

# COSTA RICA

## INFORMATION BOOKLET

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TRAVEL

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## MAP



## PACKING SUGGESTIONS

Everyone has personal preferences when it comes to packing; for this reason, the information below is offered as a general guide and not a definitive list. You know yourself best: Use your discretion and pack what you think will serve you, based on your personal preferences and specific itinerary.

You may find many of these items in our Gear Store at [holbrook.newheadings.com](http://holbrook.newheadings.com).

### CLOTHING

Casual, comfortable clothing is suitable for most activities in Costa Rica. You may wish to bring a slightly nicer outfit or two (eg sundress, polo shirt) if your itinerary includes dinners out or more formal activities.

Bring enough clothing suitable for the length of your program. If you prefer to pack light, note that many hotels offer laundry services at additional cost. If you plan to hand-wash items, remember that humidity may delay drying time.

Pack clothing that can be worn in layers to adapt to weather changes throughout the day. Costa Rica's rainy season is May through November, but it can rain at any time. Clothing that wicks away moisture and dries quickly is recommended.

If your program includes visits to higher elevations (e.g. Savegre, Monteverde, or Cordillera de Talamanca), warm clothing is strongly recommended. Temperatures can get quite chilly, especially at night and early in the morning, and hotel rooms don't always have heat. It can also be windy at times. Consider packing a warm underlayer, as well as a warm, protective outer layer.

For birding programs, pack muted colors such as khaki, olive, and forest green. If participating in turtle patrols, bring dark-colored pants and shirts.

- A combination of short-sleeved and lightweight, long-sleeved shirts for sun and mosquito protection
- Shorts
- Lightweight, quick-drying long pants for sun and mosquito protection; jeans tend to be uncomfortable in hot and humid conditions, but are fine in the cooler highlands.
- Undergarments
- Sleepwear
- Lightweight jacket or sweater/sweatshirt (or heavier weight if visiting high-elevation areas)
- 1-2 bathing suit(s) for the beach, if applicable, plus many hotels have pools
- Socks – Bring extra pairs. If your itinerary indicates muddy hikes with rubber boots provided on-site, pack a few pairs of knee socks to prevent blisters.
- Shoes – Consider your specific itinerary when choosing footwear. For most programs, you'll likely want at least one pair of comfortable, closed-toe, water-resistant or waterproof walking or hiking shoes suitable for forest hikes and walking over cobblestones or other uneven terrain. Sturdier hiking boots may be appropriate for more rugged itineraries. In addition, many participants opt for a pair of sturdy sport-strap sandals (e.g. Keens, Texas, or similar) and/or casual flip-flops or sandals. If you're whitewater rafting or visiting the beach, you may also want a pair of aqua socks, reef walkers, or water shoes.
- Lightweight rain jacket, hooded poncho, and/or windbreaker
- Visor or wide-brimmed sun hat
- Bandana, scarf, or Buff-style headwear



## PERSONAL TOILETRIES

Pack toiletries based on your personal preferences and habits. Below are just a few recommendations to keep in mind.

- Shampoo, conditioner, lotion, deodorant/antiperspirant, etc. – If possible, avoid strong fragrances if you are sensitive to insect bites (and to be considerate of your fellow travelers).
- Soap and washcloth or a small, quick-drying microfiber towel — While small bars or liquid soap are usually provided, washcloths are not standard in all hotels. If you normally use a washcloth, you may wish to bring one from home.
- Hairbrush, comb, hair ties, shower cap. Most—but not all—hotel rooms provide a hair dryer, but you may wish to bring one from home.
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Razor
- Ear plugs, especially if you are a light sleeper
- Feminine hygiene products
- Insect repellent with DEET or picaridin (see note below about treating clothing with permethrin)
- Sunscreen and lip balm with SPF – If you'll be in the ocean, we recommend reef-safe sunscreen.
- Aloe vera gel
- A travel pack of tissues – also useful as napkins or toilet paper if needed

In addition to your personal toiletries, it is useful to pack a small medical kit, which you can easily prepare. Helpful items might include: bandages, antihistamine, a pain reliever, motion sickness and/or altitude sickness medication (if you are prone to either), anti-diarrhea medicine, individually wrapped pre-moistened towelettes and/or hand sanitizer, antibiotic ointment, anti-fungal cream, moleskin for blisters, eye drops, tweezers, a mini sewing kit, and an extra pair of disposable contact lenses or eyeglasses if you wear them.

