protected areas.

In 2018, Costa Rica emerged as a hub for meeting tourism with the inauguration of the National Congress and Convention Center (CNCC), capable of hosting up to 4,600 attendees. Positioned just eight kilometers from the Juan Santamaría International Airport and 10 kilometers from San José, this new venue facilitates the exchange of ideas and business opportunities among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, Costa Rica presents an appealing investment destination, offering significant potential for the establishment of multinational corporations. This is attributed to the high academic standards of its populace, coupled with modern services and a stable social and political environment.

## FACTS TO KNOW

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Spanish. A large portion of the population speaks English as a second language.

### OFFICIAL CURRENCY

COSTA RICAN COLÓN (PLURAL COLONES) (₡)

### OFFICIAL RELIGION

Roman Catholic; complete freedom of religion.

### WHEN TO VISIT

Dry Season: December to April is the dry season, ideal for beach vacations and outdoor activities.

Green Season: May to November brings lush landscapes and occasional rain. Perfect for wildlife enthusiasts and budget travelers.

### GETTING THERE

Airports: Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) in San José and Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport (LIR) in Liberia are the main international airports.

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

01

## ESSENTIAL PACKING ITEM

Waterproof sandals are ideal for river crossings, rocky beaches, waterfall swimming and other essential Costa Rica activities. Close-toed sandals are recommended (and sometimes required) for many activities.

02

## BE READY FOR THE RAIN

The rainforest and cloud forest are wet climates at any time of year. So it's best to pack for rain, even if you are traveling in the so-called dry season. Bring sturdy, waterproof boots for hiking on muddy trails. Be prepared for showers (or downpours) with a quick-drying, moisture-wicking base layer and a waterproof rain jacket.

03

## MANDATORY VEHICLE INSURANCE

Everybody who rents a vehicle in Costa Rica is legally required to purchase liability insurance from the rental agency. This can be frustrating and confusing for travelers, especially since the extra cost of this insurance is (often) not included in the original price quoted at the time of reservation.

04

## STAY SAFE ON THE TRAIL & SURF

The biggest danger to travelers in Costa Rica? Rip tides. To stay safe, look for warning flags on beaches: yellow means you should swim with caution and red means swimming is prohibited. Always be cautious about swimming and surfing alone. Remember: don't struggle against a current pulling you out to sea; instead, swim parallel to the shore until you are free from the current. When hiking, be sure to inform a park ranger or reserve attendant before setting out, and always stay on marked trails. Watch out for snakes on the trail and never approach wild animals. (It's illegal to feed or take a selfie with a wild animal!)

05

## IT'S OK TO DRINK THE TAP WATER

There may be exceptions in remote villages or off-the-grid locales. For the most part, however, the tap water in Costa Rica is safe to drink. So, there's no need to purchase single-use plastic bottles. Bring your own water bottle to save money and save the planet!

# WHERE TO EAT



## THE SPRINGS RESORT & SPA AT ARENAL

The Springs Resort & Spa at Arenal in Costa Rica offers a luxurious escape with stunning views of the Arenal Volcano, featuring natural hot springs, lush gardens, and world-class amenities. Guests can indulge in a variety of activities, from relaxing spa treatments to exciting outdoor adventures, all set in a breathtaking tropical paradise.



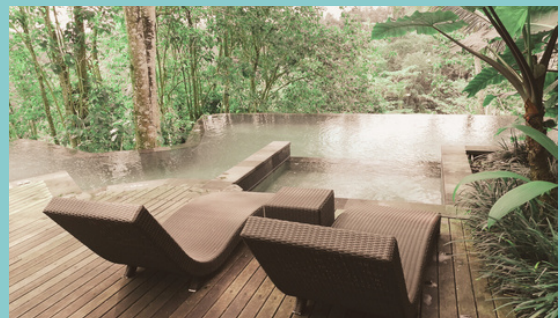
## NAYARA GARDENS

Nayara Gardens in Costa Rica is a luxurious boutique hotel nestled in the heart of the rainforest, offering stunning views of the Arenal Volcano. The resort features private casitas, exquisite dining, and serene spa experiences, providing an intimate and unforgettable stay amidst lush tropical beauty.



