



Costa Rica INFORMATION SHEET

Costa Rica is so small that it encompasses only 0.03% of the planet's surface but it is among the top 20 richest countries in biodiversity, in terms of species density. It has 850 species of bird, 209 mammal species, 13,000 plant species (including 1,500 trees and 1,400 orchids), 220 species of reptile, and 163 species of amphibians. Costa Rica has preserved these lands and natural habitats in such a way that they are more accessible to visitors than those of any other country in the region. A peaceful country, Costa Rica is the only country in the Western Hemisphere that doesn't have an army or military of any kind. An exceptional example of political stability, the country is sometimes referred to as the "Switzerland of Latin America." The following is a general information sheet. It is as accurate as we can make it. However, things sometimes change unexpectedly. Please use this only as a guide.

Expectations

While group tours are one of the most enjoyable ways to travel, they do require a certain degree of flexibility and understanding on every individual's part. We have carefully planned your itinerary and have done our best to provide you with information about what to expect. However, much of what makes travel interesting is the unexpected. Travel with an open mind and you will get the most and best out of your holiday. Please be assured that our mission is to create and provide you with the most enjoyable and memorable travel experience.

Currency

The unit of currency is the **colon**; the bills are available in various denominations, from 1,000 to 50,000 colones. Coins are also used (5, 10, 25, 50, 100 and 500 centimos). U.S. dollars and credit cards are widely accepted. Many small stores will allow you to purchase a pack of gum or a soda with a \$5, \$10 or \$20 bill, and give you colones in return. Most stores, taxi drivers, and street corner money-changers will also accept U.S. dollars, as long as they do not have to give you too much change. You can also pay for park entrance fees, hotel rooms, tours, and meals at tourist restaurants with dollars. Public bus fares, meals in local markets, and small ticket items are best paid with colones. We recommend that you purchase \$100 - \$200 in local currency, depending on your spending habits. Many shops and restaurants in the cities and tourist resorts accept major credit cards (MasterCard and Visa, but American Express not so widely) and offer the best exchange rates, but credit cards are less easy to use in the countryside. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services, which may be available; be sure to advise your bank and credit card companies you will be out of the country, to avoid issues. Cash is often preferred but should not be carried in large quantities. Money can be changed at banks in all of the main tourist areas or exchange offices as well as most hotels and railroad stations. State-run banking hours are 9:00 am - 3:30 p.m. on weekdays. ATMs are widely available throughout the country, even in small towns; most use the Visa plus network. There are currency exchange kiosks in most major airports, if you are not able to get it converted prior to departure. Tourists reaching their destination without local currency can obtain local currency through any bank or exchange office at airports.

PLEASE REFER TO THE ENCLOSED CURRENCY CONVERSION SHEET FOR ACCURATE RATES

Weather & Clothing

Generally classified as a tropical country, Costa Rica has no real winter, and the sun shines throughout the year. With over 12 hours of sunshine a day, the sun rises at about 5 a.m. and sets at about 6 p.m. consistently throughout the year. The average temperature is around 70 to 81 degrees Fahrenheit. March through May are the hottest months of the year, so make sure you protect yourself from the sun.

Listed below are the average 24-hour temperatures for the seasons. Even though we have noted the usual temperatures, you may experience unusual weather conditions. For that reason, we always suggest that you pack clothes that can be **layered**. It is also wise to check the newspaper, Weather Channel on TV, or www.weather.com before you pack to verify the most current weather situation.

CITY	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
San Jose	73 - 91	73 - 90	72 - 88	68 - 90

While on your trip, you will see temperatures forecast in Celsius. To convert Celsius to Fahrenheit, multiply the Celsius number by 9, then divide your answer by 5, and add 32.

PACK LIGHT

Bring comfortable, hand-washable clothing. We recommend shorts, t-shirts, sundresses, shirts and tops in light weight fabrics. In general, they are casual about dress. At night, it can get chilly, so bring long pants and a light weight jacket or sweater. Be sure to bring comfortable soft-soled shoes or sneakers for the days you are sightseeing. If planning to go out in the evening, slacks are highly recommended as some restaurants will not admit you in shorts or sandals. Bring a large hat to block the sun from your face and neck. If you visit churches, long sleeves and long skirts or trousers are required, while theaters and up market restaurants may have specific dress codes.

Packing Smart

Be sure to pack any prescriptions that you will need for your vacation in your carry-on-bag.

You may wish to bring any special soaps or accessories from home. Foreign hotels do not always have face cloths in the room. It's a good idea to pack your own.

You may wish to pack a pocket calculator (useful in money conversion) and a small multi-language guide with basic phrases.

Wake-up calls will be available from the front desk, but you also might want to bring your own battery-operated alarm clock.

Don't forget your camera.

The availability and quality of hairdryers at hotels vary greatly. For that reason, we strongly recommend that you bring your own with you, if you have a need for them.

Due to heightened security at the airports, remember to pack questionable items in your checked luggage, not your carry-on. Such items include knives, scissors, any cutting implements, as well as some sports items (golf clubs, ski poles, bats, etc.). If in doubt, put it in your checked bag. It will save you time going through the security checkpoint.

Enjoying the trip

Your trip will probably include an intermediate destination, where you will change planes, but your luggage will be checked all the way to your final destination. Since the airplane is dry, and you will have a long international flight, it helps to drink a lot of non-alcoholic liquids while flying. Alcohol contributes to jetlag, as does eating heavy meals on board. Feet swell at high altitudes, so it is a good idea to remove your shoes while in flight. You will probably want to bring a small book or magazine in your carry-on luggage.