Days before you leave home, you may wish to consider spraying any clothing, socks, and shoes that will be worn in lowland, tropical sites with the pesticide permethrin to deter biting insects and prevent the spread of disease. A recommended brand is Sawyer. Carefully read all instructions before use. Please note permethrin is highly toxic to cats and fish, and some aerosol products may be harmful to birds. Side effects may include minor itching, burning, or redness. You may want to use a laundry marker to label and keep track of which socks are permethrinized. Only one application per item is necessary; permethrin on treated clothes remains effective through several washings. Permethrin should NOT be applied directly to skin.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Remember to pack valuables such as your passport, cash/credit cards, and medications in your carry-on luggage.

- Passport and photocopies of all travel documentation
- Personal insurance card and travel insurance information
- Money – ATM/credit card, traveler's checks, and/or cash; small bills in good condition are recommended
- Prescription medicines (if applicable), with a copy of the prescription
- Yellow fever certificate (if required; only if arriving from a country where yellow fever transmission is a risk)

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- Sunglasses with strap
- Small day pack for hikes and excursions
- Flashlight and/or head lamp
- Travel alarm clock or inexpensive waterproof wristwatch with alarm – Not all hotels provide alarm clocks.
- A pocket calculator or phone to assist with conversions and currency exchange
- Binoculars with lens cleaner
- Camera and related equipment, such as charger, lenses, and extra memory cards
- Reusable water bottle
- Non-perishable snacks
- Pocket-knife or multipurpose tool - Pack in your checked luggage
- Zip-top style bags – useful for packing toiletries, sorting clothing, storing damp or muddy shoes, or as a dry bag for protecting electronics)
- Notepad or travel journal and pen
- Music or reading material for down time, long bus drives, or on the airplane, and a portable bright light to read by
- Collapsible walking stick with rubber tip
- A small quantity of laundry detergent if you'll be washing clothing by hand
- Travel-size umbrella – Some people find this unwieldy to carry, while others find it offers better protection than a rain jacket alone.
- Money belt
- Chargers for electronics



## TRAVEL INFORMATION

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

U.S. and Canadian citizens must have a valid passport to enter Costa Rica. Passports must be valid for at least the duration of your stay. As this requirement is subject to change at any time without notice, we recommend at least 6 months' validity. A visa is not required for visits up to 90 days.

Travelers are responsible for making sure they obtain the correct documentation for their program. Visit **travel.state.gov** for the most up-to-date information on entry requirements.

Do not pack your passport or other important documents in your checked luggage; make sure they are accessible at all times. Bring a photocopy of the photo page of your passport to carry with you in-country.

If you are not traveling with a U.S. passport, please check with the Costa Rican Embassy for the requirements based on your nationality.

### DEPARTURE TAX

There is a departure tax of USD \$29, which all but a few airline carriers include in the cost of your ticket. If you are unsure whether your departure tax is included, check with your travel specialist or airline carrier to confirm, or visit <https://sjoairport.com/en/passenger-guide>.

If the departure tax is not included in your ticket cost, it should be paid at the airport prior to check-in. This tax is subject to change without notice. We recommend using cash, as credit card payments may incur cash advance charges and other fees. This tax can be paid in U.S. dollars, Costa Rican colones, or a combination of both.

### LUGGAGE

Please check with your travel specialist or airline carrier for the number of checked bags allowed per person and any weight restrictions on luggage. Many airlines charge a fee to check bags. Any fees or other expenses related to luggage are your responsibility and are not covered by Holbrook Travel.

We recommend using a TSA-approved lock in case your luggage is selected for screening. Combination locks are preferable to keylocks. For more information, visit [tsa.gov/travel](https://tsa.gov/travel).

Pack all travel documents, valuables such as money, cameras, and jewelry, and any items you will need in transit in your carry-on bag. We cannot be held responsible for any losses.

Be prepared for the U.S. Transportation Security Administration's 3-1-1 allowances for liquids and gels in your carry-on bag: bottles containing 3.4 ounces (100mL) or less (by volume); 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger.

Powder-based substances (such as baby powder, cosmetics, ground coffee, or spices) in quantities greater than 350mL or 12 oz. in your carry-on bag may be subjected to additional screening. These items may be disposed of at the discretion of airport security, so we recommend packing them in your checked luggage.