## HOTEL BOUTIQUE CASA DEL RIO

Hotel Boutique Casa Del Rio in Costa Rica is a charming boutique hotel that blends rustic elegance with modern comforts, offering a peaceful retreat along the serene banks of a river. Guests can enjoy beautifully appointed rooms, personalized service, and close proximity to the natural attractions of the region, creating an idyllic getaway.



## AMOR ARENAL ADULTS FRIENDLY

Amor Arenal Adults Friendly in Costa Rica offers a luxurious, adults-only retreat nestled at the edge of the rainforest with breathtaking views of the Arenal Volcano. The resort features spacious, elegant bungalows, exceptional dining, and immersive wellness experiences, providing a perfect blend of relaxation and adventure for its guests.

# WHERE TO STAY



## KALU & KIOSCO

Nestled in Barrio Escalante, sharing a trendy space with Kiosco SJO, chef Camille Ratton's outstanding cafe offers a diverse fusion menu. Indulge in soups, salads, sandwiches, pastas, and unique treats like the fish taco trio featuring mango-glazed salmon, red-curry prawns, and macadamia-crusted tuna. Be sure to try the delectable passion-fruit pie priced at US\$7 – because you deserve it!



## CAFE ROJO

This charming café, adorned with tall cacti at the entrance, utilizes Costa Rica's fresh produce to craft creative lunch specials. The menu features Vietnamese noodle bowls, sandwiches filled with either pork meatballs or caramel chicken, and incredibly tasty Asian-inspired salads. Both vegans and coffee lovers will find a lot to enjoy at this establishment.



## LOLA'S

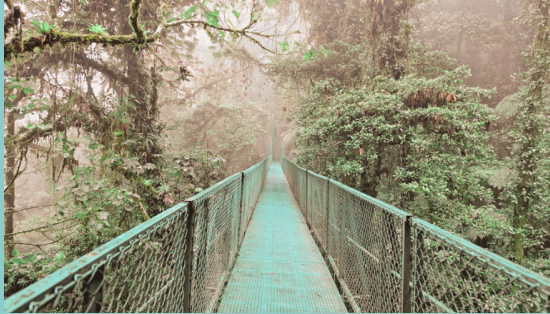
Costa Rica's Craft Brewing Company, situated in Ciudad Colón in San José, Costa Rica, specializes in crafting top-notch beers to delight both our customers and visitors to our nation.



## SILVESTRE

In the capital, Santiago Fernández Benedetto offers refined dining experiences with dishes that draw inspiration from his family's heritage. A striking spherical dessert, crafted using Talamanca cacao and cashew nut butter, honors the ancient petrospheres discovered in the Osa region.

# WHAT TO DO



## MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST BIOLOGICAL PRESERVE

Situated amidst the Cordillera de Tilarán mountain range, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve spans over 35,000 acres of dense foliage. Apart from its unique native plant life, the preserve boasts a variety of wildlife including howler monkeys and sloths. For an unforgettable experience, consider exploring the beauty of the area through an exhilarating zip-line tour.



## ECOTERMALES FORTUNA

The perfect spot to unwind and rejuvenate tired muscles after numerous exciting escapades? Look no further than Ecotermales Fortuna. With its soothing, magnesium-rich waters heated by the nearby Arenal Volcano, it's known to alleviate inflammation and pain. Plus, the refreshing cool pools offer an ideal setting for hot and cold therapy.



## SANTA TERESA

Santa Teresa is a must-visit destination for those seeking the pure life philosophy and surf enthusiasts. If you're new to surfing, beginners can opt for group or private lessons. Onshore, the beach lined with palm trees attracts many visitors for sunbathing and enjoying beautiful sunsets.



