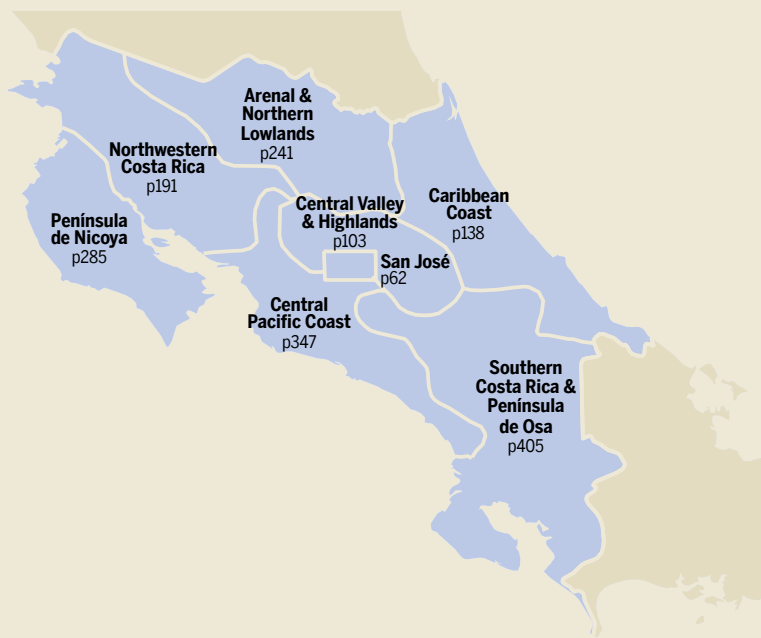




# Costa Rica



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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# Itineraries



## 2 WEEKS Essential Costa Rica

This is the trip you've been dreaming about: a romp through paradise with seething volcanoes, tropical parks and ghostly cloud forests.

From **San José**, beeline north to **La Fortuna**. After a refreshing forest hike on the flanks of **Volcán Arenal**, soak in the country's best hot springs. Then catch a boat across Laguna de Arenal, and a bus to **Monteverde**, where you might encounter the elusive quetzal on a stroll through the **Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde**.

Next: beach time. Head west to the biggest party town in Guanacaste, **Playa Tamarindo**, and enjoy the ideal surf, top-notch restaurants and rowdy nightlife.

Continuing south, visit waterfalls and linger a bit in chilled-out **Montezuma**, where you can connect via jet boat to **Jacó**, another town with equal affection for surfing and partying. Spend half a day busing to Quepos, the gateway to **Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio**. A full day in the park starts with some jungle hikes and wildlife-watching and ends with a picnic and a dip in the park's perfect waters.



## Northern Costa Rica

After landing in **San José**, make for the hanging bridges and scenery of the **Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde**. Watching the mist roll over the dense forests is a thrill, never mind the dizzying zip lines and aerial walkways.

Now, hop on a bus for **Volcán Arenal**, the country's biggest active volcano. Though it's not spitting lava, Arenal remains an incredible sight. Hikes can be finished with a soak in the local hot springs.

Leave the tourists behind and hit the ecolodges of the northern lowlands. After a couple days of connecting with easygoing Ticos, make for **La Virgen** to raft the white water of **Río Sarapiquí**.

Devote at least a few days to the beach. First stop: **Playa Tamarindo**, to party, sample some of the country's best cuisine and learn to surf. During turtle season, **Playa Grande** will be hosting a horde of nesting leatherbacks, and the humans often offer equally illuminating displays.

Stay put or take a bus south to enjoy the sand and contemporary cuisine at **Playa Sámara** or swells at **Mal País & Santa Teresa**. Wind down your trip with yoga in **Montezuma** and head back by boat and bus to San José via **Jacó**, where you can catch some last rays of sunshine and a decadent meal.



## 2 WEEKS Pacific Coast Explorer

Kick things off with **Parque Nacional Carara**, home to enchanting scarlet macaws, and spend a few hours hiking up and down the coast. Then head south to **Quepos**, a convenient base for the country's most popular national park, **Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio**. Here the rainforest sweeps down to meet the sea, providing refuge for rare animals, including the endangered squirrel monkey.

Continue south, stopping to sample the roadside *ceviche* stands, and visit **Hacienda Barú National Wildlife Refuge** for some sloth-spotting, or keep heading south to **Dominical** in search of waves. For deserted beach wandering, continue on to **Uvita**, where you can look for whales spouting offshore at **Parque Nacional Marino Ballena**.

From Uvita, continue to the **Península de Osa**, where you'll set out on journeys through the country's top national park for wildlife-viewing. Emerge at the northern end in remote **Bahía Drake**, where you'll swim in paradisiacal coves. Return to civilization via ferry through Central America's longest stretch of mangroves to **Sierpe**, home of the ancient stone spheres.



## 2 WEEKS Southern Costa Rica & Osa

Hands down the best itinerary for adventurers, this is the wilder side of Costa Rica.

Either head down the Pacific coast or fly into **Puerto Jiménez**, gateway to Península de Osa. Here you can spend a day or so kayaking the mangroves and soaking up the charm.

The undisputed highlight of the Osa is **Parque Nacional Corcovado**, the crown jewel of the country's national parks. Spend a few days exploring jungle and beach trails with a local guide, whose expert eyes will spot tapirs and rare birds; trekkers willing to get down and dirty can tackle a through-hike of the park.