Be aware that due to increased security measures, officers at some overseas airports may ask owners to power up electronic devices, including cell phones. According to the TSA, powerless devices will not be permitted onboard the aircraft, so it's important to have them charged prior to going through security.

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When returning to the United States, make sure all fruits and/or vegetables are left behind, including food from your boxed breakfast (if applicable). Failure to do so can result in large fines.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Global Entry program allows expedited security screening and other benefits for pre-approved, low-risk travelers. If this is something that interests you, please visit <https://tftp.cbp.dhs.gov> for more information.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

*Note: While uncommon, certain risks are inherent in international travel, such as natural disasters, accidents, crime, civil unrest or terrorism, and illness, including but not limited to gastrointestinal illnesses, foodborne illnesses, insect-borne diseases, respiratory illnesses, and infectious diseases. We make considerable effort to prepare for such possibilities, but no destination is ever completely risk-free, and Holbrook Travel cannot guarantee your safety at any time. As the traveler, it is your responsibility to make yourself aware of potential risks and take precautions as appropriate.*

*When visiting another country, you are subject to that country's laws and should educate yourself about local laws and customs. Be vigilant of your surroundings and practice the same safety measures and common sense that you would at home.*

*Holbrook Travel is not authorized to give medical advice. Please consult your physician, the travel nurse at your county's public health clinic, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at [cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel). Your physician and the CDC will be able to provide expert advice and recommendations. Travel health planning should begin well before departure. In addition to speaking with your physician, please consider the following:*

The CDC recommends that all travelers be up-to-date on routine vaccinations such as measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus vaccine, varicella (chicken pox) vaccine, and your yearly flu shot before every trip.

There are no vaccinations required for entry into Costa Rica, unless you are traveling from a country where yellow fever transmission is a risk. The CDC recommends inoculation against hepatitis A and typhoid for most travelers to Costa Rica. Additional vaccines may be suggested based on your individual circumstances. Please consult your physician for more information.

### MALARIA

Malaria is caused by a parasite found in Anopheles mosquitos, which are active from dusk until dawn. The CDC advises that the risk of malaria in Costa Rica is low, but travelers should still take precautions against mosquito bites. Cover exposed skin with lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants, consider treating clothes with permethrin, and use an insect repellent containing an active ingredient like DEET or picaridin.

### ZIKA VIRUS & OTHER MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESSES

Locally transmitted cases of Zika virus have been reported in Costa Rica. Local transmission means that mosquitoes in the area have been infected with Zika and are spreading it to people. In addition, locally transmitted cases of chikungunya and dengue fever have previously been reported in Costa Rica.

The CDC recommends that travelers to Costa Rica protect themselves against mosquito bites. As a precaution, the CDC advises women who are pregnant to consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.

### SUN EXPOSURE

The effects of the sun can be damaging to the eyes and skin. Spending time outdoors exposes you to the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays, even on cloudy days. To protect yourself from the sun, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen of at least SPF 15, protect skin with clothing, wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, and drink plenty of fluids.





## ALTITUDE SICKNESS

If your itinerary includes locations at high elevation (above 5,000 feet), altitude sickness is a possibility. Stay hydrated and well-rested, and avoid heavy, fatty foods and alcohol in the days before arrival. Consult your physician prior to travel for advice specific to your situation.

## TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHY

- When in doubt, drink bottled water or carbonated bottled drinks. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes in rural or undeveloped areas.
- Avoid raw fruits and vegetables from street vendors unless you peel them yourself. Remember: cook it, peel it, or forget it.
- Wear lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants.
- If you are ill upon returning home, make sure to inform your doctor of where you have traveled.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- During long flights, walk and stretch regularly and stay hydrated to help prevent DVT (deep vein thrombosis).

## SAFETY TIPS

- Familiarize yourself with the emergency exits and evacuation procedures upon arrival at each hotel.
- Leave important documents and valuables in the safe in your room. If your room does not have a safe, store items with the front desk.
- When leaving your room, bring only the necessary amount of money for the day and leave the rest in your safe.
- Don't leave your belongings unattended in public places.
- Don't accept any beverages, food, or objects from strangers.
- Do not walk alone at night. Remain in open, well-lit areas.
- Ask permission before taking photos of locals.