## TENORIO VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK

Nestled in the rugged northern region of Costa Rica within the expansive Arenal Tempisque Conservation Area, Tenorio Volcano National Park captivates visitors with its iconic volcano and the breathtaking Rio Celeste Waterfall, accessible via a 3.5-mile trail. Explore wildlife sightings and traverse canopy bridges for an unforgettable experience.

# FUN EXCURSIONS



## ZIPLINE CABLES EXPERIENCE LA FORTUNA WATERFALL

Soar through the Costa Rican rainforest on a thrilling canopy tour that includes a unique view of the impressive La Fortuna Waterfall, a feature not typically found on similar tours. Enjoy glimpses of the Arenal Volcano and Cerro Chato between ziplines, and engage with your guides about the La Fortuna region.



## CRAFT SPECIALTY COFFEE AND CHOCOLATE TOUR

Aromatic coffee, sweet sugarcane, and chocolate are three of Costa Rica's top agricultural exports and its favorite products among locals and visitors alike. Learn about these three crops first-hand on this tour of a family-owned farm near La Fortuna. See how coffee is created from bean to cup, and then taste other delicious crops along with a guide.



## SUNSET CATAMARAN IN PLAYA FLAMINGO

A 4-hour sailing tour from the Guanacaste to a white sand beach with snorkeling. Enjoy unlimited beer, wine and soft drinks as you cast off, and watch for the dolphins, whales and turtles that thrive along the scenic coastline. Drop anchor to explore with a guide or at your own pace, swim alongside brilliant fish and bright coral, then watch the first stars appear as you steer back towards the shore.



## OFF ROAD RAINFOREST & WATERFALLS ATV TOUR

Explore the countryside areas, unlike any other tourist. Feel the thrill while driving your ATV through the mountains, where you'll witness the greenery of the rainforest and an array of wildlife. Not only will you ride through the lush jungles of Costa Rica, but you'll also appreciate excellent views and can take amazing pictures.

# TRAVELING WITH KIDS

*Costa Rica is one of the most stable countries in Central America, with welcoming Ticos, lodgings to suit every style and budget, as well as long-established operators offering an array of family-friendly activities from easy wildlife encounters with sloths and toucans to adrenaline-fueled adventures. Its landscapes of smoldering volcanos, palm-fringed beaches and magical rainforests are epic, but thanks to good infrastructure, all these natural wonders can be enjoyed by the youngest travelers. Many attractions and public transport offer discounts for kids under 12, and toddlers and babies often go free – always ask if you're unsure.*



## BABIES & TODDLERS NATURE, BUTTERFLIES & ANIMALS

More and more of Costa Rica's national parks, such as Manuel Antonio, Arenal Volcano, and Carara, now feature well-marked trails that are accessible for strollers, allowing you to enjoy a hike with your little ones. Explore the rainforest with your young adventurers, spotting monkeys, sloths, and scarlet macaws while immersing them in the sights, sounds, and scents of nature. For young jungle explorers, a night hike is the ultimate adventure.



## YOUNG CHILDREN VOLCANOES, HOT SPRINGS & FOOD

Arenal Volcano boasts a perfect cone. While reaching the summit is not an option, multiple trails traverse lava fields and meander through a rainforest filled with butterflies, birds, and snakes. The short and flat Los Heliconias trail is perfect for children. After exploring, unwind in the area's hot springs. For a budget-friendly option, consider Baldi Hot Springs, which offers a dedicated area for kids. Then treat yourselves to a day pass at The Springs Resort & Spa.



## TWEENS & TEENAGERS ZIP LINES, SURFING & RAFTING

Zippering through the numerous zip lines in Costa Rica is sure to excite even the most demanding teenager. Certain companies permit adventure enthusiasts as young as three years old to glide above the forest canopy (accompanied by a guide), while others have specific weight and height requirements, so it's advisable to verify before making a reservation.



