

A
to
Z

Welcome
to

Costa Rica

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Contact

The Team of ARA Tours

ARA Tours attends you during office hours in German and English. Outside office hours you can call us under the emergency number below where you can also reach us on weekends.

Visiting Address

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Week days: 18:00 – 06:00

Weekends: 16:00 – 08:00

Exploring Costa Rica

“Natural Paradise”, “Garden of Eden between the Pacific and the Atlantic”, “Tropical Garden between two Oceans” - that’s how Costa Rica often is described in articles, travel guides, and travel reports. This might also have been one of the reasons why you decided to go on this trip. Soon, you will see that the authors of these descriptions did not exaggerate.

Costa Rica is full of colours, shapes, flora and fauna. In addition, there is the fun-loving, open-minded, and hospitably population who will enrich your stay. With the growth of tourism in recent years, the range of tourist attractions has increased enormously,

offering plenty of ways to explore this natural paradise. Enjoy the wide range of opportunities, approach people, exchange stories, get inspired by the zest of life, and fill up your energy in the nature! But don’t forget that you are a guest in a country with a different culture and lifestyle.

Show respect to the people, help to leave nature as it is, and explore it as “gently” as possible. By visiting you help to protect nature and ensure that the people living there receive an income.

We would like to express our gratitude and wish you an exciting and interesting trip through the natural paradise of Costa Rica.

Kind Regards

Table of Contents

Contact	2	En route and in your hotel	13
The Team of ARA Tours.....	2	Drive responsibly	13
Visiting Address.....	2	Back Home	13
Office Hours	2	Safety Tips	13
Exploring Costa Rica	2	In General	13
Head Office	2	In the Nature	14
Table of Contents	3	In the Hotel	14
Information from A-Z	5	In your Car.....	14
Complaints	5	Natural Disasters	14
Deposit.....	5	Important Phone Numbers	15
Food and Drink	5	Important Contacts.....	15
Directions in Costa Rica	6	Embassies:.....	15
Flight Connections	6	Regions of Costa Rica	16
Money/Currency/Exchange/Credit Cards	6	Central Region	16
ATM	7	San José	16
Baggage.....	7	Gold Museum.....	16
Internet.....	8	Jade Museum.....	16
Clothes.....	8	National Museum	16
National Parks.....	8	National Theater.....	16
Ocean Currents.....	8	Braulio Carillo National Park	17
Mail Office.....	8	Rainforest Cable Way	17
Confirmation of the Return Flight	8	Poás Volcano National Park.....	17
Return Flight/Departure Tax.....	9	Cartago	17
Souvenir and Shopping	9	La Negrita.....	17
Voltage	9	Irazú Volcano National Park.....	17
Taxi.....	9	Turrialba Volcano and National Park.....	18
Phone Calls	9	Lankester Garden	18
Transport / Transfers	9	Orosí Valley	18
Taxes and Tips	10	Tapantí National Park.....	18
Health-Medical Care	11	“La Casa del Soñador”	19
Environment/Nature	12	Guayabo National Monument	19
Conservation and Security Advice.....	12	Northern Plains	19
Welcome to Costa Rica.....	12	La Fortuna.....	19
Environment and Nature Conservation	13	Arenal National Park	19
Respect Nature	13	Arenal Lake	20
		Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge.....	20

Ecocentro Danaus.....	20	Piedras Blancas National Park.....	27
La Fortuna Waterfall.....	21	La Amistad International Park.....	27
Monteverde and Santa Elena Region.....	21	Chirripó National Park.....	27
C.A.S.E.M.	21	Northern Caribbean.....	27
Monteverde Frog Pond	21	Tortuguero National Park	27
Jardín de Orquídeas (orchid garden).....	21	Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge.....	28
World of Snakes/Serpentarium	21	South Caribbean.....	28
Selvatura Park Monteverde.....	21	Sloth Sanctuary.....	28
Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	22	Cahuita National Park	28
Ant Tour.....	22	Gandoca Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge and National Park.....	28
Cocoa Tour.....	22	History of Costa Rica	29
Heliconia Island.....	22	Interesting Facts.....	31
Biological Station El Bejuco	22	Did you know that.....	31
Biological Station La Selva.....	22	Cultural Events and Holidays.....	32
North Pacific.....	22	January	32
Guanacaste National Park	22	February	32
Rincón de la Vieja National Park.....	22	March	32
Santa Rosa National Park.....	23	April.....	32
Santa Rosa's Casona	23	May.....	33
Miravalles Refuge	23	June	33
Tenorio National Park.....	23	July.....	33
Palo Verde National Park.....	24	August	33
Las Baulas National Park.....	24	September	33
World of the Turtle.....	24	October	33
Ecomuseum of San Vicente of Nicoya.....	24	November	34
Flight in an Ultralight Aircraft	24	December	34
Ostional Wildlife Refuge.....	24	Road Signs.....	35
Nosara Nature Reserve	24	Danger ahead!.....	35
Barra Honda National Park	24	Regulations	36
Central Pacific.....	25	Construction signs	37
Cabo Blanco Absolute Natural Reserve (Reserva natural absoluta Cabo Blanco)	25		
Carara National Park.....	25		
Crocodile Bridge over the Tárcoles River	26		
Manuel Antonio National Park.....	26		
Hacienda Barú	26		
South Pacific.....	26		
Marino Ballena National Park.....	26		
Terraba-Sierpe Mangroves.....	26		
Caño Island.....	27		
Corcovado National Park.....	27		



Information from A-Z

Complaints

In case you are not happy with one of the services or you have a reason for complaints, please contact ARA Tours or your tour guide immediately.

Deposit

Some hotels may ask you to sign a blank credit card slip, something that is required at car rental companies. Hotels will ask for this security so that you may visit their restaurant or bar and pay by merely leaving your signature instead of having to carry cash. When renting a car, the deposit will cover the deductible as well as incidental expenses such as fuel as well as potential tickets, and surcharges for one-way rentals. Make sure you receive this slip prior to your departure. You can settle your charges with it or you can destroy it.

Food and Drink

Whether local, international or fusion cuisine, there is a wide range of food. Costa Rica is not a gourmet land

but in several (mostly more expensive) restaurants and hotels you can taste delicious meals. In the city centre of San José, especially in the noble suburbs such as Escazú and Santa Ana, and generally in the metropolitan area of the Central Valley, you can find a wide range of interesting restaurants and bars.

Costa Rica's cuisine is quite rustic but delicious. The traditional cuisine is based on rice, beans, corn, tubercle such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, taro, arracacha, cassava, and vegetables combined with meat, chicken, and fish. At least once you should try a "Casado", a typical combination of some of these dishes. More and more, vegetarian food is offered whereas vegan food is not very widespread. TripAdvisor provides an overview of restaurants with their offers. People usually don't eat spicy food but a hot sauce or spicy pickled vegetables - a Chilero - is frequently offered.

In cook shops, which are called "sodas", you will receive small dishes such as Empanadas (fried dumplings made of cornmeal and filled with meat, cheese or beans) and Gallos (tortillas filled with meat, chicken, pork sausage or cheese).



The national health ministry inspects all restaurant and cook shops (sodas). The hygienic standard is very high in Costa Rica. Tap water is potable in many places, except in some jungle lodges where specially filtered water is provided. Ice cubes are generally made of filtered water.

Costa Rica grows hardly any wine which is why almost all the offered wines are import products and quite expensive for European standards. Good quality is provided by wine from Chile, Argentina, and California. Supermarkets (especially in the metropolitan area of the Central Valley) usually have a wide range of different types of wine from different countries.

Beers from large breweries are characterized by European recipes. The most common type is the Imperial (export beer), followed by Pilsen (Bohemian Pilsen), Bavaria (Bavarian Light Beer 4.8%), and Bavaria Dark (dark, malty). There are some different alternatives such as Imperial Silver, Imperial light, Bavaria light, Bavaria chill, and Bohemia with a slighter flavour and a lower alcohol content. A variety of licensed beers such as Heineken (The Netherlands), Toña (Nicaragua), Corona (Mexico), Gallo (Guatemala), and Budweiser (USA) is offered.

In recent years, more and more microbreweries emerged that offer their products locally.

Directions in Costa Rica

Please note that in Costa Rica there are no standard directions and the search for a destination works differently than you are used to, so we recommend using free GPS map applications to get you safely to your destination, especially for customers who have rented a car. We recommend downloading the Waze app which is even better than Google Maps. Waze has a lot of user-generated content (including current traffic conditions, accidents, etc.). The app also works well if you are walking around the city. You need to buy an inexpensive prepaid SIM card to use Waze, but if you start navigating while connected to WiFi, the app won't use much data while en route.

Just enter the name of the hotel to find out the correct route. However, be aware that there are several places and hotels with similar or even identical names, but which are located in completely different regions of the country. Make sure you choose the right destination by comparing details such as

the name of the hotel, place or province with the information specified on the hotel voucher.

Flight Connections

Costa Rica provides a good national flight network. Several local airlines offer daily direct connections to almost all the important places and regions. They provide a well-maintained fleet with modern technical equipment and highly-trained pilots. You will receive flight schedules and prices from our Customer Experience Team. Important: Baggage on domestic flights might be limited, depending on the airline and ticket class (generally between max. 14 kg (30 lb) and 18 kg (39 lb)). One hand baggage with generally 4.5 kg (9 lb) and the internationally permitted measures is allowed.

Further information under:

<https://aerobell.airkiosk.com/aerobell/website-new/costa-rica-domestic-flights/luggage-limitations/> and <https://www.flysansa.com/travelinfo/baggage>

Money/Currency/ Exchange/Credit Cards

Costa Rica's national currency is the "Colón" (from Spanish Cristóbal Colón = Christopher Columbus). Banknotes and coins are denominated as follows:

Banknotes: 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000 and 20,000;
coins: 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 500

US dollar can be changed at all banks, euros at most of them. In many stores and supermarkets, you can pay with US\$ (not with €) and you will receive change in the national currency.

With VISA, MASTERCARD, and AMERICAN EXPRESS you can pay almost everywhere, with DINER'S CLUB unfortunately not. In general, it is advisable to carry a small amount of cash in US\$ (small notes 1, 5, 10, 20) or Colones.

