COSTA RICA

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Costa Rica Sun Tours
www.crsuntours.com

GREETINGS

Thank you for entrusting us with your Costa Rica vacation. Please read this booklet carefully. It includes travel information and practical tips for your trip to Costa Rica.

Here are a few reminders as you prepare for your trip:

- Check the validity of your passport.
- Make a copy of your passport in case it is lost and you need to get replaced.
- Look into Supplemental Medical and Trip Cancellation Insurance.
- Call your bank and let them know dates you will be out of the country.
- Ask your bank if you will be charged foreign transaction fees on your credit card.
- Check with your phone carrier / phone plan about international roaming charges and fees.
- Let us know of any special diet needs or medical conditions we need to be aware of.
- Try and learn a few Spanish phrases.

Here are a few travelers' tips that can help make for a better trip:

- On the day you travel allow plenty of time to get to the airport.
- In your carry-on pack liquids in a plastic bag and keep to less than 100 ml.
- No metal scissors, clippers, etc. in your carry-on baggage.
- Pack only the essentials.
- Leave valuables behind.
- Be sure to pack comfortable walking shoes.
- Check the weather forecast. Prepare for but do not let weather dictate the enjoyment of your trip.
- Do not exchange money at the airport. Wait and cash at hotel reception or at a local bank.
- Find out about local customs. (Let your driver/guide know that the team you cheer for is LA LIGA!)
- Do not become so focused on picture taking that you miss the enjoyment of the scene or moment.
- Try and disconnect, use cell phone just for an emergency or picture taking.
- Put phone setting on Airplane Mode to avoid hefty international roaming charges.
- Try new foods, eat out a few nights at restaurants other than your hotel.
- Do not try and do too much. Allow for some down time.

We always do our best to adhere to your scheduled itinerary, but we are at the mercy of Mother Nature and varying weather conditions. Remember if something does not go as planned, your ATTITUDE will make the difference between an adventure and an ordeal.

We wish you a memorable adventure exceeding your expectations, and we hope that you return home saying "Pura Vida Costa Rica!"

SAFE TRAVELS AND HAVE A GREAT TRIP!

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COSTA RICA

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

How I can be a Responsible Traveler?

Each time you make vacation plans you have the opportunity to have a positive impact on the places you visit. Everyone can be a responsible traveler no matter what travel style you choose. By using socially and environmentally responsible tour operators, hotels and outfitters, you can ensure that your trip contributes to conservation and the well-being of communities. Your choices do make a difference!

Responsible Travel while on tour:

1. Respect the local environment. Do not litter. Don't pick wild flowers or plants.Try to reuse water bottles and recycle when you can.
2. Preserve local resources when possible. If your hotel has a policy to minimize laundering of towels and sheets, try to support it. Remember to turn off lights and air conditioning when you leave your room. Try not to waste water when you are not using it. Try to use biodegradable soaps and organic bug repellent and sun block.
3. Respect local culture and traditions. Be aware and sensitive to cultural differences in language, custom and dress. Ask permission before taking someone's picture.
4. Learn a few words in the local language. Be open to learning about the local culture throughout the trip.
5. Help ensure your money stays in the local community. Try local brands for food and drink. Buy hand crafted goods produced by local artisans.
6. Protect national treasures. Never buy authentic archeological artifacts or souvenirs made from endangered plants animals, such as turtle shell, coral and non-plantation precious wood.

In National Parks and Protected Wilderness or Conservation Areas:

- Hire a local naturalist guide. Guides enhance the overall experience, and provide a wider interpretation of the natural areas you visit, as well as help you spot wild animals that are often invisible to the untrained eye.
- Avoid feeding, touching or harassing wild animals at all times. Contact with animals puts them at risk and can cause undue stress.
- Stay on the trail at all times. This helps lessen your impact on the forest and keeps you from getting lost.

USEFUL USA & CR TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Costa Rica Embassy (Washington DC.....1-202-499-2991/202-234-2945

Travelers Health Info (Center for Disease Control Info)..1-800-232-4636

Costa Rica Sun Tours – if calling from USA or Canada.....1-800-359-1684

Costa Rica Sun Tours – if calling within Costa Rica.....4001-5941

Costa Rica Sun Tours – After Hours Emergency.....8382-8335

TRAVEL INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- What if your trip is interrupted or delayed by unforeseen events?
- What if your baggage is lost in transit?
- What if you need medical assistance far from home?
- What if you have to cancel your trip?

It is important to consider these questions now before you leave on your trip. Trip cancellation/trip interruption insurance is strongly recommended for your protection. Prior to departure refunds are made only according to our Terms and Conditions, and it is understood that no refunds will be issued to travelers who do not complete their trip for any reason. Trip cancellation insurance will reimburse for non-refundable arrangements if you must cancel due to various reasons including injury, sickness or death, unannounced strike, weather delays of 48 hours, termination or lay-off, etc. Also check to be sure that you have adequate travel accident and medical insurance.

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECK-LIST

- ✓ Your passport must be valid for 6 months past the date of entry into Costa Rica, or you will not be allowed to enter the country.
- ✓ Inform Costa Rica Connection of your international air itinerary and of any schedule changes by the airline.
- ✓ Leave a copy of your itinerary with family and/or friends.
- ✓ Secure your home for the time you will be away.