## STEP

Travelers are encouraged to register their plans with the U.S. Department of State via their Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). When you sign up for STEP, you'll automatically receive the most current information compiled by the Department of State about the country where you will be traveling, as well as any updates or travel alerts (when applicable). You only need to sign up once, and you can then add and delete trips from your account based on your current travel plans. STEP also helps the U.S. Embassy in the country you are visiting to better assist you in the case of an emergency, such as lost or stolen passports. You can register on their website at [step.state.gov/step](https://step.state.gov/step).

## MONEY MATTERS, CURRENCY, AND GRATUITIES

The monetary unit is the colón. You can exchange dollars for colones at any bank, the airport, or at most hotels. We recommend that you change your money in San José. Local banks generally give the best exchange rate, but are not always convenient. The majority of hotels and businesses will accept U.S. dollars and major credit cards, such as VISA, MasterCard and American Express. VISA is the most widely accepted card. If you pay with U.S. dollars, you will receive colones as change. Traveler's checks are accepted in San José only at banks, and are not as useful in the rest of the country. Small-denomination U.S. bills in good condition are useful for tips and small purchases.

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Check a currency converter like [xe.com](http://xe.com) for current exchange rates.

Please advise your financial institution of your travel plans to avoid any unexpected holds on your account. Be aware that additional fees may be incurred for using credit or ATM cards internationally.

**Tippling** — Tipping is a personal matter and is generally meant to be a reflection of services rendered, not an obligation. If you wish to reward individuals who have provided outstanding service during your program, general guidelines are provided below. Please tip at your discretion; should you wish to offer gratuities for outstanding service, please do so on an individual basis. Please note that at restaurants, tips for included meals are already part of the program price.

- Naturalist Guides: \$5-10 per person, per day
- Driver: \$3-5 per person, per day
- River Guide: \$5 per person, per day
- Maid Service: \$0.50 - \$1 per person, per day
- Porters: \$1 per bag
- Taxi Drivers: Tips are not expected unless extra services are provided.

Restaurants are required by law to add 15% tax and 10% tip to the bill. Generally, Costa Ricans do not tip, but you can leave an additional 10% if you feel you received exceptional service.

Please check with your group leader or travel specialist if you are unsure whether gratuities are included in your program cost.

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Email** — Wi-Fi is readily available throughout Costa Rica, with many restaurants and hotels offering free and secure Wi-Fi. Many travelers find that email or a VoIP service (Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.) is the most convenient and cost-effective way to stay in touch with family and friends back home.

**Phones** — Cell phone coverage in Costa Rica is good to excellent. Many major carriers offer international plans with calling, text, and data for an additional fee. Contact your service provider if you would like to set up this service.

To make international calls from Costa Rica, first dial 00 and then the country code (1 for U.S. or Canada), then the area code and number. Dial 116 on any public phone for an English-speaking operator. It is most efficient to pay for the call with a calling card. You can have a hotel operator place the call for you for an extra charge and you can call collect to the United States. Local calls have seven-digit numbers, and you can reach anywhere in the country from a public phone.

**Mail** — Hotels often sell stamps for letters and postcards. Otherwise, you can purchase them at local post offices, found in every large city and town in Costa Rica. The cost to airmail letters to the United States is typically less than US \$1.

## ELECTRICITY

The electricity system is 110 volts, 60 cycle AC power. Plugs are typically the 2-pronged, flat type so most US travelers will not need a converter or adapter (unless you bring appliances that require three-pronged outlets).



## TIME

Costa Rica is six hours behind GMT, which means it is equivalent to Central Standard Time in North America.

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### WATER

The tap water in Costa Rica is generally safe to drink, except in very rural or undeveloped parts of the country. Check with your guide if you are uncertain. If you prefer to be cautious, you can use bottled water for drinking and brushing teeth. Consider packing a reusable water bottle that can be refilled with purified water, available at most hotels.

### SMOKING

Costa Rica has taken steps in recent years to reduce smoking in public spaces. Please be aware it is against the law to smoke in public or non-designated areas, including in all restaurants, bars, and public spaces such as open venues, beaches, all forms of transportation, nature reserves, and national parks.

All hotels in Costa Rica, by law, have regulations against smoking in the rooms or common areas. Some hotels have designated smoking areas, but quite a few hotels are 100% smoke-free. These regulations also apply to the use of e-cigarettes and “vaping” devices, and if you are caught smoking in any non-designated area, you could be subject to a fine.