Traveller's checks can only be cashed by banks. This usually takes some time and a fee (1-5%) will be charged.

It is mandatory to show your passport when changing money at banks, changing traveler's checks, paying with credit card, and usually also when paying with US\$ notes (banknotes higher than US\$ 20.-- are often accepted by banks only).

ATM

At almost every bank you will find an ATM as well as at some supermarkets in the entrance area (Walmart, Más x Menos, Automercado, Megasuper).

At the national banks (Banco Costa Rica, Banco Nacional, Banco Popular), functionality is limited to the time of 5:00 am until 12:00 am for safety reasons (prevention of assaults).

Private banks (BAC San José, Davivienda, Lafise, Scotiabank, Banco Promerica, BCT) operate their ATMs 24 hours.

On the ATMs it is indicated in which currency you can withdraw money:

¢ = COLONES

\$ = US DOLLAR

Private banks mostly have a greater acceptance of different cards. It is usually indicated at the entrance which cards will be accepted.

The menu on the screen can usually be displayed in Spanish and English.

Important terms that appear on the screen:

Spanish	English
Cuenta Corriente	Checking Account
Cuenta Ahorro	Savings Account
Tarjeta de Crédito	Credit Card
Retiro	Withdrawal

It is often indicated on the screen that the bank will charge you a fee (usually US\$ 3.--) when you withdraw money. You have to answer with Sí or Yes if you want to continue.

The daily credit card limit is determined by your bank. The limit at the ATM is usually US\$ 600.-- per operation, depending on the daily limit of the bank/ credit card.

Baggage

Ideally, you travel in Costa Rica with two pieces of baggage. A suitcase and a backpack (bag) for excursions. There are baggage restrictions on domestic flights (see topic flights). There might be a baggage weight limit on boat excursions (12-18 kg/26-39 lb) and only one hand baggage (4.5 kg/9 lb) is allowed. If so, our office or the tour guide will be happy to organize the storage of your main baggage.

If one of your pieces of baggage should not arrive with the same flight, please report this at the corresponding counter in the baggage hall. Always indicate your address(es) of the next 2 days. You can track the status of this piece of baggage on your airline's website (e.g. Iberia) with the international WORLDTRACER:

<https://www.sita.aero/worldtracer>

In order to provide details of your piece of baggage, please enter the ten-digit reference number in the first field and your last name in the second field



(the last name must match exactly the data of the Property Irregularity Report (PIR)). Then click on the Send button. It is recommended to carry underwear and clothes for one day in your hand baggage as well as important medication.

Internet

Internet access is provided in almost every hotel (usually for free). Please ask for availability and the access code at the check-in. Many restaurants offer this service, too. Some, mostly larger hotels, provide internet on their own computers. This might be liable to costs.

Clothes

In Costa Rica you will find quite different temperatures which depend on the altitude (0-3,820 m.a.s.l./0-12,530 FMSL). In the lowlands and on the coasts the climate is hot and often also humid. In some regions, humidity reaches up to 80-90%. In the central highlands, there are summery temperatures almost all over the year, except in December when temperatures drop to 16 °C (61 °F). In places surrounded by mountains beyond 1,500 m.a.s.l. (5,000 FMSL) it might get cool and at night even cold. In the high mountains beyond 2,500 m (8,200 FMSL), temperatures drop to 0 °C (32 °F) and you will be happy to carry a wind jacket and/or a pullover. Raincoat/poncho and/or umbrella are recommendable.

Usually, there is no dress code in restaurants and hotels but you should not appear at the table in swimwear. It is not allowed to go topless or naked to the beaches or to public baths.

National Parks

Toward the end of the 1970s, governments began to put more effort into supporting nature conservation. In the preceding decades, priority had been given to the development of new farmlands, and huge forest areas had been converted into agricultural land. Some surviving areas of unspoiled nature were then accorded the protection of national park status. In these reserves - which are managed by a specifically designed state institution (SINAC) - it is prohibited to build, cultivate, and remove anything. Only on paths and trails - specially approved for guests - you can explore parts of these nature

reserves. Currently, approximately 25% of the whole country underlie state protection. Other 5% of the country are protected by private initiatives but with the support of the SINAC.

The entrance fee is between US\$ 10-18.--.

Ocean Currents

At all beaches in Costa Rica strong currents might occur and there is often a relatively high surf due to tidal movements or weather conditions. It is important to obey the local advises (a red flag at the beach indicates danger). Ask your tour guide, the local population or, if present, the lifeguard about the general and current conditions whether the sea is suitable for swimming. If possible, inform fellow travellers or your tour guide about your plan to swim. Have respect for the great waves and always try to keep your feet on the ground. If you get caught by a current, stay calm. Swim parallel to the beach, away from the current. If you need help, catch attention by waving your arms (crossed arms over head) and shout.

Mail Office

Mail offices are located in all larger towns. The Costa Rican mail offices have the monopoly for the sale of stamps. Only local currency is accepted, no US dollar. Mailboxes are rather rare in Costa Rica. They are blue with the label "Correos de Costa Rica" and are set up in some hotels and gift shops. Postcards are best submitted directly by the mail office. Usually, it takes about 10 days to send a postcard to Europe. The Costa Rican mail office also provides courier mail and parcel service. Prices are mostly lower than those from other commercial providers.

Confirmation of the Return Flight

According to our information of the airlines, a confirmation of the return flight is not necessary if the return flight is set within two months after arrival. If this is not the case, or you would like to have confirmed your flight anyway, please do so on the airline's website with the code of the electronic ticket. There you can also carry out the electronic check-in and reserve a seat.

Return Flight/Departure Tax **Taxi**

The airport operators recommend being at the airport three hours before departure. The safety regulations are, depending on the international situation, quite strict and intensive controls are carried out. If you booked an additional transfer for your return flight from your hotel, you will find the corresponding pick-up time on your transfer information.

When departing from the international airport Juan Santamaría near San José and from Liberia, you will have to pay a departure tax prior to check-in. These are included in most of the airline tickets by now. Check here whether this applies to your airline or consult them under the following link:

Juan Santamaría Intl. (SJO)

<https://sjoairport.com/en/passenger-guide>

Daniel Oduber Quirós Intl. (LIR)

<https://www.liberiacraairport.com/>

Souvenir and Shopping

In the tourist resorts you will find souvenir shops with a wide range of popular and traditional goods.

Shopping facilities are provided by the cities of San José, Heredia, Alajuela, Cartago, and Liberia. The large, covered shopping malls, which offer a variety of goods in different shops, are very popular here.

Please note that exportation of the following goods is prohibited:

Any kind of plants, animals, insects, corals, tortoise-shell articles as well as pre-Colombian and Indian artifacts (originals). Sometimes strict controls will be applied at the airport. Exception: Seeds, plants, and farmed butterflies (exhibit) with a valid export certificate. Reproductions of Native Indian artefacts should be accompanied with a corresponding certificate.

Voltage

The voltage is 110 volts/60 hertz throughout the country. Check the compatibility of your chargers. An adapter for flat contact plugs is necessary for the sockets type A + B (US standard). You can buy them at low prices in hardware stores on the spot.

Taxis are red and have a yellow triangle with the taxi number on the front doors and a yellow sign on the roof. Please travel only by these official taxis. All taxis must have a taximeter ("Maria"). Make sure the taxi driver switches it on. Official airport taxis are orange and have fixed tariffs.

Phone Calls

The area code to make calls to Costa Rica is +506. From Costa Rica to US and Canada +1, to the UK +44, to Ireland +353, to the Isle of Man +44-1624, to Australia +61, and to New Zealand +64, followed by the city code (without the first 0) and the phone number. At most hotels you can make international phone calls (costs around US\$ 1-2.-- per minute). If you carry your own cell phone, you can buy a chip of one of the local telephone companies (Kölbi, Movistar, Claro) and some credit to call home. This is cheaper than roaming with your own chip.



Transport / Transfers

We are happy to organize additional transports and transfers for you throughout the country. Please consider that it will take some time to organize the transfer and that it is subject to availability. Therefore, we ask you to make your request early enough. In Costa Rica you can travel by public buses. This is why you should know some Spanish in order to ask for the corresponding bus stops, prices, and departure times. Internet often provides information about certain routes. Travelling by bus

can take a lot of time. There are also private minibus entrepreneurs with collective transports which take you right from your hotel to your destination. These transfers have fixed schedules and take place with a minimum of 2 persons. If you would like to travel alone or the fixed departure times of the collective buses do not suit your program, we recommend our private transfers. Flights with one of the domestic flight airlines such as a scheduled flight or a charter service are time-saving. We are happy to give you advice about the different opportunities.

Taxes and Tips

The value added tax amounts to 13% at present. Restaurants charge a 10% service fee - which are prescribed by the legislator - that the whole service staff will receive.

If you still like to tip the staff, you can choose its amount, of course.

Some restaurants only indicate net prices in the menus. In this case, 13% VAT and 10% service fee will be added. If "I.V.I." is indicated on the menu, it means that the VAT is already included and only the service fee has to be paid.

Tips for:

Chambermaids: US\$ 1.-- per night.

Local guides: US\$ 1-5.--

Drivers: US\$ 1-2.-- per day

Tour guide: US\$ 2-4.-- per day

In general, the amount of the tip depends on your satisfaction and is subject to your own discretion.



Health-Medical Care

The medical treatment is very good throughout the country. In the metropolitan area and in the whole Central Valley, including the cities of Cartago, Heredia, and Alajuela, there are good national hospitals and clinics which are equipped with modern appliances and good, highly trained medical staff. There are four large private hospitals in San José, “Hospital Clínica Bíblica” (phone +506 2522 1000), “Hospital CIMA” (phone +506 2208 1000), Hospital Metropolitano (phone + 506 2521 9595) and Hospital Clínica Católica (phone + 506 2246 3000). These private hospitals also offer high standard with modern appliances and good, highly trained medical staff. Furthermore, they provide pharmacies which are open 24 hours.

Private clinics demand to cover costs by a credit card or your health insurance’s declaration of assumption of costs. State hospitals are obliged to treat also non-members of the public health insurance in case of an emergency. The costs, of course, must be borne by the patient or his or her travel health insurance.