MONEY MATTERS

▶ Currency

The national currency of Costa Rica is the colón. The exchange rate of the colón floats in relation to the US dollar. US currency is widely accepted in Costa Rica. However, to be accepted, US dollars should be crisp and new, or at least unworn and untorn. Small denominations are preferable. We recommend bringing some cash and using your credit and/or debit card.

▶ Credit Cards

Major credit cards are accepted at many hotels, restaurants and stores. VISA and MasterCard are more readily accepted than American Express. It is a good idea to inform your credit card issuer of your travel dates. Foreign transaction fees may apply, depending on your card. Check with your bank before traveling.

▶ Money Exchange/ATMs

You may exchange your US dollars at a money exchange house (casa de cambio), at a bank or at your hotel. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are common in San José and in all major towns but not as common in rural areas, although this is changing. ATMs will accept international credit and debit cards. We recommend that you do not change money on the street.

▶ Suggestion

Always take more than one form of payment with you. For example, in addition to your ATM/debit card, always bring a credit card and/or currency in case the card is stolen, damaged or doesn't work.

PACKING TIPS

Travel Light is the best advice any traveler can heed. Often you will have to carry your own bags, or at least lift them off the carousel! Domestic flights within Costa Rica have a baggage limit. If you exceed this limitation, it is possible to make arrangements to leave extra luggage in San José, but fewer bags always means less hassle. Pack only what you will need. When in doubt, leave it home!

Most of Costa Rica has warm weather. However in the highlands, especially in Dec/Jan, temperatures can be cold at night. Casual, informal and loose-fitting clothing is appropriate throughout Costa Rica. Bring clothes that wash and dry easily. Most importantly – bring comfortable lightweight walking shoes or hiking boots. Be sure your shoes are well broken in. Sore feet can ruin your trip. Rain gear may be necessary at any time of the year.

Lightweight, soft-sided luggage is most practical. Pack a collapsible bag in the bottom of your suitcase. It can be used to store belongings in San José and/or bring home purchases. Be sure that all your bags have tags which are clearly labeled. Include your name, address and a copy of your itinerary with contact information inside each bag.

Carry the minimum amount of valuables necessary for your trip and plan a place or places to conceal them. One of the safest places to carry valuables is in a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing.

If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair. Bring them and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage.

To avoid problems when passing through customs, keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. Bring a copy of your prescriptions and the generic names for the drugs.

We strongly recommend that you hand-carry the following:

- Passport and Travel Documents
- Prescription medicine
- Money
- Valuables
- Camera
- A change of clothing
- Mini toilet kit

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

Clothing

- Walking shoes (tennis or running shoes) or hiking boots (be sure they are well broken in)
- Hiking socks
- All terrain sandals or water shoes
- Loose fitting pants (jeans generally are too slow drying)
- Hiking shorts
- Short sleeve shirts or t-shirts
- Long sleeve shirt
- Warm sweater or sweatshirt
- Swim suit
- Sleepwear
- Lightweight rain jacket
- Sun hat
- Bandana or handkerchiefs

Personal Items & Equipment List

- Passport (bring a photocopy as well and keep separate to passport)
- Copy of complete flight itinerary
- Copy of travel insurance
- Your itinerary
- Personal first-aid kit
- Toilet kit
- Insect repellant (containing Deet)
- Sun block
- Washcloth
- Quick drying travel/camp towel
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- Sunglasses
- Camera and accessories
- Binoculars
- Collapsible umbrella
- Water bottle
- Good flashlight or headlamp
- Watch
- Reusable waterproof bags
- Daypack
- Notebook, address book, pens and pencils
- Reference guides
- Paperback book

DOCUMENTS FOR TRAVEL

Citizens of the United States and Canada are required to provide the following documentation for entry into Costa Rica. Citizens of other countries should consult the Costa Rican Consulate for entry requirements.

- **A valid United States or Canadian passport for each passenger including children. Expiration date on the passport must be at least six (6) months after the date of entry into Costa Rica.**
- **A ticket to leave Costa Rica.**
- **If traveling with minors (under age 18) please note the following:**
  - **If accompanied by both parents with the same name, no further documentation is required.**
  - **If accompanied by only one parent, a notarized letter of permission for the minor to travel outside the USA from the absent parent is required.**
  - **If the minor is not accompanied by either parent, a notarized letter of permission for the minor to travel outside the USA from each of the parents is required.**

Tourist cards or visas are not required with a United States or Canadian passport. The maximum stay is three months with a valid US or Canadian passport. *Carry your passport or a photocopy of the front pages and page with the entry stamp at all times!*

We recommend that you make at least one photocopy of your passport – the front pages showing passport number, photo, date and place of issue as well as expiration date. Photocopy should be kept separate from original. It is advisable to carry an additional passport photo. The photocopy and additional photo can facilitate the issuance of a new passport in the event of a loss.

DEPARTURE FROM THE USA

Check-in at the ticket counter at least two (preferably three) hours prior to your international flight. If there are any last minute changes to your flights (e.g.; snow storms delaying departure), please let us know as this will affect your arrival in Costa Rica, and we will need to inform the transfer guide who is to meet you at the airport.