### PLUMBING

Plumbing systems in Costa Rica are different from what we are accustomed to in the US and typically cannot handle paper products, including toilet paper. To avoid clogs, please dispose of toilet paper in the waste bin provided.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### INTRODUCTION

The country of Costa Rica spans the width of Central America, from the Caribbean coast on the east to the Pacific on the west. Costa Rica shares its northern border with Nicaragua and its southern border with Panama. In area it is slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. Despite its small size, Costa Rica contains an incredible ecological diversity that is protected by one of the best-developed conservation systems in Latin America.

Since its independence from Spain in September of 1821, Costa Rica has taken advantage of trading agricultural products, primarily coffee and bananas, with the United States and Europe. Over the years it developed a stable economy and democracy. The country abolished its military in 1948, and today Costa Rica famously has more teachers than policemen. Its development has not come without a cost. The colonists brought diseases that decimated the country’s indigenous communities, and now only a tiny percentage of the national population is indigenous. Costa Rica’s environment has also suffered since independence. Loggers and farmers removed 75 percent of the land’s original forest cover. Unlike other developing countries, Costa Rica acted to conserve much of the remaining forest and thus retains rushing rivers, abundant wildlife, and a variety of pristine marine, volcanic, and rainforest ecosystems.

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## HISTORY

**Pre-Hispanic Era** — Little remains of Costa Rica's pre-Columbian culture. Archaeologists expect that people populated the land as far back as 20,000 BC. However, the oldest remains date back only 4,000 years to 2000 BC. A few archaeological sites and a plethora of jade and gold artifacts attest to the existence of a sophisticated culture in the area. Christopher Columbus named the area Costa Rica, meaning "rich coast," because of the gold pendants he saw the indigenous people wearing. Costa Rica had no centralized empire to contest the Spanish when they arrived in 1502. Rather, the indigenous lived in small, scattered groups and practiced shifting crop cultivation. After a series of attempts, the Spanish eventually gathered enough strength to subdue the population and set up an inland capital at Cartago in 1563.

**Colonial Era** — As it turned out, the land held little gold, and during colonial times Costa Rica became a mostly forgotten outpost of the Spanish empire. Small landowners and independent farmers sprang up in scattered locations across the countryside, unconsciously mimicking the pattern of the prior indigenous settlements. The colony's isolated, simple life laid the foundation for the hospitality and spirit of equality that exists in the country's people today.

After gaining independence from Spain in 1821 and declaring itself independent of the Central American Federation in 1848, Costa Rica began acquiring wealth in the late 1800s by exporting coffee.

**Democracy** — Before it could become established as a democracy, the country had to fight off the bizarre attack of an American businessman. In 1855 William Walker reached Costa Rica with the aim of taking over Central America. He had recently defeated Nicaragua and had designs to use its people as slaves to build a shipping canal to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. He had no support for his get-rich-quick schemes from the United States. Costa Rica mustered a militia, fended off Walker's army at a fort in what is now Santa Rosa National Park, then pursued him into Nicaragua and forced him to flee Central America. Walker, however, did not give up his mission and returned again and again to Central America, until he was finally assassinated in Honduras. Shortly thereafter, Costa Rica held its first official elections in 1889. During the 20th century, the democratic government remained unbroken except for a brief but brutal civil war that killed 2,000 people. After that two-week battle in 1948, the interim president, José Figueres, abolished the army and set up the country's constitution.

## GEOGRAPHY

Costa Rica has a backbone of volcanoes and mountain chains that provide an effective barrier between the Pacific and Caribbean lowlands. The mountains gradually rise from the north until they reach their highest point at the border with Panama. Volcanic activity fractures this mountainous backbone into three regions that form the central highlands. To the south is the Cordillera de Talamanca, which contains Cerro Chirripó, Costa Rica's highest peak at 12,454 feet.

## CLIMATE

Costa Rica exists entirely in the tropics. It has two well-defined seasons: the wet season, from May to November, and the dry season, from December to April. Rain is always a fact of life in Costa Rica, especially in the rainforest; moreover, the climate depends upon altitude and the mountain slope. Temperatures vary more with altitude than by season, and there are three climatic zones. The lowland coastal and northern plains are characterized by mangroves, beaches and heavy, almost continuous rains on the northern Caribbean coast; temperatures range from 77 to 100 °F. The temperate central valleys and plateaus, ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 feet, have regular rains from April through November, and milder temperatures of 59 to 77 °F. Finally, the high-altitude cold zone in areas above 6,000 feet is less rainy but windier than the temperate region, and temperatures range from 41 to 59 °F.



