



Costa Rica

📍 506 / POP 4.87 MILLION

Includes ➔

San José.	520
Central Valley & Highlands.	533
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La Fortuna & Volcán Arenal	554
Monteverde & Santa Elena.	561
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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Café de los Deseos (p527)
- ➔ Jalapeños Central (p536)
- ➔ Como en mi Casa Art Café (p552)
- ➔ Orchid Coffee (p567)
- ➔ Cocina Clandestina (p585)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Camp Supertramp (p581)
- ➔ Luz en el Cielo (p584)
- ➔ Flutterby House (p597)
- ➔ Hostel Pangea (p525)
- ➔ Aracari Garden Hostel (p543)
- ➔ Buddha House (p589)

Why Go?

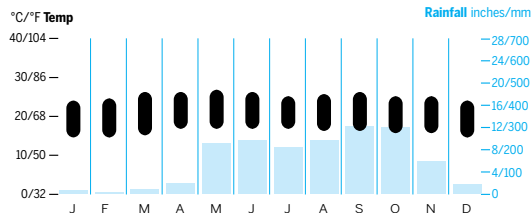
The bellowing of howler monkeys echoes across the tree-tops. Magnificent frigate birds circle high overhead, while less-than-sonorous squawking uncovers a pair of scarlet macaws. Morning breaks in the coastal rainforest. Similar scenes unfold across Costa Rica, from the dry tropical forest along the 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 during the 'green' rainy season.

Dec The holidays are festive, though accommodation prices skyrocket.

Connections

You can enter overland from Nicaragua (at Peñas Blancas, Las Tablillas or Los Chiles) and from Panama (at Sixaola, Paso Canoas or Río Sereno). For more detailed information, see Survival Guide p618.

ITINERARIES

One Week

From San José, beeline north to La Fortuna. After a refreshing forest hike on the flanks of Volcán Arenal, soak in the country's best hot springs. Then catch a boat across Laguna de Arenal, and a bus to Monteverde, where you might encounter the elusive quetzal on a stroll through the Bosque Nuboso Monteverde.

Next: beach time. Head west to the biggest party town in Guanacaste, Playa Tamarindo, and enjoy the ideal surf, top-notch restaurants and rowdy nightlife.

Two Weeks

In week two, visit waterfalls and linger a bit in chilled-out Montezuma, where you can connect via jet boat to Jacó, another town with equal affection for surfing and partying. Spend half a day busing to Quepos, the gateway to Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio. A full day in the park starts with some jungle hikes and wildlife-watching and ends with a picnic and a dip in the park's perfect waters.

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* (chicken and rice).
- ➔ Seafood is plentiful, fresh and delicious. While it's not traditional Tico fare, you'll find *ceviche* (raw fish or shrimp, marinated in lime juice and served chilled) on most menus.
- ➔ 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

Languages 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; no daylight saving time

Area 51,100 sq km

Capital San José

Emergency ☎911

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	₡397
Canada	C\$1	₡418
Euro	€1	₡606
Japan	¥100	₡506
New Zealand	NZ\$1	₡378
UK	UK£1	₡762
US	US\$1	₡536

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Dorm bed** US\$8 to US\$15
- ➔ **Casado** US\$3 to US\$8
- ➔ **Bus fare** US\$4 to US\$12
- ➔ **National park admission** US\$15
- ➔ **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)