# GETTING AROUND



## TAKE THE BUS

You can get (almost) anywhere in Costa Rica by bus, as long as you are not in a hurry. And it doesn't cost much: fares range from US\$2 to \$20, depending on the distance. The regional bus network is a great transportation option for budget travelers who have time to spare. The regional bus lines are operated by private companies that often operate out of different bus terminals. That means there's no centralized source of information, which can be extremely confusing. Useful websites include Visit Costa Rica, The Bus Schedule and Yo Viajo.

## RIDE ON THE SHUTTLE

Several companies offer dedicated tourist shuttle services to and from the most popular travel destinations. They're generally faster and more comfortable, but cost more than regional buses. Tourist shuttles are also easier to use, as they have fixed schedules, online booking and door-to-door service in many places. The main companies are EasyRide, Interbus, Monkey Ride and Tropical Tours. Fares range from \$50 to \$120, depending on the distance.



## RENT A VEHICLE

There are undeniable drawbacks to renting a vehicle, most notably, the expense; but the truth is there are so many places you can't reach without one. In fact, many of those places require a 4WD vehicle due to poor road conditions and the occasional river crossing. So, if you're going to spring for a rental, you might as well spring for the 4WD. Many major international rental companies have outlets near the San José and Liberia airports, but you'll often get a better rate through a local agency like Solid, Adobe or Vamos Car Rental.



# VISA REQUIREMENTS

WHILST ALL VISITORS NEED A VALID PASSPORT AND PROOF OF ONWARD TRAVEL TO ENTER THE COUNTRY, NOT EVERYONE NEEDS A VISA. STAYS OF UP TO 90 DAYS ARE POSSIBLE FOR PASSPORT HOLDERS OF MANY DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES; OTHERS NEED TO APPLY AT THEIR NEAREST CONSULATE IN ADVANCE. HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GETTING A VISA FOR COSTA RICA.



Passport holders from various countries like Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, South Africa, UAE, USA, and most of the EU can visit for up to 90 days without a visa.

Some nationalities have additional requirements, like ensuring their passports have at least three months of validity.

Countries whose nationals need a visa to enter Costa Rica include several from Africa and the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone, along with a few from South America like Colombia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, individuals with a valid visa or proof of residency in countries like the UK, USA, Canada, and the EU might not need to apply for a visa to travel to Costa Rica.



# SAFETY & PLACES TO AVOID

## **Is Costa Rica safe for families?**

Yes, Costa Rica is a great destination for family holidays and most families who visit experience no safety concerns. Families probably have fewer problems than other categories of travelers in Costa Rica because there's strength in numbers and, for the most part, families aren't engaging in hard partying.

## **Is Costa Rica safe for LGBTQ+ travelers?**

Many LGBTQ+ travelers visit Costa Rica and report few problems. Compared to other Latin American countries, Costa Ricans are considerably more tolerant than many other nations in the region. On 26 May 2020, Costa Rica became the first country in Central America where same-sex couples can obtain civil marriage licenses. That said, overall levels of tolerance may be a touch lower than what travelers from North America, Europe and Australia may be accustomed to. LGBTQ+ couples could encounter unwelcome attention if they engage in public displays of affection in small towns where locals aren't used to visitors. Avoid public displays of affection in more rural areas to be on the safe side.

## **Is Costa Rica safe for women travelers?**

Women, particularly those traveling alone, must exercise a high degree of caution in Costa Rica as women visitors have been the victims of sexual assault and murder in recent years and the overall sexual assault rate has increased. Solo female travelers should strongly consider staying in places where they can meet other travelers, particularly if planning to go on hikes, stay out late or visit remote places.

## **Places to avoid in Costa Rica**

Here are some places to avoid or visit only if you absolutely have to, only during daylight hours and preferably accompanied by a local.