### Average Temperature and Rainfall by City

#### Average temperature in **San José, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	77.5	79.0	80.6	81.1	80.1	78.4	77.9	78.4	78.1	77.2	76.6	76.8
Low	59.2	59.2	60.3	61.9	61.9	61.9	62.2	61.5	60.8	60.6	60.4	59.4

#### Precipitation in **San José, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	0.7	0.6	0.9	3.1	13.5	15.0	11.1	15.1	18.2	18.5	8.4	2.2

#### Average temperature in **Sarapiquí, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	86.5	87.3	89.6	90.0	88.7	86.9	86.9	86.4	86.2	85.8	84.6	84.9
Low	69.6	69.8	71.8	73.2	72.9	71.8	72.5	71.6	70.5	70.2	70.2	69.3

#### Precipitation in **Sarapiquí, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	9.6	7.2	6.1	8.6	13.1	15.2	18.1	15.5	12.3	13.7	16.1	16.6

#### Average temperature in **La Fortuna/Arenal, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	85.6	86.9	88.9	89.4	87.3	85.3	85.3	84.9	84.6	84.2	83.3	84.0
Low	66.7	67.1	68.9	70.3	70.2	69.6	70.0	69.3	68.5	68.4	68.2	66.9

#### Precipitation in **La Fortuna/Arenal, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	7.6	4.9	3.3	3.7	9.6	16.0	19.5	17.4	16.3	18.0	12.2	10.2

#### Average temperature in **San Gerardo de Dota, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	62.4	64.6	65.5	66.2	65.5	64.2	64.0	64.2	64.6	63.5	62.6	62.2
Low	46.8	46.9	47.1	48.9	49.6	49.6	50.0	50.0	49.5	48.6	48.9	47.3

#### Precipitation in **San Gerardo de Dota, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	2.9	2.8	3.5	8.9	18.3	16.5	13.2	16.5	20.9	22.8	12.1	5.2

#### Average temperature in **Tortuguero, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	85.8	86.5	88.9	89.2	88.7	86.9	86.9	86.4	86.5	86.2	84.6	84.6
Low	70.5	71.1	72.9	74.3	73.9	72.5	73.4	72.7	71.4	71.1	70.9	70.5

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Precipitation in **Tortuguero, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	16.5	10.1	7.4	10.0	12.9	15.5	23.9	17.3	11.0	14.7	23.9	24.9

Average temperature in **Jacó, Costa Rica** (°F)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
High	90.1	91.4	93.7	93.4	90.7	88.7	89.1	88.7	88.0	87.1	87.1	88.2
Low	68.4	68.7	70.7	72.1	72.1	71.1	70.9	70.2	70.2	70.0	69.4	68.2

Precipitation in **Jacó, Costa Rica** (inches)

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average	1.0	0.7	1.1	3.1	11.1	13.4	11.1	15.6	17.1	22.2	9.5	2.2

Source: [climate-data.org](http://climate-data.org)

## ECOLOGY

Costa Rica is home to 5 percent of all known species. It is home to 12 of Holdridge's life zones, which classify vegetation based on seasonal temperature and rainfall. Costa Rica's zones are tropical dry, moist, wet and rainforests with combinations of premontane, lower montane and tropical sub-alpine wet, moist and cloud types. Within this variety of climates lives over 850 bird species, 350,000 insect species, 10,000 types of vascular plants, 208 mammal species, 220 reptile species, and at least 130 species of freshwater fish. Scientists estimate at least half a million species of flora and fauna exist in Costa Rica.

## GOVERNMENT

The country is a democratic republic. The constitution was established in 1949. There are three branches, much like the United States. The Executive branch consists of the President, or Chief of State, who is elected for one 4-year term, two vice presidents, and a cabinet of 22 ministers who are also Vice Presidents. The Legislative branch consists of 57 deputies, all elected to 4-year terms. Finally the Judicial branch is made of 22 ministers who form the Supreme Court of Justice and hold renewable 8-year terms.

## POPULATION

Costa Rica has a population of about 4.9 million with a growth rate of approximately 1.3%. Of the population, 93% is of European descent, 3% of African descent and less than 1% is indigenous. The country enjoys a 96% literacy rate and the school system is 9 years compulsory.

## LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of the country, though on the Caribbean coast a Caribbean Creole dialect of English is spoken. English is widely spoken throughout many areas of Costa Rica.

*Pura vida*, which translates literally to "pure life," is a phrase heard frequently in Costa Rica. It can be used as a greeting or farewell, to say thank you, or to express that things are going well.

Costa Ricans often refer to themselves as *ticos* (for men) or *ticas* (for women).



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## CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Common greetings include *buenos días*, *buenas tardes*, or *buenas noches*, depending on whether it is morning, afternoon, or night. Among younger people, the more informal greeting *hola* is popular, but some may consider it disrespectful.

To address someone formally, use titles such as *señor* and *señora*. Use *Don* and *Doña* to address an older person with familiarity and respect.

## RELIGION

The Roman Catholic Church was the nation's official church until the 1980s, when the government decreed it undemocratic to support any particular religion. Today 95 percent of the population is Roman Catholic.

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

January 1	New Year's Day
April 11	Anniversary of the Battle of Rivas
May 1	Labor Day
July 25	Annexation of Guanacaste
September 15	Independence Day
October 12	Cultures Day
December 1	Abolition of Armed Forces Day
December 25	Christmas Day

Most shops and businesses are closed in San José during Easter week and the week between Christmas and New Year's Day.

## SHOPPING

Popular souvenirs include handmade art and jewelry, wood carvings, Salsa Lizano (a type of Costa Rican sauce), chocolate, and coffee (look for packages marked "export quality.") The town of Sarchí is known for its colorfully painted oxcarts, and smaller reproductions are widely available. Be careful about purchasing any items that are made using endangered plants or animals.

Note that haggling is not common practice in Costa Rica.

## DIET

Rice, beans, bread, tortillas and fruit make up a large part of the Costa Rican diet. A typical breakfast dish is *gallo pinto*, a mixture of black beans and rice, often served with eggs and fresh fruit. Green or ripe plantains, either boiled or fried, are a staple food. *Empanadas*, chicken with rice, and *gallos*—tortillas filled with meat and vegetables—are all common dishes. In many areas the traveler can find restaurants that specialize in brick-oven pizzas made to order—a

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favorite with tourists and locals alike. Of course, Costa Ricans drink a lot of coffee, which is one of the country's major crops. Pork and beef are the most commonly eaten meats, but chicken and fish dishes are also widely available, especially on the Caribbean coast.

## READING GUIDE

Here is a brief selection of books you may want to consider reading before your journey.

### ESSENTIAL

#### Culture and Customs of Costa Rica

Chalene Helmuth | 2008

Featured topics include Costa Rica's, legacy of social reform, religion, social customs, media, and literature, national traits, cuisine, family roles, sports, and art and the performing arts.

#### Moon Handbook Costa Rica

Christopher P. Baker | 2011

A great resource for the independent traveler, this guide features a thorough introduction to the land, history and culture Costa Rica, as well as astonishing practical detail on getting around, where to go, and where to stay.

#### Rough Guide Costa Rica

Jean McNeil | 2011

This compact guide includes an excellent historical and cultural overview of Costa Rica, paying special attention to its natural history.

#### National Geographic Costa Rica

Christopher P. Baker | 2018

The guide features 200 photographs, 20 maps and good information history, nature, culture and travel in Costa Rica.

#### The New Key to Costa Rica

Beatrice Blake | 2009

A comprehensive, frequently revised guide to Costa Rica with excellent information on hotels, restaurants and excursions throughout the country.

#### Costa Rica, Travellers' Wildlife Guides

Les Beletsky | 2004

This outstanding book is a field guide to the natural history of Costa Rica featuring 350 color illustrations of common birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles. Introductory chapters cover habitats, parks and conservation in Costa Rica.

#### Costa Rica Adventure Map

National Geographic | 2001

A double-sided color map of Costa Rica at a scale of 1:350,000, with good shaded relief.





## ALSO RECOMMENDED

### Monkeys Are Made of Chocolate

Jack Ewing | 2005

Discover the mysterious and fascinating ways in which animals and plants—and people—interact with one another in the rainforests of Costa Rica.

