

Welcome to Costa Rica

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

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 since 1948 (when the country redirected its defense funds toward education, health-care and the environment), Costa Rica is a peaceful green jewel of the region. Taking into account that more than a fourth 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 adventures in every shape and size – from the rush of a canopy zip line to a sun-dazed afternoon at the beach. National parks allow visitors to glimpse life in the tropical rainforest and cloud forest, simmering volcanoes 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 it all.

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.

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 the *pura vida* (pure life). The greeting, farewell, catchy motto and enduring mantra gets to the heart of Costa Rica's appeal – its simple yet profound ability to let people relax and enjoy their time. With the highest quality of life in Central America, all the perfect waves, perfect sunsets and perfect beaches seem like the *pura vida* indeed.



Why I Love Costa Rica

By Ashley Harrell, Writer

The night I moved to Costa an expat in a bar congratulated me. 'The best part,' she said, 'is you can do anything here.' She wasn't talking about traveling the entire country, undertaking extreme adventures or attending a Christmas party in a bikini (but yeah, done all that). She meant that people here have the time, freedom and permission to truly live. Want to sleep in a shack and surf constantly? Do it. Want to rescue baby sloths? Somebody has to. I wanted to travel, study wildlife, write and feel alive. Now I do. *Pura vida*.

For more about our writers, see p544.