Outside the capital region you receive medical, stationary care through the national hospitals. Smaller towns and villages provide state clinics or emergency centres (EBAIS) with outpatient care as well as private medical centres with registered doctors from different fields. Pharmacies are a good possibility to receive first help, and information about doctors who are locally available. The pharmacist on duty can give first advice in case of non-critical diseases. In larger cities there are pharmacies with a 24-hour emergency service.

On the website of the US Embassy, you will find a list with English-speaking doctors, and a list with hospitals and clinics:

<https://cr.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/doctors/>

In most parts of the country, tap water is potable. Please inform yourself about the respective drinking water quality on the spot. If you want to play safe, you better buy water in bottles. In the tropics it is important to drink regularly and sufficient water.

Avoid eating food of street vendors. Always wash raw fruits and vegetables or, if possible, peel them. Do not touch or eat plants and fruits you don’t know when exploring nature. Some of them can cause allergic reactions.

There is a low risk of Malaria in the Matina district in Central Limón (east) but it is so low that no prophylaxis has been recommended, so far.

Illnesses such as dengue fever, chikungunya, and zika can be transmitted by the bite of the tiger mosquito (*aedes aegypti*). These illnesses occur repeatedly in different phases. The health department fights regularly against possible hatcheries and sprays insecticide on places that indicate infections. The windows in the hotels are usually equipped with mosquito screens and some rooms have mosquito nets.

Please use a reliable mosquito repellent round-the-clock during your stay such as OFF, NO-BITE, ANTI BRUMM, etc.

Mosquito repellent can be bought on the spot in all supermarkets and pharmacies.



Environment/Nature Conservation and Security Advice

Costa Rica is located in the time zone UTC – 6h. Costa Rica keeps the same time offset all days of the year, so it does not have daylight saving time.

Costa Rica is one of the most important and diverse eco-tourism destinations in Central America. About 5% of the world's biodiversity can be found here. Environmental protection and nature conservation is already being promoted and has been implemented in many areas of the country. Over 25% of its 51,100 km² (19,730 mi²) total land area is under protection and is monitored and administered by the state. Additional 5% are private protection and reforestation projects that operate with the state's support.

The Tourism Board ICT pursues a certification program (CST) which assesses the commitment in the areas of environmental protection, nature

and cultural conservation as well as sustainability of tourism companies. ARA Tours has been awarded the maximum of 5 leaves since 2015 and is permanently working on maintaining this high standard and from 2021 the category "Elite".

Therefore, we would like to give you a few pieces of advice on how to preserve the unique nature of this beautiful country and also to protect the environment during your stay.

Costa Ricans are generally very open-minded and friendly to foreign travelers. If any problems should arise you will easily find a helping hand. Please follow the safety instructions below and you will travel unmolested, without great dangers and with much pleasure in this small but extremely interesting country.



Environment and Nature Conservation

Respect Nature

- Follow the instructions of the park rangers
- Refrain from smoking in nature
- Do not leave the designated hiking trails
- Do not talk too loudly. This makes it easier to spot wild animals
- Do not use the flash on your camera when taking pictures of animals
- Do not touch or feed wild animals
- Do not touch plants as they might be poisonous
- Do not take plants, rocks or corals with you
- ARA Tours is part of the #Stopanimalselfies Campaign so we ask you to reject practices such as taking a selfie hugging or holding an animal, as this promotes their exploitation and inappropriate management.

En route and in your hotel

- Avoid plastic packaging, bringing it is completely prohibited in national parks
- Prefer local products
- Separate your garbage during your travels
- Use water and energy consciously
- Reuse towels in your hotel
- Turn off the light, fan, and the air-conditioning when leaving your room
- Follow the eco-tips in each hotel
- If you visit a buffet restaurant, try to serve yourself what you are going to eat, this avoids food waste

Drive responsibly

- Keep the speed limit
- Start your car only when you are really ready to go
- Use the air-conditioning as little as possible

Cultural Heritage

- We safeguard our cultural heritage such as: indigenous cultures, sacred sites and cultural expressions, which are part of our idiosyncrasy, so we ask you to respect and protect them during your visit.
- When buying a souvenir, make sure that it is not of dubious origin, such as historical or archaeological artifacts, as these are part of Costa Rica's historical heritage.

Back Home

- Find ways to act more eco-friendly in your home
- Look for ecological projects in your area and support these
- Inspire other people to think and act green

Safety Tips



In General

- 🌿 Refrain from wearing expensive jewellery
- 🌿 Exchange money only at a bank or a currency exchange office and store it before leaving
- 🌿 Take a cab at night in the city. Only take a minimum amount of cash with you
- 🌿 Do not struggle or resist in case of a robbery or attack. Documents and valuables are replaceable

In the Nature

- 🌿 Follow the instructions of the park rangers
- 🌿 Study the maps of hiking trails (if available)
- 🌿 Do not go alone in remote and impassable areas
- 🌿 Do not leave the designated nature trails
- 🌿 Bring enough drinking water
- 🌿 Do not touch unknown plants
- 🌿 Do not touch wild animals, especially snakes and amphibians
- 🌿 Wear closed ankle-high shoes during your walks
- 🌿 Do not overestimate your physical condition and skills, and observe the climatic conditions
- 🌿 Please inform yourself about potential risks before swimming in the sea/river
- 🌿 Please heed the warnings on the beach regarding dangerous currents

In the Hotel

- 🌿 Inform yourself about evacuation routes and safety zones on the property
- 🌿 Use the hotel safe for your valuables and documents
- 🌿 Close windows and doors of your room while you're gone

In your Car

- 🌿 Follow the instructions of your car rental service
- 🌿 Fasten your seat belt
- 🌿 Do not make phone calls or send messages while driving
- 🌿 Follow the traffic regulations
- 🌿 Do not drive under the influence of alcohol, drugs and/or prescription drugs
- 🌿 Avoid remote, impassable streets and river crossings
- 🌿 Only park your car on supervised lots
- 🌿 Do not leave valuables and baggage in the car
- 🌿 Always lock the car

Natural Disasters

- 🌿 Keep calm
- 🌿 Follow the instructions of the authorities and the hotel staff
- 🌿 Look for the signposted security zones and evacuation routes
- 🌿 Call ARA Tours and inform us about your condition as soon as possible, even if you are unharmed
- 🌿 Call your relatives at home
- 🌿 Call your embassy

If you do not contact us, we will try to determine your condition as follows:

- 🌿 In the hotel
- 🌿 Via your guide
- 🌿 Via the cell phone of your car rental service (Please turn it on and make sure it is charged)
- 🌿 Via the Red Cross.
- 🌿 Via your embassy.

Important Phone Numbers

Important Contacts


- 📞 Emergencies: 911
- 📞 Main Office ARA Tours: +506-2232-0400
- 📞 Extension Customer Experience: 200
- 📞 Customer Experience WhatsApp:
+506-8893-3863
- ✉️ customerexperience@aratours.com
- 📞 Outside Office Hours:
18:00 - 06:00: +506-8946-8222

Embassies:

- 📞 Great Britain: +506-2258-2025
- 📞 Netherlands: +506-2296-1490
- 📞 Belgium: +506-2280-4435
- 📞 United States: +506-2519-2279



Regions of Costa Rica

 **Important! For some national parks the entrance tickets have to be bought online, by phone or by e-mail. In this link: www.aratours.com/en/media-files you will find detailed information for which parks the tickets can be purchased and how.**



Central Region

In the Central Valley you will find a wide range of cultural and tourist attractions, including Costa Rica's best museums such as the Gold Museum, Jade Museum, National Museum, Costa Rican Art Museum, La Salle Natural Sciences Museum, Insect Museum of the University of Costa Rica, Children's Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design. Furthermore, you will find the architectural jewel of the country, the National Theatre as well as the attractive Melico Salazar Theatre. All this you can see in the capital of San José. Visitors to the national parks around the Central Valley - Poás, Braulio Carrillo, Irazú, and Turrialba - can enjoy bird life, landscapes, craters, and the jungle. San José is the political and economic centre but also the provincial capitals - Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago - provide a wide range of commercial and tourist services.

Please be advised that during holidays such as Christmas, New Year's Day and special events such as parades or carnivals in downtown San Jose, the museums are closed.

San José

Costa Rica's capital is located in the area of a high valley in the country's center at about 1,100 m.a.s.l. (3,600 FMSL). This high valley is called "Valle Central". The capital is surrounded by a volcanic chain in the north and by a mighty, over 3,000 meters (9,800 ft) high mountain range in the south. Thanks to the fertile volcanic soil in the Central Valley, coffee, fruits, vegetables, and sugar cane grow. The population of San José is 1.7 million (2023).

Gold Museum

The Gold Museum is situated below the Plaza de la Cultura (behind the National Theater) and contains an impressive collection of pre-Columbian golden works of art, ceramic works, and stone masonry which will give you a good insight into the history and culture of Costa Rica's indigenous people.

Jade Museum

The Museo del Jade y Arte Precolombino is located in the Plaza de la Democracia in the centre of San José and also displays, beside pre-Columbian jade works, works of art made from stone and ceramic of this era. There are 7,000 exhibits that are shown in modern exhibit spaces.

National Museum

The National Museum, which is situated in the formerly military garrison Buena Vista in the Plaza de la Democracia, will surely provide the most extensive collection of artefacts and information about the past to contemporary history of Costa Rica.

National Theater

The National Theater of San José, built in neoclassical style, is an architectural gem of the 19th century with an exquisite internal decor. It is located right opposite the cathedral at the Central Park. The entrance hall is already very impressive with a lot of Carrara marble, gold leaf, and ceiling paintings of Italian artists. From here you reach the adjacent elegant theatre café with excellent coffee, cakes, and dishes.

Braulio Carillo National Park

This national park is located just 20 km (12 mi) from San José on the National Street 32 which leads toward the province of Limón. It is one of the regions with the highest precipitations in the country, consisting of dense rainforest and misty mountain forest. The National Park Station Quebrada Gonzalez is located halfway through the park right on the street, and provides the possibility to explore the forests along 2 hiking trails

(entrance fee US\$ 14.00, 2023).