### Wild Costa Rica

Adrian Hepworth | 2008

A wildlife photographer based in San Jose, Costa Rica, Hepworth writes with authority in this survey of the habitats, wildlife, protected areas and beauty of Costa Rica, featuring 200 color photographs.

### Costa Rica, An Ecotraveller's Guide

Hannah Robinson | 2006

A compact, well-illustrated guide to parks, wildlife reserves and outdoor activities throughout Costa Rica, organized geographically. Featuring dozens of local maps, suggested walks and activities, and an overview of wildlife.

### Costa Rica's National Parks and Reserves

J. Franke | 2009

A practical guide to the flora and fauna of Costa Rica focusing on its parks and preserves. It features profiles of Costa Rica's 40 protected areas, including sketch maps, practical directions and trail information.

### Costa Rica in Focus

Tjabel Daling | 2001

A concise guide to the people, politics, economy and culture of Costa Rica. The author explores the history of democracy since the abolition of the army in 1948, economic doldrums of the 1980s, and impact of tourism.

### Costa Rica Spanish Phrasebook

Lonely Planet | 2013

A pocket guide to understanding idioms, slang and Spanish as it is spoken by the Ticos.

### Central America, A Natural and Cultural History

Anthony G. Coates (Editor) | 1999

A concise overview of the region with contributions by diverse authors on the geology, natural history and culture of the Central American isthmus. A publication of the "Paseo Pantera Project." With charts, graphs and maps.

### The Ticos, Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica

Richard Biesanz | 1998

An insightful, fact-filled portrait of Costa Rican culture, history and society. This revised edition, by the same team that researched and wrote *The Costa Ricans*, brings the story up through the economic crisis of the 1980s and into the late 1990s. It's an excellent survey for the interested traveler.

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## A Neotropical Companion

J.C. Kricher | 1999

A tropical primer aimed at the motivated general reader. It's a systematic overview of the ecology, habitats, animals, plants and ecosystems of Central and South America.

## FIELD GUIDES

### The Birds of Costa Rica

Richard Garrigues • Robert Dean (Illustrator) | 2014

Compact, portable, and user-friendly, *The Birds of Costa Rica* has proven to be the essential field guide for identifying birds in the diverse habitats of Costa Rica. This second edition, with revisions throughout, features descriptions and illustrations of all 903 species found in Costa Rica.

### Mammals, Amphibians, and Reptiles of Costa Rica, A Field Guide

Carrol L. Henderson | 2010

This guide from the author of *Field Guide to the Wildlife of Costa Rica* includes the mammals, amphibians and reptiles travelers to Costa Rica are most likely to see, including information on natural history, ecology and animal behavior as well as 249 color photos and 117 maps.

### Field Guide to the Wildlife of Costa Rica

Carol Henderson, Alexander Skutch (Introduction) | 2002

A comprehensive photo guide to 300 commonly encountered and unusual species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and moths, and other invertebrates.

### Costa Rican Wildlife

Pocket Naturalist | 2018

A fold-up, laminated card featuring color drawings and short descriptions of commonly encountered birds, mammals and reptiles.

### Mammals of Costa Rica

Fiona Reid | 2009

A palm-sized guide to the native mammals of Costa Rica, as the author puts it, "larger than a loaf of bread." She includes some of the smaller species too, 65 in total.

## MOBILE APPS

### Costa Rica Birds - Field Guide

Michael Mullin

Full-featured birding field guide for Costa Rica with images, vocalizations, range maps, and more.

*Basic and full versions available*



## CONTACT INFORMATION

This informational packet is designed to help prepare you for your upcoming travel to Costa Rica.

If you have further questions, please contact your group leader or your travel specialist at Holbrook Travel.

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## SHARE A STORY

Don't forget to submit your photos for our yearly calendar! Each year it features photos displaying some of the highlights our travelers have had in the field. With the broad range of destinations and specialties that we offer, these moments are immeasurable and diverse. It is fascinating for the entire Holbrook Travel community to learn about your experiences and the amazing insights that have arisen from them.

We invite you to share your best photographs from your travels with us. In particular, we are seeking images that tell a story of what happened in that moment, what you were thinking, the emotions you experienced, and what impact the journey had.

For more information, please visit [holbrooktravel.com/shareastory](http://holbrooktravel.com/shareastory)

## CREDITS & THANKS

Photos by: Christa Markley and Dain Van Schoyck

Resources:

- [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)
- [cdc.gov/travel](http://cdc.gov/travel)



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