



Understand Costa Rica

COSTA RICA TODAY 476

A contemporary snapshot of Costa Rican life in the 21st century.

HISTORY 479

Starting with its pre-Columbian people, this is the story of a country shaped by everything from banana plantations to ecotourism.

THE TICO WAY OF LIFE 488

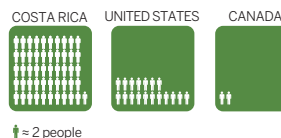
Get to know what makes Ticos tick and the culture behind the ubiquitous mantra of '*pura vida*.'

LANDSCAPES & ECOLOGY 493

A tour through the dynamic forces of nature that have created this fascinating tropical landscape.



population per sq km



Costa Rica Today

Weathering the Economic Storm

Even despite the economic tumult that has rocked the world since 2008, Costa Rica's economy has remained remarkably stable thanks to consistently growing returns on tourism. Tourism now outpaces both agriculture and industry for the biggest slice of the economy. If you're concerned about the availability of an English menu, take note: North Americans now account for nearly half the country's 2.2 million annual tourists.

Aside from tourism, the country's principal agriculture exports include pineapples, coffee, fruits and plants, while industrial exports include microchips, construction materials, fertilizer and medical equipment.

Poverty levels have been kept in check for more than 20 years by strong welfare programs. Although approximately 21% of the populace lives below the poverty line – up 5% since 2008 – beggars are few and far between, and you won't see the street kids you see in other Latin American capitals. In fact, a good system of social services has made panhandling and begging extremely rare in Costa Rica.

Foreign investors continue to be attracted by the country's political stability, high education and well-developed tourism infrastructure. In recent years, while the American investment has been checkered, Costa Rica's most promising international economic partner has become China. China has made a number of large investments in the country's infrastructure in recent years, including a 2012 \$1.7 billion investment to modernize an oil refinery on the Caribbean, and the shiny new Estadio Nacional de Costa Rica, the nation's largest sporting venue, which was financed entirely by the Chinese government and completed in 2011.

Laura Chinchilla Miranda, Costa Rica's first female president, has made economic stability a large focus since being reelected in 2010. While in office she has made major efforts to encourage Canadian investment and in 2011 she made a highly publicized tour through Asia to strengthen economic ties to the region.

- » Population: 4.25 million
- » Adult literacy: 96%
- » Population living below the poverty line: 21%
- » Annual carbon-dioxide emissions per person: 1.85 tons
- » Year projected for countrywide carbon neutrality: 2021

Faux Pas

Topless Sunbathing It isn't appropriate for women to bathe topless in public areas, and can be offensive to your hosts. The first warning from police may be gentle, but the second can result in a ticket.

'La hora Tica' Don't be put off if your local host views an appointment as more of a ballpark suggestion for when to meet.

Gringo Media

» *Tico Times* – Costa Rica's biggest English-language newspaper is high quality, though news and views are often geared toward the expat community (www.ticotimes.com).