ARRIVAL IN COSTA RICA

You will be asked to complete an immigration form for entry into Costa Rica. Upon arrival you will pass through immigration with your passport and completed immigration form. After going through immigration, proceed to collect your baggage. Take your baggage through customs, then proceed out of the building. If you have arranged for an arrival transfer, look for a sign with your party's name on it. The person holding the sign will give you the travel vouchers, and take you to your first destination. Be sure to look these vouchers over carefully. If you have any questions at this time, call the contact number on your Hotel & Contact List.

BAGGAGE LIMITATION ON FLIGHTS WITHIN COSTA RICA

All domestic and charter flights and any boat transportation have a weight allowance of 25 – 40 lbs. per person depending on the carrier and your own personal weight. Usually arrangements can be made to leave excess baggage at your hotel or in the care of Costa Rica Sun Tours. There may be an extra charge for the pick-up and/or drop-off of excess luggage. Airplanes fly as high as 10,000 ft. and are not pressurized. Spill-able liquids should be packed in plastic bags. It is important to understand that, for reasons of safety and cost, the baggage limit must be enforced on all light charter flights, regardless of whether or not they are full.

DOMESTIC FLIGHT DISCLAIMER

Costa Rica Sun Tours act solely as agents for the purchase of domestic airline tickets and the passage contract in use shall constitute the sole contract between the airline and the passenger. We are not responsible for cancellations or delays of domestic flights or for any lost services as a result of same. Domestic flights are regularly scheduled. In the case of non-operation of a domestic flight for any reason the client will be responsible for any additional expenses.

COSTA RICA TELEPHONE NUMBERS
(Numbers to use while in Costa Rica)

For assistance with any problems arising associated with your pre-paid travel arrangements, refer to your "*Hotel & Contact List*".

EMERGENCIES	911
Costa Rica Sun Tours – during office hours	4001-5941
Costa Rica Sun Tours – 24 hrs emergency line	8382-8335
Transit Police (San José)	2222-9330
Fire	911
Directory Assistance / Information	1113
International Operator	1116
Tourist Information	800-Tourism
USA Embassy	2519-2000
Canadian Embassy	2242-4400
Ambulance Red Cross	911
National Insurance Institute (INS)	800-800-8000 / 800-800-8001
Tow truck	2287-6000
Visa	0-800-011-0030
American Express	0-800-011-0776
MasterCard	0-800-011-0184
Credomatic	0-800-011-0776
To report government abuse or corruption call:	
Ombudsman's Office	2295-3643

Departure from Costa Rica

If you or the airline has made any changes to your departure flight, please contact Costa Rica Sun Tours. If you have arranged for a departure transfer, you will be met at your hotel and transferred to the airport at least 2½ to 3 hours prior to the flight time. Please be ready to leave the hotel lobby by this time. If you are renting a vehicle, we recommend that you drop the vehicle off at your hotel the night prior and arrange for a transfer to the airport the following morning.

Airline Telephone Numbers in San Jose

Air Canada	2441-8025
American Airlines	2248-9010 / 2442-1904
Delta Airlines	2257-4141
Condor Airlines	2243-1818
TACA / LACSA Airlines	2299-8222
United (Continental) Airlines	0800-0440005 or 2296-5617
US Airways	2520-0507

Costa Rica Departure Tax

As of May 2017 the Costa Rica airport departure tax is included in your flight ticket (except by Cubana and Spirit). Before checking in at the airline counter, you must fill out an immigration form that they will give you.

Duty on Purchases (when you return to the USA)

If you are bringing it back with you and you didn't have it when you left and its total value is more than your Customs exemption, then it is subject to duty. On the Customs declaration form you must state, in US dollars, what you actually paid for each item including all taxes. When returning from Costa Rica to the USA the customs exemption is $600.00. This means you can bring back goods and merchandise valued at up to a total of $600 without paying any duty. Everyone must fill out a Customs Declaration Form. *(See U.S. Customs "Know Before You Go" for complete information.)*

THOUGHTS ON MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP

The People

"Ticos", as Costa Ricans call themselves, are self-assured people characterized by genuine friendliness and great national pride. They have a largely European heritage and the society is dominated by a large middle class.

Pre-Conceptions

You probably have some pre-conceptions about what your trip will be like. You may have seen documentaries on the flora and fauna of Costa Rica. Remember that often those films and/or photos were taken over a long period of time. Don't be disappointed if you don't see a Quetzal in your first 15 minutes in the cloud forest. You also may expect Costa Rica to be more like your own country than it really is. We suggest that you leave all your pre-conceptions at home and accept Costa Rica for what it is – not for what you expect it to be. If this is your attitude right from the start, we're sure that Costa Rica will live up to and probably even exceed your original expectations.

Adapting

Part of the fun, and at times the difficulty, of traveling to new regions of the world is trying to adapt to various environments and situations (hotel, food, transportation, climate). Try to look at it as a positive, interesting and exciting experience. Also, try to observe and appreciate how the people of Costa Rica have adapted to their particular environment – don't focus solely on the plants and animals.