Rainforest Cable Way

Next to the Braulio Carrillo National Park you can find Rainforest Adventures Costa Rica Atlantic. This attraction resulted from a project of the US-American biologist Donald Perry who was able to prove the enormous biodiversity inside the treetop region in these forests through his research in the 1970s and 1980s. The canopy tour, the cable way as well as nature trails with bird watching offer the possibility to observe the flora and fauna from different perspectives. Various packages with different prices are provided.

Location: Approximately 45 minutes from San José on the National Street 32 in the direction of Guápiles.

Poás Volcano National Park

The Poás Volcano National Park is located on the continental divide of the Central Highlands at 2708 meters above sea level (8880 feet above sea level) and has two craters. The main crater measures 1.36 km (0.8 mi) in diameter, and therefore it is one of the largest craters in the world. Its second crater, the Botos lagoon, extinct for a thousand of years, is filled with a lake. You can easily reach both craters on well-kept paths

(entrance fee US\$ 17.00, 2023).

Cartago

This city is located about 25 km (16 mi) east of the capital, San José, at an elevation of about 1'435 m.a.s.l. (some 4,707 FAMS.L), at the base of the Irazú Volcano. Cartago is the capital of Cartago province and was the colonial capital of the back then province Costa Rica from 1574 to 1823. It is the religious centre of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica.

The Plaza Mayor in Cartago includes the Santiago Apostol Parish ruins, about seven blocks west from the basilica. Despite their beauty, they are not real ruins but an unfinished building, which was started in the last quarter of the 19th century and was badly damaged by the disastrous Santa Monica earthquake (8.3 on the Richter scale) on the 4th of May 1910, just before the roof could be constructed. The building has been discontinued since then and is a national historical site today.

La Negrita

According to folklore in Costa Rica, a small statue in the shape of the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus, made of black stone, was found by a mulatto girl on 2nd of August 1635 sitting on a rock at the natural spring where she used to get water every day and gather fire wood. The legend says that she brought the statue home several times, but it mysteriously reappeared at its original site. On the very same site the catholic community of Cartago built a church in honour of the Virgin Mary, called Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles. The statue, which is commonly called "La Negrita" is kept in a safe in the basilica and is revered as the national sacred relic. In the basement of the church the supposedly original rock with a replica of La Negrita is on display. Outside the church, the original spring spills its water from several tubes. Catholic believers come to the church in order to pray to the Virgin Mary, sprinkle some spring water on themselves and take some of it home. The water is considered holy and with healing powers.

Every year on August 2, more than 100,000 pilgrims from Costa Rica and neighbouring countries gather at the church. The statue of La Negrita is displayed in the church then and many sick come and pray in order to receive healing.

Irazú Volcano National Park

The Irazú Volcano with a height of 3,432 m.a.s.l. (11,260 FAMS.L) is the highest volcano of the country and the most active stratovolcano in Costa Rica's history. It lies on the continental divide, northeastern of the city of Cartago. The last volcanic activity of the 20th century was from 1963-65. Since then, it has been in a resting phase, and it is possible to drive right up to the crater area in order to walk over a lunar-like landscape inside an old, huge crater. You

can look at the Irazú crater with its 1050 m (3500 ft) in diameter and 300 m (1000 ft) in depth, and the smaller De La Haya Crater next to it with 600 m (2000 ft) in width and 200 m (650 ft) in depth. The slopes of the Irazú massif are very fertile, thanks to the volcanic soil, and are used for the cultivation of potatoes and different types of vegetables, up to a height of over 3000 m (9800 ft). The uniform climate provides harvests all over the year. Due to its location it is recommended to visit the park early in the morning as the panoramic view will disappear behind clouds around noon

(entrance fee US\$ 17.00, 2023).

Location: The national park is well-marked and can be reached via the city of Cartago.

Turrialba Volcano and National Park

Irazú Volcano's direct neighbour has the impressive height of 3,325 m.a.s.l. (10,910 FAMS) and is therefore the second-highest volcano in the central volcanic chain. After a resting phase of 143 years, it is active again with strong gas emissions and ash eruptions with varying intensity.

After being closed for 8 years, Turrialba Volcano National Park has been reopened to the public in December 2020

(entrance fee US\$ 14, 2023)

Lankester Garden

This botanical garden was originally established as a private garden by Charles Lankester in order to conserve the local flora, especially orchids, bromeliads, and lilies. There are more than 800 orchid species to admire but also an enormous diversity of tropical plants. You can walk through the spacious area along well-kept paths.

Location: Lankester Garden can be reached via the city of Cartago in the direction of Paraíso. Turn right approximately 500 m (550 yd) after the Plaza Paraíso shopping mall

(entrance fee US\$ 12.00, 2023).

Orosí Valley

The landscape between the Irazú and Turrialba volcanoes and the tropical rainforest is one of the most beautiful in Costa Rica. In the village of Orosí you can admire the oldest still preserved monastery church of the country which was built by Franciscan friars in the year of 1743.

Tapantí National Park

The Tapantí National Park protects 58,300 hectares (472,600 acres) with 150 lakes which are responsible for a large part of the metropolitan area's water supply. The park is situated on altitudinal zones from 700 (2,300) to 3,400 m.a.s.l. (11,200 FAMS)



and includes a variety of climate and life zones. In some zones, the precipitation per year goes up to 7,000 mm. This region provides about 50% of the metropolitan area with tap water.

45 mammal species live here such as tapirs, jaguars, ocelots, pumas, coyotes, anteaters, white-nosed coatis, new world porcupines, and lowland pacas. There are about 260 bird species including the quetzal, already admired by the Mayans. The quetzal ranks among the most beautiful birds in the world and lives in the high-altitude areas of this region. The national park can be reached via Orosi. Here you can hike along a small part of the park and if you're lucky you can see one of the shy representatives of the local fauna.

“La Casa del Soñador”

The “House of the Dreamer” is made entirely of wood and bamboo and was the home and workshop of Macedonio Quesada, a local wood carver who died in 1995. Here you can buy various wooden artefacts from local carvers.

Location: Coming from Orosi, follow the road to Cachí. The “House of the Dreamer” is located approximately 5 km (3 mi) after the bridge which leads over the river of Palomo.

Guayabo National Monument

Guayabo, with its total area of 65 hectares (160 acres), is the most important archaeological site in Costa Rica. The first archaeological finds were made when coffee estates were planted up at the beginning of the 19th century, but only in the last third of the 19th century archaeological works and analyses were initiated.

Between 1000 B.C. and 1400 A.D., approximately 2000 to 10,000 indigenous people, who predominantly were part of the Chibcha culture of the Andes, lived in this region. However, there are finds that show influences of Mesoamerican cultures. The excavations exposed aqueducts, water basins, stone stairs, stone statues, and large, round stone platforms. Conical longhouses, constructed of wood and palm fronds, were up to 30 m (100 ft) in diameter and towered 20 m (65 ft) above these platforms which were made of stacked boulders. The finds show that the central settlements of Indian kings, high priests, and the related upper-class lived here. The surrounding settlements were connected with

the centre. This is why it is believed that Guayabo was an important political, religious, and cultural centre.

When at the beginning of the 16th century the Spanish arrived in this region, the settlement was already abandoned for about 100 years. Reasons for the inhabitants' disappearance could have been wars or disease epidemics.

Location: By driving from the city of Cartago on the National Street 230 to Santa Cruz de Turrialba, you will reach the well-marked street that leads to the monument on your left after approximately 10 km (6 mi)

Entrance fee to the well laid-out area is US\$ 6.00 (2023).

Northern Plains

La Fortuna

This small but lively town is marked by the Arenal Volcano whose perfect cone forms a picturesque backdrop only some 8 km (5 mi) away. In 1968, it broke out after 400 years of resting and attracted volcanologists from all over the world and later also many tourists. It is said to be one of the most active volcanoes of the world. On clear days you can see the top of the youngest volcano (about 7000-8000 years) of Costa Rica. Since 2010, there has not been any volcanic eruptions, but a column of smoke is almost always visible.

The most important attractions are hot springs, horseback trips, quad tours, hiking, bike tours, river trips (rafting), and canopy tours.

Arenal National Park

This national park includes the active Arenal volcano which constantly produced lava until 2010. You can hike through vegetation that has regrown surprisingly quickly, to a field of cooled lava from which on clear days you can get a sweeping view of the smoking volcano and the nearby Arenal lake.

Location: Approximately 18 km (11 mi) north of the city of La Fortuna, at a small control house of the Fuerza Pública (police), you turn left into a gravel road. After about 1.5 km (1 mi) you will find the entrance on your left.

Entrance fee: US\$ 17.00 (2023)



Arenal Lake

At the foot of the volcano of the same name lies the 80 km² (30 mi²) reservoir which was built in the 1970s by the state-owned electric company ICE. The lake's water is used to generate power. Not only is the lake of a particularly natural beauty, its water is used to produce 40% of the country's electricity. Among the activities to do here are fishing, kayaking, motor boating, and, on the windy northwestern end of the lake, sailboarding and kitesurfing. A picturesque road leads from La Fortuna around the lake toward Nuevo Arenal and Tilarán. From Tilarán you can get to the mountain region of Monteverde or to the hot lowlands of the Guanacaste plains.

Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge

This wetland, designated as a protected area, provides an important habitat for water birds. Water surfaces, created by seasonal flooding, become home for cattle egrets, snowy egrets, great egrets, wood storks, roseate spoonbills, and cormorants. Boat trips are offered to explore the bird life. On the way, you can see mantled howlers, white-headed capuchin monkeys, iguanas, turtles, caimans, and crocodiles. Many species of fish live in the waters.

The ethnic alligator gar, a bony fish, is relict of the past. A living fossil.

Entrance fee: US\$ 6.00 (2023)

Boat trips on the Río Frío are offered in Los Chiles which is close to the Nicaraguan border. Here you can also see a lot of animals.

Location: Drive along the Country Road 142 from La Fortuna toward Tanque, then take a slight left into the National Street 4 until the intersection with the Country Road 35 in the direction of Muelle and Los Chiles.

