



COSTA RICA

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Ashley Harrell,
Jade Bremner, Brian Kluepfel

Welcome to Costa Rica

Discovering a sleepy sloth in the rainforest or scaling a misty mountain peak, braving a rushing white-water rapid or riding a world-class surf break, in Costa Rica the heart is set a-flutter. The only limit is your return date.

If marketing experts could draw up an ideal destination, Costa Rica might be it. The 'rich coast' has earned its name and stands apart from its Central American neighbors on the cutting edge of peace-keeping policy, farm-to-table restaurants and sustainable tourism. The dizzying suite of outdoor adventures offers thrills of every shape and size – from the squeal-inducing rush of a canopy zipline to a sun-kissed afternoon at the beach. National parks offer glimpses into rainforest and cloud forest life, volcanoes simmer amid otherworldly vistas, and reliable surf breaks are suited to beginners and experts alike.

Meanwhile, wildlife that seems almost cartoonish abounds: keel-billed toucans ogle you from treetops and scarlet macaws raucously announce their flight plans. 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. One-quarter of the country's wild lands are protected by law, while developing infrastructure is balanced by green energy such as wind and hydro. And with no standing army, Costa Rica allows visitors to relax into the pure life, or as the locals say at every opportunity, *pura vida, mai*.

“relax into the pure life...
pura vida”

Cloudbridge Nature Reserve (p116)
CHRISNTOUR84/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



Contents

Plan Your Trip

Costa Rica's	
Top 12	4
Need to Know	16
Hot Spots for.....	18
Local Life.....	20
Month by Month.....	22
Get Inspired	25
Itineraries	26
Family Travel.....	32

San José	35
...at a Glance	36

Plaza de la Cultura.....	38
Plaza de la Democracia	40
San José	
Walking Tour	42
Sights	44
Tours	48
Shopping	49
Eating	50
Drinking & Nightlife.....	56
Entertainment	58
Where to Stay.....	61

Tortuguero	63
...at a Glance	64

Turtle Tours	66
Boat Tours	70
Tortuguero	
Village	72

Southern Caribbean	79
...at a Glance	80

Surfing.....	82
Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Gandoca-Manzanillo.....	84
Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	86
Manzanillo	94

Río Pacuare	97
...at a Glance	98

Rafting the River	100
Turrialba	102
Siquirres	106

Parque Nacional Chirripó	109
...at a Glance	110

Climbing Cerro Chirripó.....	112
San Gerardo de Rivas	116
San Gerardo de Dota	120

Península de Osa	123
...at a Glance	124

Hiking in Corcovado	126
Wildlife-Watching	130
Puerto Jiménez	132
Bahía Drake	136
Sierpe	140
Carate	141
Cabo Matapalo.....	142



Costa Ballena 145
...at a Glance 146

Parque Nacional Marino Ballena.....148
Uvita150
Dominical154

Manuel Antonio 161
...at a Glance 162

Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio164
Wildlife-Watching168
Quepos170
Manuel Antonio176

Southern Nicoya 181
...at a Glance 182

Reserva Natural Absoluta Cabo Blanco.....184
Montezuma Waterfalls.....186
Santa Teresa & Mal País188
Montezuma192

Monteverde 199
...at a Glance 200

Bosque Nuboso Monteverde.....202
Coffee Tours.....206
Canopy Tours.....208
Monteverde & Santa Elena.....210

Volcán Arenal 225
...at a Glance 226

Parque Nacional Volcán Arenal.....228
Hot Springs.....232
La Fortuna234
El Castillo242

Sarapiquí Valley 247
...at a Glance 248

White-water Rafting.....250
La Virgen252
Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí255



In Focus
Costa Rica Today.....260
History262
Costa Rica Outdoors272
The Tico Way of Life279
Landscapes & Ecology.....284
Food & Drink.....292

Survival Guide
Directory A–Z297
Transport305
Language310
Symbols & Map Key323

Baby three-toed sloth
MARK KOSTICH/GETTY IMAGES ©

Plan Your Trip

Costa Rica's Top 12

N K/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



Southern Nicoya

Wild ocean meets lush jungle

If you dig laid-back beach culture and lounging on sugar-white coves, head for Southern Nicoya. In the little surf towns of Mal País and Santa Teresa, the sea is full of wildlife and the waves are near-ideal in shape. There's easy access to Cabo Blanco reserve or Montezuma's triple-tiered waterfall, and some of the country's best restaurants await. Left: Montezuma (p192); Right: Capuchin monkeys

1



JO CREBBIN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



KEVIN WELLS PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



Tortuguero

Sea-turtle spotting and canal tours

Canoeing the canals of Parque Nacional Tortuguero is a boat-borne safari. Get up close to caimans, river turtles, crowned night herons, monkeys and sloths. Under the cover of darkness, watch the ritual of turtles building nests and laying eggs. Between wetlands and the wild Caribbean Sea, this is among the country's premier places for wildlife. Top: Basilisk lizard; Bottom: Baby green turtle

2



Costa Ballena

Whale-watching, wave riding and pure deliciousness

South of Quepos, the well-trodden central Pacific trail tapers off, evoking the Costa Rica of yesteryear – surf shacks and empty beaches, roadside ceviche vendors and a little more space. Intrepid travelers stumble on deserted beaches and great surf spots, and the long, coconut-strewn Costa Ballena beaches feel like an isolated desert island (great for whale-watching). Parque Nacional Marino Ballena (p148)

3

4

Península de Osa

Secluded wilderness and wildlife for days

Muddy and intense, the vast, largely untouched rainforest of Parque Nacional Corcovado is no walk in the park. Here travelers with a sturdy pair of rubber boots thrust themselves into the unknown and emerge with stories of a lifetime. The further into the jungle you go, the better it gets: the best wildlife-watching, most desolate beaches and vivid adventures lie down these seldom-trodden trails.

Parque Nacional Corcovado (p126)



5

Manuel Antonio

Alive with the call of birds and monkeys

Although droves of visitors pack Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio, the country's most popular (and smallest) national park remains an absolute gem. Capuchin monkeys scurry across its idyllic beaches, brown pelicans dive-bomb its clear waters and sloths watch over its trails. It's a perfect place to introduce youngsters to the wonders of the rainforest; indeed, you're likely to feel like a kid yourself. Brown pelican, Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio (p164)