The Guide/Client Relationship

Even though the naturalists, drivers and other employees are called "guides", they do not have all the answers. Likewise we're sure that many of you can contribute your own expertise on a variety of subjects. Feel free to participate and share your knowledge for the benefit of all.

Enthusiasm

The more interest you show, the more your guides will tell you.

Interaction

Part of the fun of traveling is trying to communicate with the local people. Whatever Spanish you know, use it.

TIPPING GUIDELINES

The following guidelines may assist you if you feel compelled to show your gratitude financially to those who make your trip enjoyable:

- Restaurants are required by law to add 13% tax and 10% gratuity to the bill. You may wish to tip an extra 5% for exceptionally good service.
- Taxi drivers are not usually tipped unless extra service is provided. It is wise to negotiate a price before starting off to your destination.
- Bellboys are generally tipped a minimum of US $1.00 per bag at check-in and check-out.
- Chamber maids are often overlooked. US $2.00 per night is recommended.
- Naturalist Guides: It is customary to tip US $10.00 to $15.00 per person, per day, depending on the group size.
- Local Guides, River Guides, Adventure Guides, and Boat Captains: A suggested tip is US $5.00 to $6.00 per person, per day.
- Drivers and Transfer Guides: The recommended tip is US $3.00 to $5.00 per person, per day.

SOUVENIRS

Nothing says Costa Rica better than coffee. A pound of the best export-quality beans is a great gift, as well as a fragrant remembrance of Tico times past. You can find coffee in souvenir shops and, more cheaply, in supermarkets. There is also interesting coffee-bean jewelry, prettily packaged coffee-paper stationery, mellow coffee-based liqueurs and traditional "*chorreador*" coffee makers.

Another unique taste is Salsa Lizano, the spicy, fruity sauce that enlivens *gallo pinto*. It's an inexpensive, offbeat souvenir.

Traditional souvenirs include ceramics, hammocks, banana-paper products, painted oxcarts and a wide variety of wooden boxes and bowls. Jewelry made of polished seeds from rainforest trees and multi-hued woods is pretty, inexpensive and portable. Certain endangered hardwoods may be sold locally but can't legally be taken out of the country.

Customs will also confiscate archeological artifacts and products made from endangered species such as coral and turtles. Do not buy these items. Cuban and local cigars are sold everywhere. The Cuban varietyare still illegal for US import.

Many galleries and shops showcase sculpture and painting by local artists as well as masks, carvings and basketwork by indigenous crafts people. Reproductions of pre-Columbian gold and jade jewelry are also popular.

DRIVING IN COSTA RICA

San José has a complicated one-way street system and traffic is horrendous. We advise against driving in the city. If you choose to, then drive defensively. *Please note that according to local custom – cars do not yield to pedestrians and cars do not yield to other cars.*
Outside San José road conditions vary with locale and weather. Many roads are narrow and winding with no hard shoulder. Mudslides, fog and flooding are not unusual. Many roads in Costa Rica are not marked with route numbers (although this is improving).

Rental Cars

To rent a car in Costa Rica, you must:

- **Be at least 21 years of age**
- **Have a valid driver's license**
- **Have a major credit card with $1000 - $1500 of available credit**
- **Pay the mandatory collision damage waiver (CDW) insurance (cost varies by vehicle)**

Inspect the vehicle for scratches, dents, malfunctions when you pick it up (there is a large deductible on any insurance claim).

Ask any questions about the rental agreement when you pick up the vehicle.

Fasten your seat belt. Always obey speed limits and other traffic laws. Police in Costa Rica use radar.

Safety when you drive

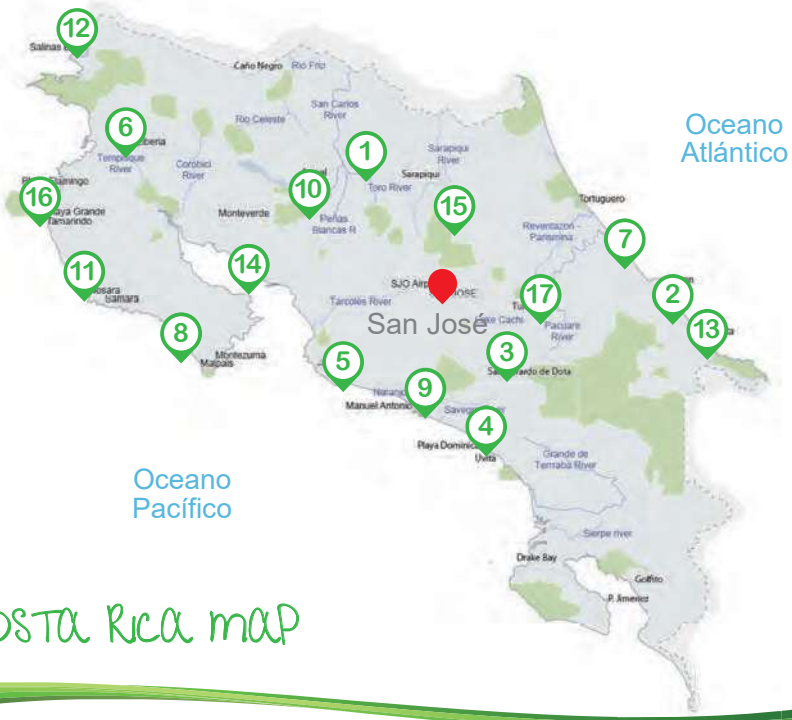
Do notstop if …

- **you are told something is wrong with your vehicle**
- **you notice or suspect you are being followed**
- **you see flashing headlights**
- **your vehicle is bumped from behind**

Drive to the nearest Police station or public area!