Ecocentro Danaus

This reforestation and nature conservation project which started in 1997 with 3 hectares (7 acres) of pastureland - provides many exciting attractions of the flora and fauna. A spring originating on the premises feeds a 700 m² (7530 ft²) pond where caimans and turtles live. In the trees around the water, you can watch night active boat-billed herons that rest here during the day. Big common kingfisher look for fish. A small butterfly house shows several types of butterflies, and you can also take a look at the eggs, caterpillars, and cocoons of these highly developed insects. If you're lucky you can see a

sloth hanging in the tree. More than 300 different kinds of tropical plants and herbs form the backdrop for tiny, red poison-dart frogs. There are very good bird-watching possibilities at a feeding spot set up for this purpose. Furthermore, a night tour with a local guide is offered.

Location: From La Fortuna you drive along the Country Road 142 toward Tanque and after about 5 km (3 mi) you turn left into a well-marked driveway.

Guided Daytime Walking tour: Adults US\$ 48.00,
Guided Night tour: Adults US\$ 55.00 (2023)

La Fortuna Waterfall

Some meters after the entrance you can already see the beautiful, narrow waterfall of 70 m (230 ft) height. Many stairs lead through the forest to the water basin of the waterfall. It is not recommended going swimming because of the strong suction of the falling mass of water.

Location: Drive south from La Fortuna on the Country Road 702, after about 1.2 km (0.75 mi) turn right into the side road Diagonal 301. Road signs: Catarata La Fortuna. Approximately 7 km (4.5 mi) on a street in a partially poor condition. This terrain is managed by the community of La Fortuna.

**Entrance fee: Adults US\$ 18.00, children 8+
US\$ 6.00 (2023)**

Monteverde and Santa Elena Region

C.A.S.E.M.

This is a local society of artists and craftspeople from Santa Elena and Monteverde. In this cooperative you can buy hand-embroidered and hand-painted clothes, and also different souvenirs with themes of the cloud forest region.

Monteverde Frog Pond

The frog pond is one of the many attractions in Monteverde. 25 frog and toad species and other amphibians are kept in terrariums which imitate their natural habitat. You pay once the entrance fee of currently US\$ 20.-- per person for a guided tour which allows you to re-enter at night in order to watch the nocturnal species with flashlights (will be

provided).

Location: From the town centre about 200 m (220 yards) in front of the hotel Poco a Poco.

Jardín de Orquídeas (orchid garden)

The orchid garden researches orchid plants in the region of Monteverde and has a collection of 400 species.

Location: In the centre of Monteverde, 50 m (55 yards) south of the Banco Nacional.

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí is located in Costa Rica's northern lowlands on the banks of the Sarapiquí River. This place should not be confused with Puerto Viejo de Talamanca which is situated at the Caribbean coast. Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí is a typical village where the principal income of residents results from agriculture and gradually from tourism. It's an important starting point for boat trips on the rivers of Sarapiquí and San Juan. It is a perfect place for watching birds. The hotels also offer other activities.

Ant Tour

In the region you have the possibility to explore the fascinating way of life of the leafcutter ants. In many years of loving work, a local farmer established this project as a hobby. This unusual tour was started due to the general interest in the exhibition. You can contact us and make bookings at our office in San José. Phone: 2232-0400.

Cocoa Tour

Those who want to know exactly how cocoa gets into a chocolate bar should not miss this tour. In an interesting and funny way you will learn everything about the origin, history, and techniques of the cocoa and chocolate production. Of course, you can also try some of these sweet delicacies.

Heliconia Island

This botanical garden provides more than 70 heliconia species that bloom all over the year. Apart from native heliconia species you can also admire varieties of other tropical zones of the world.

Furthermore, it is possible to sight some of more than 400 bird species from the tropical forest in the lowlands of Sarapiquí.

Location: Heliconia Island is approximately 8 km (5 mi) away from Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí on the way to Horquetas/Guápiles. At the signpost “Mortero/ Finca la Chaves” you turn right, then follow the road signs “Isla de las Heliconias”.

Biological Station El Bejuco

The Biological Station El Bejuco consists of an area of about 30 hectares (75 acres) of tropical rainforest, thereof 66% primary forest. This place is well suited to experience the tropical rainforest of Costa Rica’s North Atlantic lowlands, and to learn about its flora and fauna and the surrounding country life.

Location: El Bejuco is situated in Chilamate between Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí and La Virgen de Sarapiquí.

Biological Station La Selva

The Biological Station La Selva is a good example of biodiversity of the tropical rainforest in the Caribbean lowlands. La Selva provides wide trails and a reserve next to the Braulio Carrillo National Park. This is why the station is a world-famous research center for tropical ecosystems. The biodiversity is spectacular with 1900 plant species, 330 tree species, and 436 bird species.

Location: Drive along the street from Puerto Viejo toward Horquetas/Guápiles. After 3 km (2 mi) turn in the direction of La Selva and continue about 2 km (1 mi) on a dirt road. Guided hikes are offered daily at 8:00 am and 1:30 pm.

North Pacific

Guanacaste National Park

The Guanacaste National Park forms, together with the Santa Rosa Park, a refuge of 85,000 hectares (328 mi²) which provides migration routes and protection for a large number of animals. It also protects the last species of tropical dry forest which formerly extended along the Pacific coast from Mexico toward the south, and which today has almost disappeared.

Rincón de la Vieja National Park

The active Rincón de la Vieja Volcano is the most important attraction in this park of 14,084 hectares (34,800 acres). When hiking on the well-kept trails (partly adapted for handicapped people), you can see volcanic phenomena such as bubbling mudholes, hot springs, and steaming fumaroles.

Location: Coming from Liberia you drive in northern direction, and a few kilometres later you will see a road sign that leads to the small village of Curubandé where you turn right. 15 km (9 mi) later you will reach the park entrance via a gravel road.

Entrance fee: US\$ 17.00 (2023)

Mondays Closed.

Santa Rosa National Park

This one-of-a-kind national park includes several distinct habitats such as tropical, broad-leaved dry forests as well as oak, coastal, and mangrove forests but also marshland, swampland, savanna, and rocky shores. A part of the offshore Pacific Ocean has been declared a Marine National Park. The corresponding beach of Nancite - as well as Ostional and Plaza Grande - is one of the most important nesting sites for the Olive Ridley and the Ridley sea turtles. The park protects a large number of animals and plants.

The ranch house La Casona, where in 1856 the Battle of Santa Rosa took place, is included in the park.

Location: Coming from the city of Liberia you drive in northern direction on the National Street 1. After 34 kilometers (21 mi) you turn left in the direction of Santa Rosa National Park.

Entrance fee: US\$ 17.00 (2023)

Santa Rosa’s Casona

La Casona - the main building of the Santa Rosa Hacienda - is a historical museum in commemoration of the Battle of Santa Rosa that took place here in 1856 between the Costa Rican voluntary army and filibuster William Walker’s North American mercenaries. The battle was won by the Costa Ricans. La Casona was set on fire by illegal hunters in May 2001, later it was rebuilt, and in March 2002 it was completely restored and reopened. La Casona is one of Costa Rica’s most important national monuments.

Miravalles Refuge

The Miravalles Volcano is the highest volcano in the Guanacaste Mountains with a height of 2,026 m.a.s.l. (6,646 FAMS.L). The peak is usually hidden by massive clouds and rain. There are some thermal baths which are fed by the volcanic hot springs. The national Institute of Electricity ICE runs a geothermal energy plant here.

Tenorio National Park

This national park encompasses four volcano peaks and two craters. Its surrounding area is almost completely covered with primary forest that provides protection for a large number of animals and plants. The main attraction are the magnificent Rio Celeste waterfall, a light blue lagoon and the spot on the river where a physical reaction gives specific particles an incredible light blue colour due to certain light incidence. Be sure to hike to the end of the trail!

Entrance fee US\$ 17 (2023)

Palo Verde National Park

Palo Verde National park comprises more than 13,000 hectares (30,000 acres) with swamps, floodplains, lagoons, meandering canals, and pools in the lower basin of the rivers Tempisque and Bebedero. The swampy lagoons provide feeding, nesting, and resting places for many threatened bird species, such as the jabiru, especially during the dry season.

Las Baulas National Park

The park was created to save certain animal species from extinction, in particular the Giant Leatherback, the largest sea turtle in the world. These turtles, which can reach a length of up to 2.5 meters (8 ft) and a weight of up to 700 kilograms (1500 lb), gather at the park from November to April to lay their eggs.

World of the Turtle

This is the museum - situated at the entrance of Playa Grande - where you can get excellent, didactic information about turtles.

Ecomuseum of San

Vicente of Nicoya

This small village is known for its pottery made of local clay. Some families of craftspeople are of indigenous origin from the Chorotega tribe. The potters manufacture ceramics in the traditional manner. They use natural colours to paint their beautiful earthenware which is available in all sizes and forms. You can also find great earthenware copies of the Chorotega Indians.

The museum, founded by people in the area, offers a vivid exhibit of the art and culture of the Chorotega potters with its large display of ceramic artefacts by a variety of artists.

Location: From Liberia to Santa Cruz. Right before



reaching Santa Cruz follow the signs to Santa Bárbara on the left-hand side. Turn left in San Vicente after the soccer field where you find the museum.

Ostional Wildlife Refuge

This refuge was founded in order to preserve the nesting sites of sea turtles, especially for the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle and the Leatherback Sea Turtle. Following Nancite beach, this region was designated the sea turtles' second most important breeding area worldwide. You can observe the so-called "arribadas" (arrivals) which last about 4-8 days. They mostly take place in the rainy season and are communicated by the local parking attendants via Facebook: Asociación de Guías Locales de Ostional (AGLO) Costa Rica.

Nosara Nature Reserve

This private reserve of about 50 hectares (125 acres) is part of the Lagarta Lodge. It consists of mangroves and rainforest along the Nosara River. More than 170 bird species and other animals, such as monkeys, coatis, raccoons, armadillos, snakes, anteaters, crabs, and reptiles, live here.

Location: Entrance via Hotel Lagarta Lodge.

Barra Honda National Park

This park's main attraction are the limestone caves. So far, 42 caves have been discovered but only two of them are open to the public. They are all well-preserved since their vertically aligned entrances are difficult to access. The Terciopelo Cave is one of the largest and most beautiful examples. It is filled with many stalactites - hanging from the ceiling - and stalagmites - rising from the ground - as well as other dripstones of various shapes and configurations. Guided tours to the caves are available at the entrance of the national park.

Entrance fee: US\$ 14.-- (2023). Prices for the cave tour on the spot.

