

Welcome to Costa Rica

All trails seem to lead to waterfalls, misty crater lakes or deserted, jungle-fringed beaches. Explored by horseback, foot or kayak, Costa Rica is a tropical choose-your-own-adventure land.

The Peaceful Soul

As the eco- and adventure-tourism capital of Central America, Costa Rica has a worthy place in the cubicle daydreams of travelers around the world. With world-class infrastructure, visionary sustainability initiatives and no standing army, the country is a green, peaceful jewel of the region. Taking into account that more than a third of the land enjoys some form of environmental protection and there's greater biodiversity here than in the USA and Europe combined, it's a place that earns the superlatives.

Outdoor Adventures

Rainforest hikes and brisk high-altitude trails, rushing white-water rapids and world-class surfing; Costa Rica offers a dizzying suite of outdoor adventures. They come in every shape and size – from the squeal-inducing rush of a canopy zip line to a sun-dazed afternoon at the beach. National parks allow visitors to glimpse the seething life of the tropical rainforest; simmering volcanoes and cloud forests offer otherworldly vistas; and reliable surf breaks are suited to beginners and experts alike. Can't decide? Don't worry, you won't have to. Given the country's diminutive size, it's possible to plan a relatively short trip that includes all of the above.

The Wild Life

Such wildlife abounds in Costa Rica as to seem almost cartoonish: keel-billed toucans ogle you from treetops and scarlet macaws raucously announce their flight paths. A keen eye will discern a sloth on a branch or the eyes and snout of a caiman breaking the surface of a mangrove swamp, while alert ears will catch rustling leaves signaling a troop of white-faced capuchins or the haunting call of a howler monkey. Blue morpho butterflies flit amid orchid-festooned trees, while colorful tropical fish, sharks, rays, dolphins and whales thrive offshore – all as if in a conservationist's dream.

The Pure Life

And then there are the people. Costa Ricans, or Ticos as they prefer to call themselves, are proud of their little slice of paradise, welcoming guests to sink into the easygoing rhythms of *pura vida* (the pure life) – every bit as much a catchy motto as it is an enduring mantra. With the highest quality of life in Central America, Costa Rica's perfect waves, perfect sunsets and perfect beaches seem like the pure life indeed.



Why I Love Costa Rica

By Wendy Yanagihara, Author

Costa Rica seduced me as a young solo traveler in the mid-1990s with visions of tropical beaches, smoking volcanoes, abundant wildlife and friendly locals. I wasn't disappointed. In the intervening years, I've covered the country for Lonely Planet from Pacific to Caribbean, Nicaragua to Panama, and there's always something left to explore – the deep wilderness of Parque Internacional La Amistad, the far-flung diving paradise of Isla del Coco, the little nowhere village where I didn't have time to linger. What draws me back is not just Costa Rica's lyrical natural beauty but also the warmth of its people, who truly embody *pura vida*.

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