APPROXIMATE DISTANCES & DRIVING TIMES FROM SAN JOSÉ

	LOCATION	MILES	KM	TIME ESTIMATE
1	Arenal	93	150	4 hours
2	Cahuita	121	195	4½ hours
3	Cerro de la Muerte	49	80	2½ hours
4	Dominical	133	215	5 hours
5	Jacó Beach	62	100	2 hours
6	Liberia	131	211	4 hours
7	Limón	94	152	3 hours
8	Mal País	85	138	5 hours
9	Manuel Antonio	107	173	3 hours
10	Monteverde	89	144	5 hours
11	Nosara	157	254	5 hours
12	Papagayo	155	250	4½ hours
13	Puerto Viejo de Limón	131	212	4½ hours
14	Puntarenas	43	70	1½ hours
15	Sarapiquí	44	71	2 hours
16	Tamarindo	175	283	5 hours
17	Turrialba	40	64	1½ hours



Costa Rica map

SAFETY TIPS

Tourists are often better targets for petty theft than local citizens, in part because their attention often is focused on new sights and sounds rather than on personal security. Don't be paranoid, but do take a few simple precautions:

1. **Stay alert and aware of those around you**
2. **Travel with others**
3. **Avoid flashy jewelry**
4. **Wear your day pack on your chest rather than your back**
5. **Wear your fanny pack as a belly pack**
6. **Hold firmly onto your purse**
7. **Keep money in front, rather than back, pockets**
8. **Carry as little cash and valuables as possible.**
9. **Use a money belt**
10. **Carry a copy of your passport (front pages with passport number, photo, date and place of issue) rather than the original**
11. **Note that the local custom is that cars do not yield to pedestrians.**
13. **If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police.**

Note: Local police numbers are: in San José – 2295-3311
outside of San Jose – nearest Judical Investigative Police office.

Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims and as an explanation of your plight. After reporting missing items to the police, report the loss or theft of:

- **credit cards to the issuing company**
- **airline tickets to the airline or travel agent**
- **passport to the US embassy**

Precautions regarding taxis

- **Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings. Beware of unmarked cabs.**
- **If you are traveling alone in a taxi, lock the doors, and don't allow the driver to pick up any other passengers.**

CAUTIONS ABOUT INSECTS & SNAKES

BUGS

Costa Rica is home to a bevy of butterflies, moths, bees, chiggers and thousands of other insect species, many of which have yet to be identified. They are mainly a nuisance, and are generally manageable with a no-nonsense repellent and a mosquito net if you plan to sleep under the stars or in rustic cabins at the beach or rainforest.

SNAKES

Although very few tourists have been bitten by poisonous snakes in Costa Rica, they do exist in areas you may be traveling. Therefore, a few precautions are advisable. Consider all snakes poisonous unless your guide tells you otherwise. Small snakes can be just as deadly as big snakes. Watch where you walk. Always step on top of a log or rock obstructing a trail and look before stepping down. If you see a snake on the forest floor, stop and step back. In tall grass, poke the ground before you with a stick as you walk and wear rubber boots or sturdy shoes.

BEES

All the classic honeybees in Costa Rica are Africanized “killer” bees, which become highly aggressive when defending a hive. They nest mainly in hollow trees, fallen logs and crevices. If you accidentally disturb a nest, run fast in a zigzag pattern for dense brush, the nearest house or body of water. Little black bees and tiny orange honeybees, known as “Marias”, are harmless.

CAUTIONS ABOUT NATURE & THE ELEMENTS

Mud and Rain

Mud and rain are inevitable in the tropics, so be prepared. May through November rain falls nearly every afternoon. And the December-April "dry season" does not necessarily apply to the Caribbean and Southern zones, where torrential rains can fall any time. If you venture into the countryside or jungle, be prepared with a rain poncho, plastic bags to protect your camera and an umbrella. High rubber boots are the best protection against mud.

Dehydration and Sunburn

Intense tropical sun and heat can ruin a vacation if you don't take care to drink lots of water and protect yourself with a hat and sunscreen. Costa Rica is only 10 degrees north of the equator which means the ultraviolet rays from the sun are more direct and stronger than in the USA. A location at high altitudes where the air is thinner means an increased chance of sunburn. Please use sun block or sunscreen with a SPF 15 or higher.

Falling Down

In general, much of what is interesting in the tropical forest is up in the trees, and much of what is dangerous is on the ground. Two simple safety rules then are:

1) When you're looking up, don't move your feet.

2) When you're moving your feet, look down!

A common accident is slipping and falling while walking in the rainforest.

It also seems that getting on and off buses and vans is a lot more dangerous than one might think. Please be careful.

Sea Safety

Check with your hotel, guide or local people about rip tides and undertows before you get in the water. If you get caught in a rip tide, let it take you until you feel its pull lessening, then swim parallel to the shore until free of the current before attempting to swim back towards the shore.