Central Pacific

Cabo Blanco Absolute Natural

Reserve (Reserva natural absoluta Cabo Blanco)

Cabo Blanco (White Cape), Costa Rica's first nature reserve, was established at the initiative of Olle Wessberg and his wife Karen Mogensen in 1963. Cabo Blanco is a green oasis in a region otherwise dominated by pastureland. Its 13 km² (3,200 acres) of land area and 18 km² (4,450 acres) of marine area enjoy absolute protection.

The nature reserve is unique because it straddles the transitional area between the wet forest and the dry forest which consists of an interesting mixture of both evergreen and deciduous trees. Favourable conditions ensure that the watercourses in this very hot and parched region never run dry.

Hiking trails lead through the reserve right to the coast where you find white beaches characterized by corals and mollusc shells. Seabirds, especially the colonies of brown boobies and brown pelicans, can easily be observed.

Entrance fee: US\$ 14.-- (2023)

Location: Take the ferry from Puntarenas to Paquera and Playa Tambor, then the National Street 21 southward. After the gas station of Cobano turn into the Country Road 924 toward Montezuma. Continue on the coastal highway in southern direction following the signs to Cabuya and Cabo Blanco.

Carara National Park

This park was established in 1973 and covers a protected area of more than 52 km² (13,000 acres) but only a small part of it can be explored on well-kept trails. There is a loop trail that is suitable for the disabled. This region in transition from dry to rainforest is home to an astonishing diversity of flora and fauna. Carara is known for the scarlet macaws which nest in these forests and which you can hear consistently and maybe even get the chance to see one.

Left of the Quebrada Bonita trail near the bridge over the river is a giant tree with a big knothole some 18 m (60 ft) above the ground. There you can watch the macaws during the breeding season that takes place from December to February. Squabs can be in the nest until May. There are local, well-trained guides at the park's entrance. (US\$ 25-30.-- per person).

Entrance fee: US\$ 14.-- (2023).

Location: On the National Street 34 (Costanera Sur), 2 km (1 mile) south of the Tárcoles River.

Crocodile Bridge over the Tárcoles River

From the bridge over the Tárcoles River it is almost always possible to see crocodiles sunbathing on the sandbars. American Crocodiles can reach a length of more than 5 meters (16 ft). Caution! Do not leave your car unattended or open as already many thefts have been reported. There are guarded parking spaces at the restaurant and the gift shops. You can walk on a narrow sidewalk to get to the middle of the bridge. Be careful when crossing the street as there is a lot of traffic on the bridge.

In the Tárcoles River there is one of the largest populations of these primeval reptiles.

Location: 2 km (1 mile) north of the Carara National Park.

Manuel Antonio National Park

This relatively small but very popular national park provides - beside a great possibility of watching animals - several beaches that invite to go

swimming. There are showers (please don't use soap or shampoos) and restrooms near the beach.

It is one of the best places to see sloths, white-tailed deer, and monkeys. Capuchin monkeys are often present at the beaches and are easy to photograph. They are specialized in stealing food, so be careful with your backpack as they know how to open zips. That is why bringing food is subject to strict regulations and your bags will be searched at the entrance of the park.

Squirrel monkeys, which in Costa Rica exclusively are endemic to Manuel Antonio and Golfito further south, can also be seen in this park.

The park is a very popular attraction, particularly on the weekends, so large crowds of visitors must be expected.

Well-trained guides offer tours in the park for US\$ 25-30.00 per person.

Entrance fee: US\$ 18.-- (2023)

Location: Drive on the National Street 34 until you reach the city of Quepos and then follow the road signs to the national park.

Tuesday closed.

Hacienda Barú



Hacienda Barú is a perfect example of private nature conservation and reforestation. By the end of the 1970s, the ranch discontinued its cattle operation and started with reforestation. Today, it is a wildlife reserve with an area of 330 hectares (815 acres) and various tropical habitats such as primary moist forest, secondary forest, mangroves, and shore vegetation.

More than 320 bird species and 105 mammal species have been identified here. The Hacienda provides trails over 7 km (4.5 mi), a birdwatching tower, and 2 km (1 mi) long clean beaches which are only suitable for swimming to a limited extent due to strong currents and surf. Accommodations, a restaurant, a small butterfly garden, a good and cheap canopy tour, a gift shop with a wide range of textbooks of nature and books with the definition of leaves can be found in the Hacienda.

Location: On the National Street 34 to the south, 1 km (0.6 miles) before reaching the beach town of Dominical. Turn right just before the El Ceibo gas station.

South Pacific

Marino Ballena National Park

Endangered humpback whales that come to this area of the Pacific Coast give the national park its name – ballena means “whale” in Spanish. Twice a year, humpback whales visit these warm coastal waters to mate and give birth. From December to April, whales migrate down from Alaska; and between August and November, southern humpback whales migrate from Antarctica. Located south of Dominical, the Ballena National Marine Park also protects the largest coral reef on the Pacific side of Central America. Besides humpback whales, the park’s rich waters are home to large populations of dolphins, seabirds, and sea turtles.

Wednesday closed.

Terraba-Sierpe Mangroves

Near the sea, the Terraba and Sierpe Rivers build a network of canals and isles of special beauty, basically consisting of dense mangrove swamps. This region offers protection for many bird species, snakes, and mammals.

Caño Island

This large, uninhabited island of 3 km² (740 acres) is a national park which also includes 58 km² (14,330 acres) of marine reserve. The island is located 16.5 km (10 mi) west of the Osa Peninsula in the Pacific ocean. Up to 1500 years old finds of stone balls, tombs with stone statues, golden votive gifts, and ceramics prove that the island was used as a cemetery for high-ranking persons during the pre-Columbian era.

The reefs around the island are perfect for snorkelling and abound with fish. If you’re lucky you can see dolphins, turtles, and humpback whales along the way. The whales come to these waters from August to April in order to give birth to their calves.

The island can only be entered for registration with the parking attendants.

Different organizers in Quepos, Dominical, and Drake Bay offer boat excursions as well as the lodges around the Corcovado National Park.

Corcovado National Park

The National Geographic Magazine described this park as “the most intensive biological place of the world”. It extends over the west sector of the Osa Peninsula and preserves many different habitats such as shallow lagoons, mangrove swamps, rivers, rainforest, deep cloud forest, and sandy coasts. It offers protection for some endangered species such as jaguars, tapirs, ocelots, giant anteaters, and scarlet macaws.

Piedras Blancas National Park

The Piedras Blancas National Park protects one of Costa Rica’s last lowland rainforests. The park was founded as a result of the common efforts of the Austrian population and Costa Rica’s government. Thanks to generous donations from the Austrian population for the “Rainforest of the Austrians” project, it was possible to buy large areas of rainforest which now will be preserved for mankind.

La Amistad International Park

This park constitutes the largest nature reserve in Costa Rica. It covers almost 200,000 hectares (500,000 acres) of forested land protecting a wide

variety of plant and animal life and the drainage basins of its main middle and upper water courses. The region provides shelter for many endangered species. La Amistad International Park has its counterpart in Panama and forms part of the Amistad Biosphere Reserve created by the UNESCO which also includes Chirripó National Park, Las Tablas, Hitoy Cerere, and five indigenous reserves.

Chirripó National Park

The difference in altitude that ranges from 1,400 m.a.s.l. (4,590 FAMS) to 3,819 m.a.s.l. (12,529 FAMS) and the variate climate zones and soil types give rise to the largest biodiversity in the country. About 400 species of birds and 260 species of amphibians have been identified.

Here you can find the highest point of Central America between the four-thousanders of

Guatemala and the Andes of South America. The upper range consists of several mountain peaks over 3,700 m.a.s.l. (12,140 FAMS). The highest is Cerro Chirripó (3,820 m.a.s.l./12,530 FAMS), the second-highest Cerro Ventisquero (3,811 m.a.s.l./12,503 FAMS), and Cerro Terbi (3,760 m.a.s.l./12,340 FAMS) with the rock formation Los Crestones that rises into the sky opposite the base camp of the same name, and that has been declared a national monument. When hiking to the summit, you will stay at Crestones Base Camp for one night. The route from San Gerardo to the base camp is 14.5 km (9 miles) in length and involves a total climb of almost 2000 m (6560 ft).

Location: Drive from the city of San Isidro in the direction of Rivas until you reach San Gerardo de Rivas. There you can find the national park administration where information about access to the park and accommodation in the base camp is available. Meals are also provided at the base camp which is situated at an altitude of 3,500 m.a.s.l. (11,480 FAMS).

Northern Caribbean

Tortuguero National Park

This region is only accessible by boat or plane. During the last 60 years, transport canals for the wood industry have been created between the rivers and the Tortuguero lagoon. The rainforest,

which is adjacent to the waterways, offers many great possibilities to watch water birds, monkeys, and reptiles on boat safaris offered there. There are 2-day and 3-day packages with a selection of well-run jungle lodges.

Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge

Barra del Colorado is located in the north of the Tortuguero National Park bordering Nicaragua. It consists of canals, lagoons, rivers, river islands, forests, swamps, and small hills, just like Tortuguero. Barra del Colorado is a well-known fishing spot and famous for its tarpon fish.

Like Tortuguero, it is only accessible by boat or plane.

South Caribbean

Sloth Sanctuary

This sanctuary, especially established for the purpose of care and reintroduction of injured sloths to the wild, offers a 2-hour tour for US\$ 30.-- where you will learn a lot about these fascinating animals and also get in contact with them.

Location: Drive south from the port city of Limón on the National Street 32. After about 30 km (18 mi) you will reach the Sloth Sanctuary which is located on the left-hand side.

Cahuita National Park

This national park covers more than 10 km² (2470 acres) of land area, 6 km² (1480 acres) of coral reefs, and 22.5 km² (6000 acres) of marine area. If the weather is good, you can hike through the park on a 4 km (2.5 mi) hiking trail which runs along clear beaches that invite for swimming. You can walk until Cahuita Point where often excursion boats are anchored offering a snorkelling tour near the coral reef with a guide. It is not allowed to swim to the coral reefs from the beach. The coastal forest is home to howler monkeys, capuchin monkeys, sloths, iguanas, land crabs and many seabirds. With good luck you can see one of the lemon yellow Oropel snakes that hide in the branches of the trees. Capuchin monkeys are usually found at Cahuita Point. Please do not feed them!

