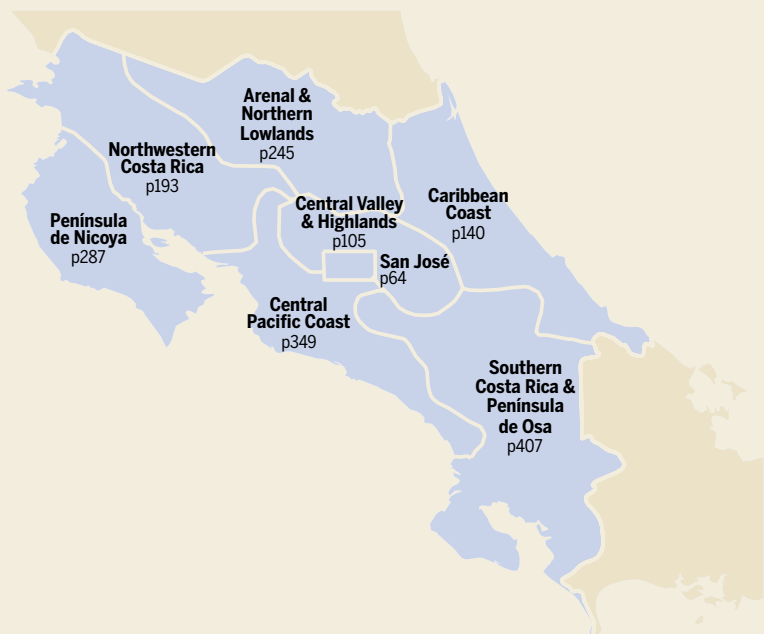




# Costa Rica



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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# Itineraries



## Essential Costa Rica

This is the trip you've been dreaming about: a romp through paradise with seething volcanoes, tropical parks and ghostly cloud forests.

From **San José**, beeline north to **La Fortuna**. After hiking the forest on the flanks of **Volcán Arenal**, soak in the area's 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 Nicoya, **Playa Tamarindo**, and enjoy the ideal surf and rowdy nightlife.

Continuing south, 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.



2  
WEEKS

## Northern Costa Rica

After landing in **San José**, make for the hanging bridges and breathtaking scenery of the **Bosque Nuboso Monteverde**, one of Costa Rica's most iconic destinations. Just watching the mists roll over the dense forests is a subtle thrill, but the add-ons around here sweeten the deal: dizzying zip lines and aerial walkways, excellent hikes and one of the country's best butterfly gardens.

After a few days in the cloud forest, hop on a bus for **Volcán Arenal**, the country's biggest active volcano. Though it's not spitting lava, Arenal remains an incredible sight. Hikes here can be complemented with soaks in local hot springs.

Now, leave the tourists behind and head into the real-life Costa Rica of the northern lowlands. Inviting ecolodges and homestays have sprung up in this historically farm-based economy. After a couple days of connecting with easygoing Ticos, make for **La Virgen** to raft the white water of **Río Sarapiquí**.

At least a few days in Costa Rica must be devoted to the beach. First stop: **Playa Tamarindo**, to party with other travelers, sample some of the country's best international cuisine and learn to surf. Visit during turtle season and **Playa Grande** will be hosting a horde of nesting leatherbacks; if not, the human action on the beach is an equally illuminating mating ritual.

Stay put or string together a series of southbound buses to visit one heavenly beach after the next: there's stunning sand and contemporary cuisine at **Playa Sámara** or legendary swells at **Mal País** and **Santa Teresa**. Any would be excellent places to swim in warm Pacific waters. Wind down your trip with some yoga in **Montezuma** and head back to San José via **Jacó** by jet boat and bus.

2  
WEEKS2-3  
WEEKS





MARCO SIMONI / GETTY IMAGES ©



JOHN COLETTI / GETTY IMAGES ©

Above: Volcán Poás  
(p112)

Left: San José (p64)



1-2 WEEKS

## Caribbean Coast

Latin beats change to Caribbean rhythms as you explore the 'other Costa Rica.' Hop on the first eastbound bus out of **San José** for Cahuita, capital of Afro-Caribbean culture and gateway to **Parque Nacional Cahuita**. Decompress in this mellow village before moving on to **Puerto Viejo de Talamanca**, the Caribbean's center for nightlife, cuisine and all-round positive vibes.

From Puerto Viejo, rent a bicycle and ride to Manzanillo, jumping-off point for snorkeling, kayaking and hiking in **Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Gandoca-Manzanillo**.

To fall further off the map, grab a boat from **Moín** to travel up the canal-ribbed coast to **Tortuguero**, where you can watch nesting green and leatherback turtles. But the real reason you're here is to canoe the mangrove-lined canals of **Parque Nacional Tortuguero**, Costa Rica's mini-Amazon.

After spotting your fill of wildlife, head back to San José via water taxi and bus through **Cariari** and **Guápiles**.



