

Understand Costa Rica

COSTA RICA TODAY464

Green goals and a border dispute feature in this snapshot of contemporary Costa Rican life.

HISTORY467

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 LIFE476

Get to know what makes Ticos (Costa Ricans) tick and the culture behind the ubiquitous mantra *pura vida* (pure life).

LANDSCAPES & ECOLOGY481

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

Costa Rica Today

Still slowly bouncing back from the global economic crisis of 2008, Costa Rica remains its peacefully stable, if ever-so-mildly stirred-up self. The 2014 presidential election will provide plenty of conversational fodder when the results shake out, and new disputes over the Nicaraguan border have whipped up old resentments. But the economy is regaining strength as tourists return in increasing numbers.

Best in Print

Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America (Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata; 1987) Easy-to-digest natural-history essays explain rain-forest phenomena.

Costa Rica: The Last Country the Gods Made (Adrian Colesberry and Brass MacLean; 1993) Beautiful photographs by Kimberly Parsons are accompanied by quirky vignettes.

Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion (Barbara Ras, foreword by Óscar Arias; 1994) Collection of stories reflecting distinct regions of Costa Rica.

Best on Film

El Regreso (The Return; 2011) Featuring a realistic, contemporary plot, this is the first Tico (Costa Rican) film to earn international acclaim; Hernán Jiménez wrote, directed, starred in and crowdfunded it.

Agua Fría de Mar (Cold Ocean Water; 2010) Directed by Paz Fábrega, this social commentary unfolds at a paradisiacal Pacific beach; the film won several international awards.

Caribe (Caribbean; 2004) The first Costa Rican film ever to be submitted for Oscar consideration; drama set in Limón.

Changing of the Guard

Costa Rica acquired a new president after a runoff election (the second in history) in April 2014. Following the departure of the country's first female president, Laura Chinchilla, who termed out, the runoff between Johnny Araya and Luis Guillermo Solís was a formality, as Araya stopped campaigning in March 2014 after it became clear that Solís was overwhelmingly likely to prevail.

Though Costa Rica's political landscape is unlikely to change dramatically, Solís' win may signal a sea change for the National Liberation Party (PLN), which has dominated Costa Rican politics for more than half a century. Araya, a member of the PLN, had attempted to distance himself during his campaign from Chinchilla's PLN administration, which was dogged by corruption scandals.

Solís, affiliated with the center-left Citizens' Action Party (PAC), ran on promises to fight corruption and to address the country's social and economic inequality. As a scholar of Latin American studies, Solís was formerly a professor at the University of Costa Rica and a published writer specializing in Latin American politics and social issues. As such, he is still considered somewhat of a political outsider, despite serving as an advisor to Óscar Arias as a foreign-ministry official. From the results of the election, it seems that many Costa Ricans view Solís as an agent of much-needed but not-too-radical change. Of course, only time will tell.

Carbon Neutrality

Costa Rica has long had a reputation for being green, but, to paraphrase Kermit: it ain't easy. Back in 2009, then-president Óscar Arias set an ambitious goal – that Costa Rica achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2021.