INFORMATION ABOUT COSTA RICA

COSTA RICA FACTS

Name:	Name: Republic of Costa Rica
Location:	Central America, South of Nicaragua, North of Panama
Capital:	San José
Area:	51,000 km sq (about the size of West Virginia)
Population:	4 ,857,348 (2016 est.)
Infant mortality rate:	9.9 per 1,000 live births
Life expectancy:	74 years for males, 79 years for females
Ethnic divisions:	White (including mestizo) 94%, Black 3%, Indian 1%, Chinese 1%, other 1%
Religions:	Roman Catholic 79%, Evangelical 14%. Protestant faiths are practiced, and there is a small Jewish community.
Language:	Spanish (official), English spoken around Puerto Limon, in the tourism industry, and by most professionals in the Central Valley
Administrative division:	7 provinces: Alajuela, Cartago, Guanacaste, Heredia, Limón, Puntarenas, San José
Form of Government:	Democratic republic with two similar centrist dominant parties: National Liberation Party (PLN) and Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC). Elections are held every four years.
Education:	Free and compulsory through the 6th year
Principal industries:	Tourism and agriculture (coffee, sugarcane, pineapple…)

BRIEF HISTORY OF COSTA RICA

In 1502 Christopher Columbus landed at "Cariari," known today as Puerto Limon. Christopher Columbus actually named Costa Rica (rich coast) under the assumption that the land was filled with precious metals. The earth never yielded gold and silver, but the name was perfect for the wealth of natural beauty and flawless climate. Located in Central America, Costa Rica is bordered by Nicaragua on the north, by Panama on the south, the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Caribbean on the east.

The country has a territory of 51,000 km2 and a population of 4,800,000. Mountains spread from the northwest to the southeast forming a fertile central valley measuring approximately 3,000 km. The great majority of the population is concentrated here. The first settlers in Costa Rica were the Chorotega, Cabécar, Bribri, Huetares and Bruncas; today there are still about 20,000 Indians living here.

Costa Rica was settled by those relatively few Spanish immigrants who valued natural beauty and independence more than riches. Since the rugged mountainous land was not suitable for large plantations, Costa Rica developed into a country of independent family farmers. Even now they are the backbone of the country. This, more than anything else, explains the fact that from independence (1821) on, Costa Rica has been the most stable democratic country in Latin America.

Peaceful Costa Rica has been ruled since 1949 by democratically elected presidents. The Executive Power is exercised by the President, a person who must be over thirty years old and of Costa Rican birth. The constitution prohibits any army, to maintain peace and order the Civil Guard serves as a police force.

Costa Rica has avoided the armed conflicts that have engulfed neighboring nations, and has concentrated on improving life for its citizens. The development of a modern welfare state has resulted in Costa Rica having high health indicators, a good standard of living, and high literacy rates. Costa Rica is one of the world's more prosperous developing countries and is currently the focus of international attention for its incredible biodiversity.

CLIMATE

Be prepared for sunshine, rain, cool mountain breezes, and muggy jungle mists depending on where and when you plan to visit. Rugged topography means that Costa Rica has an amazing biodiversity and a wide variety of microclimates. As you ascend or descend in altitude, or move from one province to another, the weather can change dramatically.

Conditions are pleasantly moderate all year long and are often compared to a never-ending spring. There is a rainy season or "green" season from May to November. The dry season lasts from December through April. Even during the rainy season, mornings are likely to be bright and sunny.

The average temperature is 72°F (22°C) in the highlands and varies from the high 70's F(26-28°C) to the low 90's F (32-35°C) in the lowlands. The Central Valley has a year around average temperature of about 75°F (24°C) with highs in the upper 80's F (30-33°C) and lows in the upper 50's F (13-16°C). The two coasts are warm all year with highs in the 80's F (27-32°C). High humidity makes it feel warmer. The mountain lodges and highlands can get chilly when the sun goes down and in areas where clouds shroud the mountain tops. Temperatures can drop as much as 20°F during the night.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES IN COSTA RICA

Place	Elevation (feet)	High	Low
San José	3,200	80°F(27°C)	61°F(16°C)
Tiskita Lodge/Golfito	10-200	91°F(33°C)	72°F(22°C)
Arenal	150-2,000	85°F(29°C)	61°F(16°C)
Monteverde	4,500-6,000	80°F(27°C)	61°F(16°C)
Limón/Tortuguero	10	87°F(31°C)	71°F(22°C)
Liberia/Guanacaste	0-280	92°F(33°C)	72°F(22°C)
Puntarenas	10	92°F(33°C)	73°F(23°C)

FOOD AND DRINK

Water

Water is both safe and refreshing throughout Costa Rica. However, we do recommend that you drink bottled water in remote areas and port cities. Bottled water is available at hotels, grocery stores and restaurants.

Costa Rican Cuisine

We are sure you will enjoy many of Costa Rica's typical dishes which take advantage of the fruits, vegetables and grains abundant there. Costa Rican cooking is mild rather than spicy, and is based around their love affair with rice and beans. It seems that the 'Tico' appetite isn't satisfied unless rice and beans are on the menu at least once a day. At breakfast *gallo pinto* (their national dish) is one of the tastier ways to combine arroz y frijoles, and you'll have a chance to try it at any hotel in the country.