1 WEEK

## Central Valley

The central valley circuit is about sleeping volcanoes, strong cups of coffee and the spiritual core of the country – all sans the madding crowds.

Begin the scenic route of volcanoes by hiking the volcanic lakes and trails surrounding **Volcán Poás**, one of Costa Rica's most accessible glimpses into an active crater. Move on to **Monumento Nacional Arqueológico Guayabo**, the country's only significant archaeological site, protecting ancient petroglyphs and aqueducts.

With the geological and archaeological wonders complete, raft the white water of the **Río Pacuare**, one of the country's best white-water runs and some of Central America's most scenic rafting.

Finally, swing south into the heart of the **Valle de Orosi**. Costa Rican coffee country, and take the caffeinated 32km loop passing the country's oldest church and endless green hills. End this short circuit on a spiritual note at the country's grandest colonial temple, the **Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles** in **Cartago**.

## Off the Beaten Track: Costa Rica

PLAN YOUR TRIP OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

### BOCA TAPADA AREA

Travel through a Tico Costa Rican heartland of pineapple plantations to discover the pristine rainforest of Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Mixto Maquenque. (p277)

### LA ENSENADA LODGE & WILDLIFE REFUGE

A rustic getaway on a working ranch and national wildlife refuge. Explore mangroves by boat or tropical dry forest on horseback, or just relax and enjoy the scenery. (p219)

### PLAYA PALO SECO

A dirt road through palm plantations winds up at a 6km finger of isolated black-sand beach, and nearby mangroves to explore by boat. (p376)

### MATAPALO

Not far off the Costanera Sur, but surprisingly lightly trodden, Matapalo doesn't have much more than kilometers of gray-sand beach and wild waves for the more experienced surfing set. (p395)



### TRINIDAD

At the confluence of the rivers Sarapiquí and San Juan along the border with Nicaragua, this marshy land reveals wildlife and protected reserves in a tenuous zone of human habitation and historical conflict. (p283)

### CASA RÍO BLANCO B&B

Rustic jungle cabins located above a rushing river and a nearby swimming hole provide a lush, meditative base for getting away from the nonessential. (p146)

### PARISMINA

This far-flung spit of sand between canal and Caribbean Sea has only the barest bones of tourist-oriented infrastructure and not a lot of action besides turtle conservation and kayaking the local canals. (p153)

### PARQUE INTERNACIONAL LA AMISTAD

The country's deepest, most impenetrable wilderness lies in this vast park that spans both Costa Rica and Panama. Encompassing numerous life zones, the forest's diversity is truly awesome. (p430)

### LUNA LODGE

Up a winding road into the mountains, this remote ecolodge borders Parque Nacional Corcovado and is run by an infectiously passionate conservationist. (p448)





## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Wendy Yanagihara

**Coordinating author, Central Pacific Coast, Southern Costa Rica & Peninsula de Osa** Wendy Yanagihara first ventured to Costa Rica in 1996 and couldn't wait to get back...until she was distracted by Southeast Asia. Ten years later, she went on her first research trip to the land of *pura vida* and has been covering it since. She has explored Costa Rica from border to border and coast to coast as well as contributing to over 20 guides for Lonely Planet, including *Japan*, *Vietnam*,

*Mexico* and *Grand Canyon National Park*. As it tends to do, Costa Rica has helped transform her into a budding birder, better sloth-spotter, still-terrible surfer (who sticks to the bunny breaks) and improviser of California-style *gallo pinto*.



### Gregor Clark

**San José, Central Valley & Highlands, Caribbean Coast** On his first Costa Rican adventure in 1997, Gregor made a beeline for Corcovado National Park, where he so thoroughly enjoyed hiking and camping that he returned with his fiancée (now wife) the next year. Highlights of researching this guide included discovering off-the-beaten track destinations such as La Danta Salvaje and Volcan Turrialba Lodge with his nature-loving family, and seeing his first quetzal in the

company of daughter Meigan Quetzal Clark. Gregor contributes regularly to Lonely Planet's Latin American and European guides.

Read more about Gregor at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/profiles/gregorclark](http://lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/profiles/gregorclark)



### Mara Vorhees

**Northwestern Costa Rica, Arenal & Northern Lowlands, Peninsula de Nicoya** In 18 years of travel to Costa Rica, Mara has spotted 156 species of birds, all four New-World monkeys, anteaters, sloths and tapirs, a kinkajou and a jaguarundi. None of it, she attests, is quite as wild as her four-year-old twins, who accompanied her while hiking, swimming, rafting, birding and horseback-riding around Costa Rica. Mara has written many guidebooks for Lonely Planet, including *Central America on a Shoestring* and *Belize*. When not spying on sloths, she lives in Somerville, Massachusetts with her husband, two kiddies and two kitties. Follow her adventures online at [www.havetwinswilltravel.com](http://www.havetwinswilltravel.com).

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