Location: Drive south from the port city of Limón on

the National Street 32, after 45 km (28 mi) you will reach the village of Cahuita on the left-hand side. The park's entrance is located on the beach which is accessible from the village.

Gandoca Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge and National Park

Near the small village of Manzanillo, south of the tourist beaches of Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, you can find a very beautiful, relatively quiet beach

which is only a bit busier on weekends. At the south end of the beach there is a bridge that leads toward the overlook of Punta Manzanillo.

Small, non-maintained trails lead to the coastal rainforest. They are often slippery due to frequent rainfall in this region. Following these trails, you reach the small beach of Punta Mona. From here you go back 4 km (2.5 mi) to Manzanillo.

Just off the coast lie the largest coral reefs and mussel beds of Costa Rica's Caribbean coast.



History of Costa Rica

 **1502**

During his fourth journey Christopher Columbus landed on Uvita, a small island offshore where now the city of Limón, a port on the Caribbean coast, is located. He named the country Costa Rica (= rich coast).

 **1540**

Costa Rica was declared to be a Spanish province and was under control of the General Captaincy of Guatemala.

 **1563**

Conquest and pacification of Costa Rica by Juan Vázquez de Coronado de Anaya.

Foundation of Cartago. The city was the administrative capital of the Spanish crown in the province of Costa Rica until 1823.

 **1723**

An eruption of the Irazú Volcano destroyed Cartago.

 **1737**

The construction of a church dedicated to Saint Joseph (San José) in Villa Nueva de la Boca del Monte was the decisive factor in the town's emergence as the future capital.

 **1808**

During Tomás de Acosta's governorship the coffee plant was introduced to Costa Rica.

 **1820**

First coffee exports: 92 kilograms (202 lb) of coffee are shipped to Panama from the port of Puntarenas.

 **15 September 1821**

The Spanish General Captaincy of Guatemala declared itself and all its provinces to be independent of Spain and joined the new empire of Agustín de Iturbide from Mexico.

 **1823**

The capital changed from Cartago to San José after a civil war between the republicans (San José

and Alajuela) and the supporters of the union with Mexico (Heredia and Cartago).

 **1823**

The Mexican Emperor Agustín I was overthrown and Guatemala proclaimed, for itself and its provinces, the foundation of the Federal Republic of Central America.

 **1824**

Nicoya seceded from Nicaragua and adhered to Costa Rica as the province of Guanacaste.

 **1825**

The state of Costa Rica proclaimed its first constitution.

 **1838**

Costa Rica left the Federal Republic of Central America and gained full independence.

 **1848**

A new constitution defined Costa Rica as an independent republic.

 **1856**

In the Battle of Santa Rosa, a Costa Rican voluntary army defeat the mercenaries of North American William Walker who was forced to return to Nicaragua.

 **1870**

Costa Rica got a new constitution.

 **1880**

The first banana exports left Costa Rica.

 **1890**

Inauguration of the train from the Central Valley to the Atlantic Coast.

 **1900**

The underpopulation of Costa Rica was ended by a population explosion.

 **1910**

A strong earthquake in Cartago on May 4th 1910

with 6.5 on the Richter scale claimed more than 700 lives and caused great destruction to the city.

1929/1930

The world economic crisis caused many company collapses and strong political and social tensions.

1940

Declaration of war on Germany and expulsion of all Germans.

1943

Creation of health insurance and pension fund as well as introduction of Labour Law.

1948

Civil war of 44 days with 2000 victims. José Figueres Ferrer “Don Pepe” emerged from the fight against the group of Calderonistas as winner with his group.

Abolition of the army and establishment of the electricity utility. Suffrage for women, black and indigenous people. Adoption of a new constitution that is still basically in effect today.

1963

Visit of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. Five days before his visit, Irazú Volcano erupted and welcomed the President with an ash fall. The eruption lasted 2 years.

1986

Franklin Chang Díaz was the first Costa Rican in space when he was on the space shuttle mission STS-61-C.

1983

Visit of Pope John Paul II.

1987

Oscar Arias Sanchez received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to pacify Central America, and for mediating in the Nicaraguan Contra War against the Sardinista regime.

1989

Costa Rica celebrated 100 years of democracy.

1990

First participation in the FIFA World Cup where Costa Rica reached position 13.

1991

As one of the strongest earthquakes in Costa Rica's history with 7.5 on the Richter scale the one in the province of Limón caused great destruction and claimed 48 lives. The railroad line between San José and Limón was badly damaged and withdrawn from service.

1996

Claudia Poll won the first Olympic gold medal for Costa Rica in swimming.

2007

Referendum on the free-trade agreement CAFTA between the Dominican Republic, Central America, and the USA.

2009

The earthquake of Cinchona measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale was the strongest in younger time and claimed 27 lives.

2010

The boxer Hannah Gabriels won the world cup in super welterweight. She defended her title three times until 2011.

2012

The Costa Rican astronaut Franklin Chang Díaz was inducted in the United States Astronaut Hall of Fame with 8 participations in NASA space shuttle missions.

2013

In March 2013, the Chinese President Xi Jinping visited - beside the USA and Mexico - also Costa Rica.

US President Barack Obama visited Costa Rica in May. He was the 7th US President after Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, J.F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George Bush Sr., and Bill Clinton who paid an official visit to Costa Rica.

2014

Costa Rica participates in the World Cup for the fourth time and made it into the quarter finals for the first time. Costa Rica loses to the Netherlands in a penalty shoot-out, 4-3.

Interesting Facts

Did you know that...

... Costa Rica represents only about 0.03% of the earth's surface but features approx. 5% of the world's biodiversity?

... 915 bird species have been registered in Costa Rica? That are as many as in both the USA and Canada.

... there are more butterfly species than in the whole African Continent, that is to say 12,000 different species?

... a quarter of the Costa Rican land area is protected?

... the rainforest soil is not really fertile and the humus layer is very thin?

... the primary forest is easily passable and that there is almost no understory? The treetops are high and very dense so that hardly any light reaches the ground, and therefore only few plants can grow.

... you can distinguish the secondary forest by its dense, almost impenetrable understory?

... an alga grows in the sloth's fur which makes it appear green and serves as camouflage?

... the crater of Poás Volcano is one of the largest in the world?

... Cocos Island - belonging to Costa Rica and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site - is the largest inhabited island outside the pole area and is designated as a national park?

... Costa Rica has several national symbols? Its national bird is the clay-coloured thrush (*Turdus grayi*), the national animal is the white-tailed deer, the national tree is the Guanacaste, and the national flower is the Guarianthe skinneri, a purple orchid.

The national instrument is the marimba and the national monument is located in the national park in San José. The two-toed and three-toed sloth was designated a national symbol in 2021 to conserve its population and protect its habitat.

... Costa Rica was the first country worldwide that abolished its army in 1948?

... Costa Rica has been a republic and has been regarded as one of the oldest and most stable democracies since 1848?

... Oscar Arias - the country's president from 1986-1990 and 2006-2010 - was given the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for developing a road map for peace for Central America?

... Costa Rica is also called "Switzerland of Central America", not only because of its mountainous landscape but also because of its relative prosperity and the political neutrality which it declared - similar to Switzerland (1815) - in 1983?

... with more than 10%, Costa Rica has the highest immigration rate throughout Latin America?

... Costa Rica's currency, the "colón", was named after Christopher Columbus (Spanish: Cristobal Colón)?

... the Costa Ricans are proudly called "Ticos"?

... Costa Rica has the lowest illiteracy rate of Latin America?

... the former prison of San José now is the Museo de los Niños (Children's Museum)?

... the international airport of San José (SJO) is located near the city of Alajuela?



Cultural Events and Holidays

January

New Year's Day

January 1. Especially in the district of Zapote in San José, there is a large fairground with traditional bull riding, food booths, a lot of fireworks, and music.

Copa del Café

Mid-January. International tennis tournament at the Costa Rica Country Club.

Palmares Fiestas

Mid-January. The most visited fair after Zapote. Fairground with bull riding, carnival, music, and dance.

Alajuelita Fiestas

Mid-January. Oxcart parade as well as pilgrimage to the iron cross.

Santa Cruz Fiestas

Mid-January. Dance, Marimba, and bull riding.

February

San Isidro de El General Fiestas

In the first week of February. Livestock shows, agriculture and industry fairs, bull riding, and flower shows.

Fiesta de los Diablitos

It takes place in the last week of February in the south of San Isidro de El General in the indigenous village of Boruca de Rey Curré. It represents the fight between the Indians (disguised as little devils) and the Spanish (bulls) with colourful garments, masks, dance, and fireworks.

Puntarenas Carnival

This event takes place in the last week of February with many parades and festivities.

Liberia Fiestas

This festival takes place in the end of February in the

capital of Guanacaste with a lot of music, concerts, and especially a lot of folklore and traditions.

March

Oxcart Day

This traditional parade takes place the second Sunday in March in Escazú and over 150 oxcarts participate.

San José Day

March 19. Religious celebration in honour of Saint Joseph, patron saint of Costa Rica and the capital's archbishopric.

Ujarrás

A religious procession from Cartago to Ujarras to the ruins of Costa Rica's first church takes place in mid-March.

April

Easter week

For the catholic Costa Ricans Easter is the most important church holiday. On Holy Thursday the processions that partly re-enact the suffering, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth begin. As school holidays are at the same time, many families spend these days on the beaches.

Juan Santamaría Day

April 11. Day of death of the national hero Juan Santamaría. He died during the battle over the Mesón of Rivas in Nicaragua in 1856 against the filibusters under the command of William Walker. There are events on this topic in the hero's hometown in Alajuela, especially on Juan Santamaría square.

University week

In the last week of April there are exhibits, live music, and parades at the University of Costa Rica.

May

Labor Day

May 1. There are parades and the president gives his traditional speech where he informs about the state of the nation.

Limón Fiestas

May 1. The fiestas in Limón offer cricket matches, domino competitions, dance, games, and family picnics.

San Isidro Labor Day

May 15. There are fairs in all towns named after the patron saint of farmers and cultivators, San Isidro. Animals and crops are blessed and parades and fiestas take place.