Unlike other Latin American countries and restaurants, Costa Rican food is not spicy or hot. There is a large variety of hot sauces available to add to your meal which allows for individual preferences. Costa Rican food is very similar to North American "home cooked" meals with a wonderful array of exceptionally high quality beef, chicken and seafood being a staple part of the Tico diet.

San José is a cosmopolitan city with various international foods available. Some lodges employ internationally acclaimed chefs.

HEALTH INFORMATION

Medical advice should be sought by consulting your doctor or an international health clinic before you travel. The following medical suggestions should not be substituted for consultation with a physician. Carry appropriate health and accident insurance documents and copies of any important medical records. Discuss appropriate prescription and over-the counter medications to combat traveler's diarrhea. Be sure to bring a supply of these and any other medicines you regularly require sufficient to last your entire stay. Bring a spare pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses.

Immunizations

No innoculations or vaccinations are required as a condition for entry into Costa Rica unless you are coming from or passing through contaminated areas. For your personal protection it is recommended that your Tetanus, Diphtheria and Polio booster shots are current. Depending on your itinerary, your personal risk factors and the length of your visit, your health care provider may offer you vaccination against Hepatitis A, Typhoid or Hepatitis B. Consult your doctor for further information.

Malaria

The risk of malaria does exist in Costa Rica, more in the rural lowland areas (generally below 1600 feet or 500 meters altitude). The medicine Cloroquine protects against this type of malaria. Serious side effects are rare, but it may be inappropriate for some people. Because no malaria drug is 100% effective, seek immediate medical attention for any fever or flu-like illness occurring within 3 months of your return home. Be sure to tell your health care provider of your travel history.

Insect-borne Diseases

Insects transmit a variety of diseases in this country, mostly in the rural lowland areas. Risk for most of these diseases will vary considerably according to your itinerary and activities. Mosquitoes, in particular, transmit malaria and dengue fever. Personal protective measures are important.

Food and Water-borne Diseases

Quite a few diseases, including Hepatitis A and Typhoid Fever, are transmitted by unsanitary food handling procedures and contaminated water. Food and beverage precautions are essential in order to avoid illness.

Dengue Fever

Costa Rica has suffered from a re-emergence of Dengue Fever in recent years, although the incidence rate remains lower than in other Central American countries. Dengue is transmitted by mosquite bite and there is no vaccine. Travelers should take steps to avoid mosquito bites.

Other Health Information

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions may be obtained from the Center for Disease Control at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or via the CDC's web site at www.cdc.gov/travel/

Medical Facilities

Costa Rica's medical system is considered among the best in the world. The country has a very complete and modern public hospital system with health services and clinics in all major cities as well as in many of the smaller towns. There are also private medical facilities available in most ares.

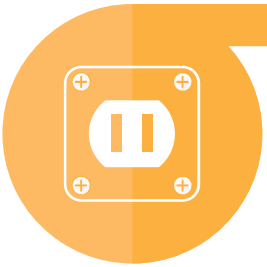
BUSINESS HOURS

Costa Rican business hours vary with respect to the type of business. Some businesses close for lunch of 1 to 2 hours. Following is a list of normal hours by type of establishment. Be aware of holiday closings.

Government offices	8:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Banking	9:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Professionals(lawyers, accountants, etc.)	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Service-oriented businesses	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Shops/shopping centers	9:00 AM to 8:00 PM

POSTAL SERVICE

There are post offices in towns and cities all over Costa Rica. Letters and postcards may be sent from most hotels. Expect your postcards to arrive home after you do.Never send cash or anything else of value by regular mail from Costa Rica. Federal Express, DHL and other courier services are available.



ELECTRICITY

Costa Rica's electrical system is compatible with that of North America, 110 volts. Three pronged grounded plugs are more common today but you will still find two pronged. If you have equipment that needs a three pronged plug, be sure to bring a three to two plug adapter or buy one at a hardware store.

PHONE SERVICE / INTERNET

TELEPHONES

Costa Rica's telephone system offers international direct dialing to most countries at reasonable rates. All phone booths are connected to the international system, and you can connect directly to operators in the USA and Canada to call collect or use your credit card. To dial direct from Costa Rica to the US dial 001 - area code - number. For the international operator dial 1116. Public phones take phone cards with an electromagnetic strip which you may purchase at pharmacies, stationery stores or supermarkets. All calls within Costa Rica are in the same area code.

CELL PHONES

Costa Rica has good cell phone service. You may choose to bring your own unlocked GSM phone and purchase a prepaid Simcard from one of the local phone companies (Kolbi, Claro or Movistar) at the San José International Airport. Be sure it works on the correct band - in Costa Rica they use 1800 MHz. Another other option is to purchase an inexpensive GSM phone that comes with a prepaid Simcard locally – these will cost anywhere from $20-$40 with up to $20 in free minutes.Please ask us if you have questions.

