



Costa Rica

506 / POP 4.7 MILLION

Includes →

San José	529
Monteverde & Santa Elena.....	571
La Fortuna & Volcán Arenal.....	580
Liberia.....	586
Península de Nicoya.....	591
Montezuma	601
Mal País & Santa Teresa.....	604
Manuel Antonio	610
Southern Costa Rica & Península de Osa.....	613

Best Places to Eat

- Bread & Chocolate (p570)
- Café Caburé (p578)
- Restaurant Mary (p604)
- Taco Bar (p606)
- Café Milagro (p609)

Best Places to Stay

- Hotel Pura Vida (p568)
- Arenal Hostel Resort (p582)
- Chilamate Rainforest Eco Retreat (p584)
- Luna Llana (p601)
- Casa Mariposa (p615)

Why Go?

The bellowing of howler monkeys echoes across the tree-tops. Magnificent frigate birds circle high overhead, while less-than-sonorous squawking uncovers a pair of scarlet macaws. Morning breaks in the coastal rainforest.

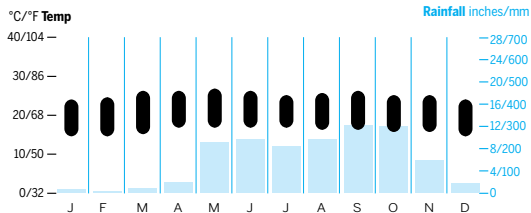
Similar scenes unfold across Costa Rica, from the dry tropical forest along the Pacific coast to the misty cloud forest at higher altitudes. One-third of this country's area is protected, making it a wildlife wonderland.

The flora and fauna are only part of the appeal. Annually Costa Rica attracts more than one million visitors eager to catch a wave, climb a volcano or otherwise partake of paradise.

It's never easy to maintain the delicate balance between preserving natural resources and cashing in on economic opportunity, but Ticos are tireless in their efforts. These peace-loving people are eager to share the staggering scenery, bountiful biodiversity and complete contentment of *pura vida*, the 'pure life' of Costa Rica.

When to Go

San José



Jan–Apr The 'dry' season sees consistently hot temperatures and sunny skies.

May–Jul Crowds thin out and prices drop at the beginning of the 'green' rainy season.

Dec The holidays are festive, though accommodation prices skyrocket.

Connections

You can enter overland from Nicaragua (at Peñas Blancas or Los Chiles) and from Panama (at Sixaola, Paso Canoas or Río Sereno). For more detailed information, see Survival Guide on p634.

FIRST TIME IN COSTA RICA

One Week

From San José, beeline north to **La Fortuna** to hike on the flanks of **Volcán Arenal** and soak in the area's hot springs. Then catch a boat across Laguna de Arenal, and a bus to **Monteverde**, where you might just encounter the elusive quetzal on a stroll through the **Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde**. Head south to Quepos and finish your week exploring the rainforest and soaking up the sun at **Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio**.

Two Weeks

Continue south to discover the under-explored southern sector. Scale the country's highest peak (3820m) at **Parque Nacional Chirripó** or blaze a trail through the pristine rainforest of **Parque Nacional Corcovado**. End your trip on the culturally distinct Caribbean coast, where you can paddle a maze of canals around **Tortuguero** or indulge in surf, sun and fun in **Puerto Viejo de Talamanca**.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ The Tico diet consists largely of rice and beans and – when it's time to change things up – beans and rice.
- ➔ Breakfast for Ticos is usually *gallo pinto* (literally 'spotted rooster'), a stir-fry of rice and beans, usually served with eggs, cheese or *natilla* (sour cream).
- ➔ Most restaurants offer a set meal at lunch and dinner called a *casado*, or a 'married man's' lunch, featuring meat, beans, rice and salad. An extremely popular *casado* is the ubiquitous *arroz con pollo*, or chicken and rice.
- ➔ Seafood is plentiful, fresh and delicious. While it's not traditional Tico fare, you'll find *ceviche* on most menus (raw fish or shrimp, marinated in lime juice and served chilled).
- ➔ On the Caribbean coast, the cuisine shows off its Caribbean roots. Don't miss a chance to sample *rondón*, a spicy seafood gumbo.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Costa Rican colón; US dollars (US\$) also accepted

Language Spanish & English

Money ATMs are ubiquitous; credit and debit cards widely accepted

Visas Generally not required for stays less than 90 days

Time GMT minus six hours; no daylight saving time

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 51,100 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** San José
- ➔ **Emergency** 911

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Dorm bed** US\$12 to US\$16
- ➔ **Casado** US\$3 to US\$6
- ➔ **Bus fare** US\$3 to US\$10
- ➔ **National park admission** US\$10
- ➔ **Zip-line canopy tour** US\$40 to US\$60

Resources

- ➔ **Tico Times** (www.ticotimes.net)
- ➔ **Costa Rica Tourism Board** (www.visitcostarica.com)
- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com)