Return to Puerto Jiménez and travel up the Pacific Costanera Sur to **Uvita**, where you can wander empty beaches, surf and snorkel at **Parque Nacional Marino Ballena**. Then it's off to the mountains. Link together buses for **San Gerardo de Rivas**, where you can spend a day acclimating to the altitude and hiking through the **Cloudbridge Nature Reserve**. End the trip with an exhilarating two-day adventure to the top of **Cerro Chirripó**, Costa Rica's highest peak.





## 10 DAYS Caribbean Coast

Latin beats change to Caribbean rhythms as you explore the ‘other Costa Rica.’

Hop on the first eastbound bus out of **San José** for Cahuita, capital of Afro-Caribbean culture and gateway to **Parque Nacional Cahuita**. Decompress in this mellow village before moving on to **Puerto Viejo de Talamanca**, the Caribbean’s center for nightlife, cuisine and all-round positive vibes.

From Puerto Viejo, rent a bicycle and ride to Manzanillo, jumping-off point for snorkeling, kayaking and hiking in **Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Gandoca-Manzanillo**.

To fall further off the map, grab a boat from Moín to travel up the canal-ribboned coast to **Tortuguero**, where you can watch nesting turtles. But the real reason you’re here is to canoe the mangrove-lined canals of **Parque Nacional Tortuguero**, Costa Rica’s mini-Amazon. After spotting your fill of wildlife, head back to San José via water taxi and bus through the tiny town of Cariari and then **Guápiles**, an ideal base for gazing at open farmland and exploring **Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo**.



## 10 DAYS Central Valley

The Central Valley circuit is all about (lightly) sleeping volcanoes, strong cups of coffee and the spiritual core of the country – all sans the madding crowds. Begin the scenic route of volcanoes by hiking the volcanic lakes and trails surrounding **Volcán Poás**, one of Costa Rica’s most accessible glimpses into an active crater.

Move on to **San Isidro de Heredia** for a close encounter with rescued baby sloths and toucans and a taste of the region’s chocolate history. With the geological and culinary wonders complete, raft the **Río Pacuare**, one of the country’s best white-water runs and providing some of Central America’s most scenic rafting.

Move on to **Monumento Nacional Arqueológico Guayabo**, the country’s only significant archaeological site, protecting ancient petroglyphs and aqueducts. Finally, swing south into the heart of the **Valle de Orosi**, Costa Rican coffee country, and take the caffeinated 32km loop passing the country’s oldest church and endless green hills. End on a spiritual note at the country’s grandest colonial-era temple, the **Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles** in **Cartago**.



Above: Refugio  
Nacional de Vida  
Silvestre Gandoca-  
Manzanillo (p186)

Right: Valle de Orosi  
(p128)



SATHISH JOYTHIMANAR / GETTY IMAGES ©

## Off the Beaten Track: Costa Rica

### BOCA TAPADA AREA

Travel through a Tico Costa Rican heartland of pineapple plantations to discover the pristine rainforest of Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Mixto Maquenque. (p275)

### LA GAVILANA HERBS & ART

This bake shop and gallery offers two-day 'extreme hikes' between El Castillo and San Gerardo (near Santa Elena) that traverse old-growth forests and raging rivers. (p258)

### PLAYA PALO SECO

A dirt road through palm plantations winds up at a 6km finger of isolated black-sand beach, and nearby mangroves to explore by boat. (p367)

### MATAPALO

Not far off the Costanera Sur, but surprisingly lightly trodden, Matapalo doesn't have much more than kilometers of gray-sand beach and wild waves for the more experienced surfing set. (p387)





# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkeling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway/Subte station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*





## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Dublin, Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Mara Vorhees

**Coordinating Author, Northwestern Costa Rica, Arenal & Northern Lowlands, Península de Nicoya**

In 20 years of travel to Costa Rica, Mara has spotted 162 species of birds, all four New-World monkeys, anteaters, sloths, tapirs, peccaries, coatis, agoutis, a kinkajou and a jaguarundi. None of it, she attests, is quite as wild as her 5-year-old twins, who accompanied her while hiking, swimming, snorkeling, surfing, zippling, rafting, birding and horseback riding around Costa Rica.

Mara has written many guidebooks for Lonely Planet, including *Central America on a Shoestring* and *Belize*. When not spying on sloths, she lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, with her husband, two kiddies and two kitties. Follow her adventures at [www.havetwinswilltravel.com](http://www.havetwinswilltravel.com).



### Ashley Harrell

**San José, Central Valley & Highlands, Caribbean Coast** When Ashley was 12, her dad took her on a medical mission to León, Nicaragua, where she remembers diving into a muddy swimming hole, devouring whole fried fish (eyeballs included) and downing her first beer. Twenty years and thousands of beers later, Central America enticed her again, and she moved to Costa Rica to be closer to sloths and work as a journalist, eventually enlisting with Lonely Planet. The

'research' for this guidebook involved sampling the capital's new farm-to-table restaurants, befriending a crocodile whisperer and exploring far-flung corners of the Caribbean, where she spotted a great jacamar and broke her flip-flops. Ashley also wrote the Plan Your Trip section.



### Anna Kaminski

**Central Pacific Coast, Southern Costa Rica & Península de Osa** This was Anna's second research trip to Costa Rica and on this occasion she was lucky enough to tackle the southern part of the country – with the best dining scene, most rugged mountain and jungle trekking and the best opportunities to delve into indigenous culture. With a university background in the history and culture of Latin America, Anna has been traveling all over this part of the world for nearly

15 years. She tweets at @ACKaminski. Anna also wrote the Understand Costa Rica and Survival Guide sections.

### Published by Lonely Planet Global Limited

CRN 554153

12th edition – October 2016

ISBN 978 1 78657 112 0

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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