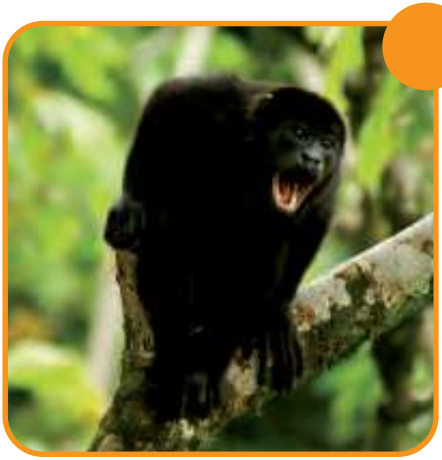
INTERNET

Most, but not all, hotels offer Wireless Internet access – not always in your room and not always for free. Check with us beforehand if this is important to you. There are also many internet cafés and restaurants with wifi.

WILDLIFE

RESPLENDENT QUETZAL

The name is exotic. The bird is exotic. A member of the trogon family, the Resplendent Quetzal was a symbol of freedom and independence to some indigenous Central American people. It thrives in Costa Rica. Though Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve is the most famous site for seeing this fantastic iridescent bird with its blue-green head, neck and body and its crimson belly, other national parks and forests are home to the quetzal. The birds are endangered because of destruction of their habitat.



HOWLER MONKEY

Howler monkeys live in groups in Costa Rica's lowland forests. Each troop has its own territory which it defends and where it feeds. They defend their territory by using their loud voices. Howler monkeys eat flowers, fruits and seeds. Females have one infant at a time, which can often be seen clinging to its mother.

SLOTHS

These slow moving mammals live high in the canopy, eat leaves and only come down to defecate once a week. Two and three-toed sloths live in Costa Rica. Three-toed sloths can appear grey-greenish because of algae that grow on their fur.

TOUCANS

Five kinds of toucans live in Costa Rica, but the Keel Billed is one of the most common. They use their large bills to hunt lizards, small snakes, frogs, as well as seeds and fruits. The bills are also useful to chase other birds away from their nests. They are social birds and can be found in groups of six or more. They nest in hollow tree trunks.

GREEN IGUANA

Costa Rica has two kinds of large lizard-like reptiles: green iguanas and “black iguanas” (which are not technically an iguana). These ground nesting reptiles can be found high in the treetops, feeding on leaves and basking in the sun. Juvenile iguanas eat grubs and other invertebrates, while adults are mostly plant eaters but will occasionally eat small mammals and nesting birds.

WHITE-NOSED COATI (COATIMUNDI)

A relative of the raccoon, these medium-sized mammals are diurnal and live in large groups, although some adult males live on their own. These omnivores are active feeders that look for food on the ground as well as in the trees. They feed by poking their long noses in holes and crevices, and use their long claws to tear apart rotten tree trunks.

SEA TURTLES

Six of the world's eight species of sea turtles nest on Costa Rica's coasts. Though it is possible to see a turtle laying eggs on a beach almost any night of the year, there are times when turtles arrive in large numbers at particular sites. The turtle species are green, leather-back, hawksbill, olive ridley, Pacific green, and loggerhead.

TURTLE-WATCHING

Practice proper turtle-watching etiquette!
Stay still when a turtle comes onto the beach – movement may scare it back into the water. Light disturbs the turtles, so all light is now prohibited – no flashlights are allowed, no flash cameras. Wear dark clothing. Wait until turtles are laying their eggs before drawing near. Be quiet!

FROGS

Famous frogs are the red-eyed tree frog and the poison dart frog. The poison dart frog is a tiny frog that advertises its toxicity with its bright color. They are less than an inch long and can be found under low plant leaves. There are at least twenty poison-arrow frogs, thus named because of their use of the toxins in deadly arrows of some natives. The tink frog was named for the sound that it emits. Many of the tropical frogs are so specialized that they have learned to survive in the canopies of trees by using the water that's deposited in bromeliads and tree trunks.

BUTTERFLIES

More than 1,000 species of butterflies flit about the country in a never-ending kaleidoscope of color. The undisputed king of the butterfly realm is the saucer-sized, neon-bright morpho, flashing its electric blue wings. Subspecies differ in coloration according to locale. To learn about butterfly ecology, visit a butterfly “farm”, most of which are live exhibits. There are more than a dozen Butterfly Farms and/or Gardens in Costa Rica.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Read as much as you can about Costa Rica before you travel. The more you know, the more interesting your adventure will be. Here are a few suggestions.

Travel Guides

There are many travel guides written about Costa Rica. Choose your favorite.

Field Guides

Field Guide to the Wildlife of Costa Rica, Carrol L Henderson

The Birds of Costa Rica , Richard Garrigues & Robert Dean

Tropical Plants of Costa Rica, Willow Zuchowski

The Natural History of Costa Rican Mammals, Mark Wainwright

Other

A Neotropical Companion, John C. Kricher

Nature's Paradise, Douglas Goodell& Marco Saborio

Life Above the Jungle Floor, D. Perry

Costa Rica: The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide, Les Beletsky

Costan Rican Natural History, Daniel Janzen

The History of Costa Rica, Iván Molina and Steven Palmer

Walking with Wolf, Kay Chornook and Wolf Guindon

Costa Rica, A Traveler´s Literary Companion, Barbara Ras

The Quetzal and the Macaw: The Story of Costa Rica's National Parks, David Rains Wallace