Be careful in Quepos, which is the gateway town just outside Manuel Antonio National Park. The same goes for Tamarindo and Jaco due to incidents of crime (mostly robberies) targeting visitors.

Other high-risk areas with violent crime rates significantly higher than the national average include Matina, a small rural community along the Matina River in Limón province, Limón, Liberia, Pococí, Talamanca, the Desamparados neighborhood in San Rafael, Santa Rosa de Pocosol, San Carlos, a rural region bordering Nicaragua, and the district of Barranca, on the Pacific coast in the province of Puntarenas. The Caribbean coast has historically had more crime than the Pacific coast. San Jose, like many big cities, can be riskier for travelers, particularly after dark and especially in the downtown area. It is advised that you avoid any of the parks in San Jose at night, as they are considered very dangerous, and stay away from the following neighborhoods in and around San Jose: Los Guido, Desamparados, Pavas, La Carpio, Leon XIII, the El Carmen neighborhood in Cartago, and the "El Infiernillo," sector of Alajuela.

**Avoid camping on any of the beaches for safety reasons** – it's best to find secure accommodation at a lodge or hostel. A good rule of thumb is that anywhere visitors visit frequently will be a target for crime – don't be alarmed, just be alert.

# T R A V E L

## T I P S

Tourists stand out from locals, but it's easy to minimize your risk of serious crime. Here's how to avoid trouble (that you could apply to anywhere you travel).

- Travelers should consider traveling only in groups when moving about very early in the morning and late at night
- When traveling by bus, avoid placing luggage in the overhead bins, as theft from them is on the rise.
- Solo travelers, particularly women, are vulnerable on beaches at times when there are few others around, the same applies to national parks and other wild places
- Hand over cash and valuables if you're robbed; they're not worth risking injury for
- Don't be flashy with your belongings or the way you dress
- Avoid carrying your passport or too much money with you while you're out and about
- Keep your valuables locked up safely in your accommodation, and never leave anything of value out in the open, even if it's inside your hotel room
- Don't leave anything under your towel while you're out surfing
- Protect yourself from mosquito bites at dawn and dusk
- Don't say yes to drugs, don't get drunk and keep your wits about you at all times
- Snatch and grabs are quite common, with thieves grabbing just about anything they can get their hands on. A common crime is pulling watches from unsuspecting visitors as they casually hang an arm out a car window, or snatching sunglasses that are resting on someone's head
- Theft from parked and unattended vehicles is also on the rise. Try to park in well-lit or guarded areas, always keep the doors locked and windows rolled up, and never leave anything of value in plain sight of passersby
- Pay close attention to your surroundings in crowded locations, particularly when using public transport throughout Costa Rica
- Thieves tend to strike in more touristy areas like beaches, national parks and in and around downtown San Jose – so be aware.

# COSTA RICA PACKING LIST

## BASICS

- SUITCASE
- PACKING CUBES
- TOILETRY BAG
- LAUNDRY BAG
- CARRY ON / DAY PACK
- DOCUMENT WALLET
- SMALL PURSE
- FOLDABLE SHOPPING BAG
- 
- 

## CLOTHING

- UNDERWEAR
- BRAS
- SOCKS / STOCKINGS
- SLEEPWEAR
- T-SHIRTS
- TANK TOPS
- LONG SLEEVED TOPS
- LONG PANTS
- SHORTS
- LEGGINGS
- MAXI DRESSES
- DRESSY OUTFIT
- SCARF / PASHMINA
- LIGHT JACKET OR
- WRAP WORKOUT
- CLOTHES
- 
- 
- 

## CARRY ON BAG

- WATER BOTTLE
- SNACKS
- TISSUES & WET WIPES
- HAND SANITIZER
- BOOKS / MAGAZINES
- CHEWING GUM
- TRAVEL PILLOW
- SUITCASE KEYS
- GLASSES
- PEN & NOTEBOOK
- POCKET COMB / BRUSH
- GUIDE BOOKS
- 
- 