San Juan Day

May 17. This day is celebrated with a half-marathon from Cartago to San José.

Corpus Cristi

May 29. Religious celebration.

June

San Pedro y San Pablo

June 29. Religious celebration in honor of Saint Peter and Paul.

July

Virgin of the Sea

Mid-June in Puntarenas. The celebration consists of a colourfully decorated boat parade off the coast of Puntarenas. One of the boats has the effigy of the patron saint of Puntarenas, the virgin of Monte Carmelo.

Annexation of Guanacaste

July 25. In 1824 the province of Guanacaste decided to annex itself to Costa Rica. The main celebration takes place in Liberia, capital of Guanacaste, with rodeo, parades, and typical food.

August

Virgen de los Angeles Day

August 2. Celebration of the patron saint of Costa

Rica, also called La Negrita. Pilgrims from across the country and even from the neighbouring countries walk, sometimes for days, to the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels in Cartago to honour the Virgin Mary who, legend has it, appeared to a young peasant girl in the form of a small stone statue on August 2, 1635.

Mother's Day

August 15. Costa Ricans celebrate Mother's Day. Official holiday in Costa Rica.

San Ramón's Day

August 30. These festivals take place in San Ramón and include parades, dances, and music.

30 patron saints come from the neighbouring villages to honour the patron saint of San Ramón.

Black and Afro-Costa Rican Culture Day

In November 2021, a new holiday was added to the National Calendar on August 31st, "Día de la Cultura Negra y Afrocostarricense" (Day of Black and Afro-Costa Rican Culture). This holiday has been celebrated throughout the country, especially in the province of Limón. This celebration aims to recognise the great contribution of Afro-Costa Rican culture to the country in equal terms with contributions of other Costa Rican folk. In order to save the values and cultural elements of black culture, this day has been celebrated since the 1980s at the initiative of the Comité Ciudadano por la Cultura del Pueblo Negro (Citizens' Committee for the Culture of the Black People).

September

Independence Day

September 15. The Independence Torch is brought by relay runners over a distance of 1350 kilometers (840 mi), from Guatemala via Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua to the border of Costa Rica where it arrives on September 13 at 11:00 am. On September 14 it is carried to Cartago (the former colonial capital) by Costa Rican runners and at 6:00 pm the national anthem is sung. After a lantern parade and speeches by the president and his ministers, the torch will be officially received at 8:00 pm. September 15 is an official holiday. Banks and state institutions are closed.

October

San Isidro Day

October 9. A celebration to commemorate the establishment of this important agricultural town.

Virgin of Pilar Day

October 12. Celebration to honour the virgin of Pilar, patron saint of Tres Ríos.

Corn Fiesta

October 12 in Upala. A parade with costumes made of corn as well as the coronation of the corn queen are part of this traditional celebration.

November

All Souls' Day

November 2. Families visit their deceased relatives at the cemetery and bring flowers.

Oxcart Parade

Last Sunday in November in San José. This parade takes place in San José and honours Costa Rica's oxcart tradition. It starts in the morning in Paseo Colón and ends at the Central Park.

December

Army Abolition Day

December 1. On 1 December 1948, the Government Junta under Don José Figueres Ferrer decided to eliminate the army and, in a gesture of symbolic value, converted the former Bellavista Military Barracks into the National Museum.

Advent

Although many Costa Ricans start decorating their houses already in the course of November, the Christmas spirit doesn't begin until December. The Tamales (a typical dish made of cornmeal, meat, and different types of vegetables wrapped in banana leaves) are prepared according to old family recipes. The Christmas tree is put up and the house decorated with holiday lights. Snowmen and Santa Claus made of plastic often adorn the roofs. The nativity, usually lavishly and creatively decorated, must not be missed in any house. The baby Jesus is laid in the manger on December 24.

Los Negritos

December 8 in the indigenous village of Boruca. A combination of traditional indigenous festivities and catholic rites. This day honours the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.

Immaculate Conception

December 8. This day is celebrated with a lot of fireworks.

Festival de la Luz/Lights Festival

2nd Sunday in December. The town center of San José is decorated with many lights. In the evening floats and marching bands parade through the Paseo Colón and the Avenida Segunda. There is also a competition of the marching bands. In order to have a good view of the parade, you should start looking for a place on the sidewalk already at noontime.

Fiesta de la Yeguita

December 12 in Liberia. The main event of this day is a parade in honour of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Of course, the festival would not be complete without the traditional music, dance, and firework.

Christmas Eve/Christmas

December 24/25. Traditionally, the arrival of the Christ Child is celebrated on the 24th at midnight. There are midnight feasts, and midnight masses are said in order to welcome baby Jesus. Christmas gifts are distributed. Only December 25 is a holiday.

Tope

December 26 in San José. A well-known horse parade that leads through the center of San José. Proud riders present their well-trained horses that perform amazing footwork.

Carnival

December 27 in San José. The colourful parade with its themed floats and a lot of music leads through the center of San José.

Zapote Fiestas

December 25-31. The marketplace of San José's district Zapote transforms into a setting of one of the most popular fairgrounds. Rodeo, mobile disco bars, food booths, and other fairground activities are offered. It is best to go there by taxi.

Road Signs

Danger ahead!



Intersección adelante Intersection ahead

Derrumbes en la vía Landslides on the road

Curva adelante Curve ahead

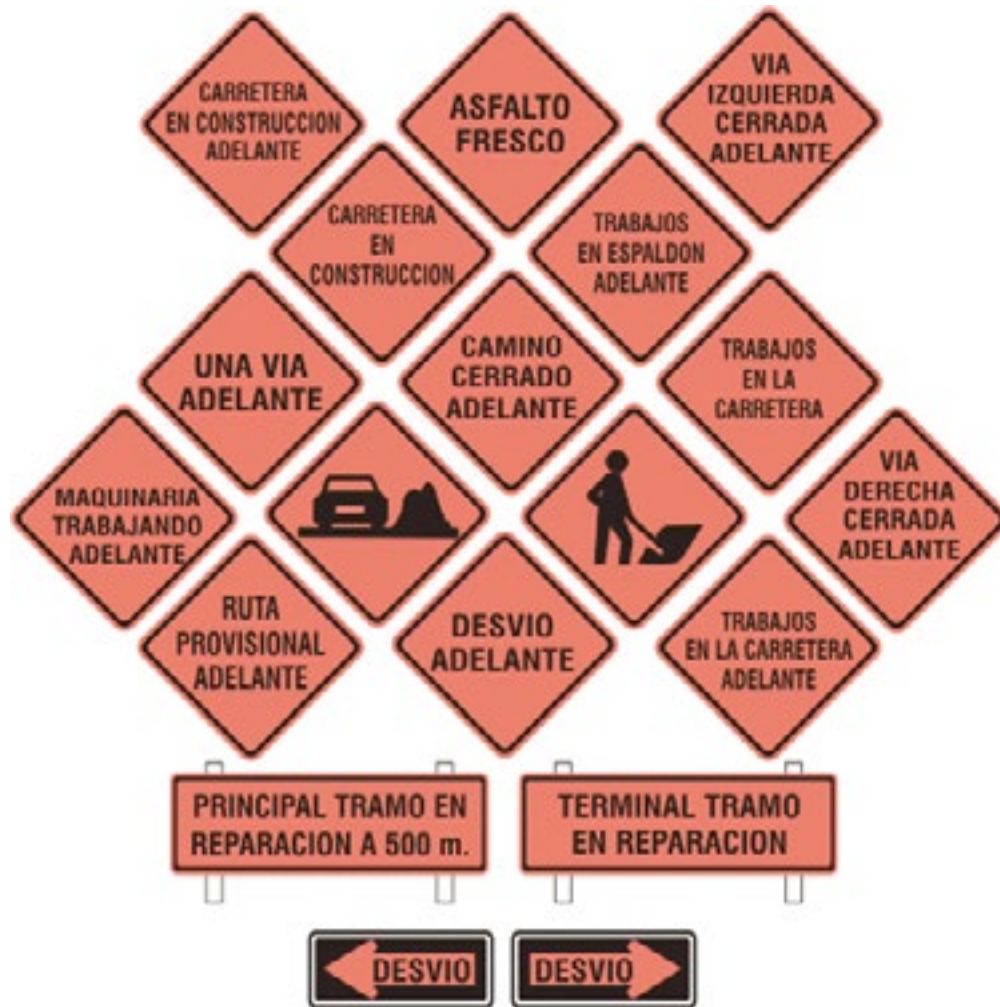
Despacio Slow

Regulations



Velocidad máxima	Speed limit
Parada de autobuses	Bus stop
Parada de taxis	Taxi stop
Peatones por la izquierda	Pedestrians on the left side
Ancho máximo	Clearance width
Peso Máximo por vehículo	Gross vehicle weight
Mantenga su derecha	Keep right
Fin de velocidad restringida	End of restricted speed
Camiones vía derecha	Trucks on the right lane
Estacionamiento una hora - 6 a.m. - 6 p.m.	1 hour parking - 6:00am - 6:00pm
Se permite virar en u	U-turn permitted
Altura máxima	Clearance height
No hay paso	Do not enter
No adelantar	No overtaking
No virar en U	No U-turns
Siga con precaución	Proceed with caution
Doble vía adelante	Two-way road ahead
No ciclistas	No cycling
No virar a la derecha	No right turn
No virar a la izquierda	No left turn
No estacionar	No parking
Una vía	One way
Alto	Stop
25 kph	Speed limit 25 kph (15 mph)
Ceda el paso	Yield right of way

Construction signs



Carretera en construcción adelante	Road construction Ahead
Asfalto fresco	New asphalt
Vía izquierda cerrada adelante	Left lane closed ahead
Vía derecha cerrada adelante	Right lane closed ahead
Carretera en construcción	Road work
Trabajos en espaldón adelante	Shoulder work ahead
Una vía adelante	Single lane ahead
Camino cerrado adelante	Road Closed ahead
Maquinaria trabajando adelante	Road machinery ahead
Ruta provisional adelante	Temporary route Ahead
Desvío adelante	Detour ahead
Trabajos en la carretera adelante	Roadwork ahead
Principal tramo en reparación a 500 m	Main construction works in 500 m (545 yd)
Terminal tramo en reparación	End of roadwork



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