



Caribbean Coast

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Why Go

While the sunny climate and easy accessibility of the Pacific have paved the way (literally) for development on that rich coast, the Caribbean side has languished in comparison. The same rain-drenched malarial wildness that thwarted the first 16th-century Spaniards from settling here also isolated this region for centuries afterward. Thus, its culture – influenced by indigenous peoples and West Indian immigrants – blended slowly and organically and is distinctly different from the rest of Costa Rica. It still takes a little more effort to travel here to see the nesting turtles of Tortuguero, raft the Río Pacuare or dive the reefs of Manzanillo. Life is more rugged and rustic on this coast, allowing wildlife to thrive. And it's well worth tasting its unique flavors: the *rondón* (spicy seafood gumbo), the lilt of patois, and the uncrowded stretches of black-sand beaches.

Best Places to Eat

- » Cha Cha Cha (p430)
- » Stashu's con Fusion (p441)
- » Selvin's Restaurant (p448)
- » La Pecora Nera (p446)
- » Maxi's Restaurant (p449)

Best Places to Stay

- » Rana Roja (p416)
- » Tortuga Lodge & Gardens (p416)
- » Playa Negra Guesthouse (p427)
- » Hotel Pura Vida (p437)
- » Costa Rica Tree House Lodge (p447)

When to Go

As evidenced by the spectacularly lush greenery in this region, there's no traditional 'dry season.' It rains throughout the year, though less in February and March and September and October – this latter period conveniently coinciding with when the rest of the country is getting soaked. Surfers, note: the biggest swells hit the southern Caribbean from December to March. Turtle-nesting season runs from March to October. January to June and September to December are best for sportfishing, although fishing is good year-round in the northern Caribbean.

Caribbean Coast Highlights

1 Canoe the jungle canals of **Tortuguero** (p412) in search of caiman, river otter and night heron

2 Surf, sample the culinary scene, laze on the beach and party in **Puerto Viejo de Talamanca** (p432)

3 Visit cacao and iguana farms at the **indigenous villages** (p444) around Bribri

4 Chill out in rustic bliss in **Cahuita** (p424) and soak up its Caribbean Creole culture

5 Overdose on the dangerous cuteness of baby sloths at **Aviarios del Caribe** (p421)

6 Snorkel the teeming reefs off of end-of-the-road **Manzanillo** (p448)

7 Volunteer to protect **endangered sea turtles**

8 Navigate a 4WD over pothole craters and hike through cloud forest to the summit lagoons of **Volcán Barva** (p401)

