



Central Valley & Highlands

Includes ➔

Alajuela	106
Atenas	113
Grecia	113
Sarchí	114
Zarcero	115
San Ramón	119
Heredia	120
Barva	123
Cartago	125
Parque Nacional	
Volcán Irazú	127
Valle de Orosi	128

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Xandari (p110)
- ➔ Hotel Quelitales (p131)
- ➔ Jalapeños Central (p109)
- ➔ Colbert Restaurant (p112)
- ➔ Bromelias Del Río (p125)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Wagelia Espino Blanco Lodge (p134)
- ➔ Vista Atenas B&B (p113)
- ➔ Hotel Quelitales (p131)
- ➔ Peace Lodge (p112)
- ➔ Bosque de Paz (p118)

Why Go?

It is on the coffee-cultivated hillsides of the Central Valley that you'll find Costa Rica's heart and soul. This is not only the geographical center of the country, but also its cultural and spiritual core. It is here that the Spanish first settled, here that coffee built a prosperous nation, here that picturesque highland villages still gather for centuries-old fiestas. It is also here that you'll get to fully appreciate Costa Rica's country cooking: artisanal cheeses, steamy corn cakes and freshly caught river trout.

Curvy mountain roads force travelers to slow their roll. Quaint and quirky agricultural towns invite leisurely detours to farmers markets and church processions, a refreshing break from the tourist-industrial complex on the coasts. But it's not all cows and coffee – world-class rapids, resplendent quetzals and close encounters with active volcanoes all show off the rich landscape in which Costa Rica's character is rooted.

When to Go

- ➔ During high season (December to March), an elevated altitude and landlocked location mean perfect weather.
- ➔ Afternoon showers are not uncommon during 'green' season (June to December), but so too are bargains.
- ➔ The rainy months from June to October are great for white-water rafting.



Central Valley & Highlands Highlights

- ① Paddling for your life down the cascading rapids of the **Río Pacuare** (p132) near Turrialba.
- ② Peering into mammoth craters and volcanic lakes

at **Volcán Irazú** (p127) and **Volcán Poás** (p111).

- ③ Learning the history of chocolate, and meeting rescued toucans and sloths in **San Isidro de Heredia** (p124).

- ④ Contemplating the aqueducts and petroglyphs at Costa Rica's largest archaeological site, **Monumento Nacional Arqueológico Guayabo** (p135).