## MEDICAL KIT

- PRESCRIPTION
- MEDICATIONS VITAMINS
- BAND-AIDS
- PAIN RELIEF
- ANTIHISTAMINE
- IMODIUM EYE DROPS
- MOTION SICKNESS
- TABLETS INSECT
- REPELLENT
- HYDRATION SALTS
- AFTER BITE GEL
- AFTER SUN LOTION
- ANTI CHAFFING CREAM
- 
- 

## DOCUMENTS

- PASSPORT
- VISA (IF REQUIRED)
- BOOKING
- CONFIRMATIONS CREDIT
- & DEBIT CARDS
- CAR RENTAL INSURANCE
- TRAVEL INSURANCE
- LOYALTY CARDS
- AIRFARE DOCUMENTS
- EMERGENCY CONTACT
- LIST

## TOILETRIES

- SHAMPOO / CONDITIONER
- BODY WASH
- DEODORANT
- MOISTURIZER
- TEETH CLEANING
- SHAVING GEAR
- HAIR STYLING PRODUCTS
- BRUSH OR COMB
- CONTACT SOLUTION & CASE
- NAIL FILE / CLIPPERS
- SANITARY PRODUCTS
- COSMETICS
- CLEANSER
- MAKE UP REMOVER
- JEWELERY WIPES
- 
- 

## ELECTRONICS

- PHONE
- HEADPHONES
- CHARGERS & CABLES
- ADAPTERS /
- CONVERTERS POWER
- BANK
- CAMERA
- EREADER
- 

## FOR THE BEACH

- BEACH TOTE
- SUNSCREEN
- SUNGLASSES
- CHAPSTICK
- BATHING SUIT
- COVER UP
- SUN HAT
- BEACH BLANKET
- WATERPROOF PHONE CASE
- WATERPROOF CAMERA
- CASE
- 
- 

## FOR WINTER

- JUMPER
- JEANS
- JACKET

## FOOTWEAR

- WALKING SHOES
- DRESS SHOES
- SANDALS
- HIKING BOOTS

# FAQS

## DO I NEED A PASSPORT?

A valid passport is mandatory to enter Costa Rica.

## DO I NEED A VISA?

Depending on your country of origin, you may enter Costa Rica without a visa. USA, Canada and most European countries enjoy this privilege.

## DO I NEED AN INTERNATIONAL DRIVERS LICENSE TO DRIVE?

With a legal driver's license, you are allowed to drive for three months.

## IS THE WATER DRINKABLE?

The water is potable in most of the country. However, we recommend bottled water, especially in areas around the coast.

## DO I NEED AN ELECTRIC ADAPTER FOR PHONE CHARGER?

OUTLETS ARE 110 V, WITH STANDARD US TWO PRONG PLUGS.

## HOW MUCH IS THE DEPARTURE TAX?

Departure tax is US\$29.00, which can be paid in US Dollars, colones or with a credit card.

## WHAT SHOULD I BRING WHEN VISITING THE RAIN FOREST?

All you need is insect repellent, a rain coat with a hood and a comfortable pair of hiking boots.

## WHAT NUMBER SHOULD I DIAL IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY?

Dial 911 for immediate assistance.

## HOW IS COSTA RICA POLITICALLY DIVIDED?

Costa Rica is divided into 7 provinces: San Jose, Heredia, Alajuela, Cartago, Limon, Puntarenas and Guanacaste.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF A RENTAL CAR?

When you are sent a quote or the reservation notice for a car, it is recommended that you ask about the cost of insurance and taxes, as well as the amount of the deductible that will be charged to the credit card or security deposit.

## ARE THERE ANY CULTURAL ETIQUETTES I SHOULD KNOW?

Embrace the "Pura Vida" lifestyle, respect local customs, and ask permission before taking photos of people. Tipping is customary in restaurants, and 10% is typically added to the bill.