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

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Starting with its pre-Columbian people, this is the story of a country shaped by everything from banana plantations to ecotourism.

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

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

Costa Rica Today

Elation over Costa Rica reaching the 2014 World Cup's quarterfinals having worn off, public discontent has grown over the presidency of Luis Guillermo Solís due to growing unemployment and continuing economic woes. And while Costa Rica has emerged the victor in the long-standing border dispute with Nicaragua, relations between the two countries have worsened due to the Cuban immigrant crisis.

Best on Film

El Regreso (The Return; 2011)

Featuring a realistic, contemporary plot, this is the first Tico film to earn international acclaim; Hernán Jiménez wrote, directed, starred in and crowdfunded it.

Agua Fria 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.

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 on rainforest phenomena, written by two biologists.

There Never Was a Once Upon a Time (Carmen Naranjo; 1989) Ten stories, narrated by children and adolescents, by Costa Rica's most widely translated novelist.

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

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.

With Solís in power, Costa Rica's political landscape hasn't changed dramatically, and it's too soon to say whether his win has signaled 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.

It seems that many Costa Ricans viewed Solís as an agent of much-needed but not-too-radical change when they voted him in, but his government continues to face substantial problems inherited from past administrations: namely, the growing rate of inflation, growing unemployment and severe income inequality. While past administrations avoided taxing large companies and high-income earners, Solís' government is enforcing taxation of the above to address these issues.

Solís has expressed his support for increased rights for the LGBT community, flying a rainbow flag over the Presidential House on International Day Against Homophobia & Transphobia.