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# costa rican spanish



official language

For more details, see the **introduction**.

Costa Rican Spanish lounges under the beach umbrella of Latin American Spanish – the term given to the many varieties of Spanish that have evolved in the Americas after the Spanish conquests in the 16th century. The language that originally emerged as one of the branches of vulgar Latin successfully took root and spread in the New World and now has official status in 20 countries of Latin America.

Not only did the Spanish language successfully transplant itself, it also hybridised with the indigenous languages and became a colourful array of different varieties of Spanish. Among them, Costa Rican stands out as a unique linguistic entity with its own intriguing quirks of both grammar and vocabulary.

The main grammatical peculiarity is *voseo* **vo-se-o** – the use of *vos* (meaning ‘you’) as the second-person singular pronoun, which is considered an archaism in Spain. This is a feature that Costa Rican shares with varieties of Spanish found in other Latin American countries, particularly Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay,

Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In vocabulary, the abundance of diminutives formed by adding *-tico* **·tee-ko** and *-tica* **·tee-ka** to the ends of masculine and feminine words respectively – a cutesy way of saying ‘small’ or expressing affection – has earned Costa Ricans the nickname *Ticos*.

Perhaps what gives Costa Rican Spanish its most distinctive flavour is the rich store of slang expressions commonly known as *tiquismos* **tee-kees-mos**.

### at a glance ...

**language name:**

Costa Rican Spanish

**name in language:**

*español* (*costarricense*)

*es·pa·nyol*

(*kos·ta·ree·sen·se*),

*castellano* *kas·te·ya·no*

**language family:** Romance

**approximate number of speakers:** over 3 million

**close relatives:**

Castilian Spanish,  
Latin American Spanish,  
Italian, French,  
Portuguese

This phrasebook contains many of these unique turns of phrase to get you talking like a Tico or a Tica and blending in with the crowd. Take it with you and you'll learn exactly why the expression *pura vida* *poo-ra vee-da* embodies the friendly, unhurried approach to life in Costa Rica. You'll also learn a lot about other key elements of Costa Rican culture expressed in the language.

Though it's a distinct variety of Spanish, Costa Rican does share many similarities with its Latin American siblings which set it apart from the mother language, Castilian Spanish. Costa Rican was influenced by the southern Spanish dialect of Andalusia, from where the first Spanish conquistadors sailed to the New World. The most noticeable trait that sets Costa Rican pronunciation apart from Castilian Spanish is common for the entire continent – *seseo* *se-se-o*, or the absence of the lisping consonants *c* and *z*, as in *cerveza* *ser-ve-sa* (beer).

By learning some Costa Rican Spanish, you're opening the door to a world of over 350 million speakers – and be reassured, while it's a distinct variety with its own beautiful individualities, Costa Rican Spanish will be understood by speakers all over Latin America – and even in Spain.

This book gives you the practical phrases you need to get by, as well as the fun, social phrases that lead to a better understanding of Costa Rica and its people. It will also ensure that you can pronounce them like a true *Tico* or *Tica*. To help you get the most out of your travels in beautiful Costa Rica with its many natural wonders, this phrasebook also provides you with an ecotourism section listing the names of flora, fauna and natural features in both Spanish and English.

The contacts you make through speaking Costa Rican Spanish will make your travel experience unique. Local knowledge, new relationships and a sense of satisfaction are on the tip of your tongue – so don't just stand there, say something!

## abbreviations used in this book

a	adjective	n	noun
adv	adverb	pl	plural
f	feminine	pol	polite
inf	informal	sg	singular
m	masculine	v	verb

Costa Rican Spanish pronunciation isn't hard, as most of the sounds are also found in English. The best way to learn the correct pronunciation is to listen to the people around you.

Costa Rican Spanish pronunciation differs from the Castilian Spanish spoken in Spain. The most obvious difference is the lack of the lisping 'th' sound. With a little practice you'll soon get the basics and even if you can't roll your *r*'s or hiss out your *j*'s like a Tico or a Tica, your efforts are certain to be rewarded.

## vowel sounds

Vowels are generally short and clear. In a number of cases, however, two vowels can be very closely combined (so-called 'diphthongs').

symbol	english equivalent	spanish example	transliteration
a	run	<i>agua</i>	<i>a-gwa</i>
ai	aisle	<i>baile</i>	<i>bai-le</i>
ay	say	<i>seis</i>	<i>says</i>
e	bed	<i>edad</i>	<i>e-dad</i>
ee	bee	<i>idioma, y</i>	<i>ee-dyo-ma, ee</i>
o	not	<i>ojo</i>	<i>o-kho</i>
oo	good	<i>uva</i>	<i>oo-va</i>
ow	cow	<i>autobús</i>	<i>ow-to-boos</i>
oy	boy	<i>hoy</i>	<i>oy</i>
ya	yard	<i>viaje</i>	<i>vya-khe</i>
ye	yes	<i>tiempo</i>	<i>tyem-po</i>