A valid U.S. passport is required. We recommend that it be **valid for at least 3-6 months past the time your tour ends**. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you may need further identification. Contact National Passport Information at 1 888-362-8668 (toll call) or the Costa Rican Consulate for further information. No visa is necessary for this tour for U.S. citizens. No vaccinations are necessary for U.S. citizens.

Remember that you are responsible for having all valid documentation needed for this tour.

Electrical Current

Electric current is 110 volts, the same as USA and Canada. A U.S. two-pronged outlet is standard.

Food & Drink

A typical Costa Rican meal is black beans and rice (gallo pinto). This simple dish, often referred to as comida tipica, is the backbone of Costa Rican cuisine. While many dishes are still prepared with oils high in saturated fats, Costa Rican food is generally quite healthy when coupled with an active lifestyle. Cheese and other dairy products are rarely used. Meals are often served with a good portion of fruits or vegetables or both. Refrescos, made of blended fruit and ice, are very popular. A sweet and spicy drink, horchata is made of roasted ground rice and

cinnamon. Beer is a common drink, and the country has two local breweries. Coffee is also an extremely popular and nationally revered drink.

Optional Side Trips

At most destinations, optional side trips to nearby attractions are available. The tour host at your destination can help you arrange these trips during your free time. A few operators on these side trips will not take credit cards. You may want to carry more in traveler's checks if you think that you may be interested in taking these trips. The prices on the excursions vary greatly depending on the length of the tour and the places visited.

Safety and Health Services

We recommend that you leave a copy of your itinerary with friends or family, in case of emergencies.

In order to have a trouble-free holiday as a traveler, you should avoid flaunting jewelry, and wear your handbag securely strapped across your chest. Many stores (as well as Durgan Travel) also sell security wallets that are worn inside your clothing. They are large enough to hold your passport, money, etc., and offer a secure option if you prefer to carry them with you.

You should keep a record of your credit card and Traveler's check numbers separate from your purse or wallet. It is also a good idea to carry a photocopy of the picture page of your passport and leave your passport (remember that you may need to have your passport with you to cash traveler's checks), and any valuables locked in the hotel safe, unless you have a security wallet. Losing your passport can be very expensive and inconvenient. Avoid going off on your own, unless you are familiar with the area. Be alert for suspicious people or circumstances.

There is no reciprocal health agreement with the U.S. and treatment is very expensive. If you have health issues, be sure to check with your healthcare provider before leaving home to verify what procedures they want you to follow, should the need arise. Should an injury or accident occur, you would be responsible for any costs involved, medical and/or travel related. For this reason, we **strongly urge** you to take out some form of traveler's insurance before your departure.

Accommodations

Hotel rooms abroad are most always smaller than those in the United States, and it is not unusual for one room to differ from the next. Hotel rooms in major cities tend to be smaller than hotel rooms throughout the rest of the country – but what you don't get in spacious accommodations is more than compensated by the wealth of attractions surrounding you.

It is the custom for a twin room to be two single beds made up separately and placed side by side. A double room will usually have one double bed. A single room will have one twin-size bed. A triple is generally a twin room with a cot or small bed added. Also, please be aware that single rooms are almost always smaller than twin rooms.

Unfortunately, we can only request room types and locations. Room assignments are made at the discretion of the hotel.

Telephones

Most public phones do not take currency, but accept only special telephone cards issued in colones. Available in increments between 500 and 3000 colones, these cards can be purchased in most stores and at the airport. Even if you decide to rent a mobile phone during your stay, a calling card is a good precaution in case of an emergency.

To call Costa Rica from the U.S. dial 011 and the country code (**506**) followed by the city code and then the phone number. It is very expensive to call the United States from your hotel room. We suggest that you use a phone card from a public phone booth. If you are using your own telephone credit card, you can secure the access codes to call the United States from your long distance telephone service provider. To call the U.S. from abroad, once you get a local line, dial your access code, followed by the area code and number. No need to dial 1.

Shopping

Costa Rica does a brisk business in selling crafts and clothes imported from Guatemala, Panama, and Ecuador. Words of advice: Buy coffee. Lots of it.

Most shops open from 9:00 am to 6:00 or 7:00 pm Monday through Saturday; most are closed on Sunday. Stores usually close from noon to 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. for siesta.

For larger purchases, Costa Rica imposes a Value Added Tax (VAT), currently 13%. If the purchase is over a certain amount, you can get it partially refunded. Ask for a form where you purchase the item or at the airport. You must submit the form at the airport before you depart. Your refund will be mailed to you. For more information call 1 800 566-9828.

Time

Costa Rica is 1 hour behind us and practices Daylight Savings Time.

Gratuities

All restaurants in Costa Rica include a 13 percent sales tax and a 10 percent gratuity for the wait staff. It is not customary to leave an additional tip, but Costa Ricans and foreign tourists will do so, for superlative service.

On the other hand, gratuities are expected from most service-oriented personnel. Airport luggage porters should receive about 500 colones (\$1.50) per bag, while hotel staff, like bellboys and chambermaids, expect between 150 - 600 colones (\$0.45 - \$2.00) a day, depending on the quality of service. Taxi drivers will only expect a gratuity if they have provided assistance beyond getting you to a known address.

Gratuities to your tour director, driver, local guides, and dining room staff are not included in the tour price. While the amount of these gratuities will depend upon your degree of satisfaction for services received, many of our clients have asked us for general tipping guidelines. For a good job, we suggest \$3.00-\$5.00 per person per day for your full-time tour director and \$3.00-\$5.00 per person per day for your driver. In restaurants a 15% - 20% tip is expected to show appreciation. In **bars and restaurants** - 10% of the total bill.

Custom Regulations

\$500 US of merchandise may be brought in. Cameras, computers, and electronic equipment for personal use are permitted duty-free but bringing in more than one or two of any of these items may draw suspicion. Luggage is rarely checked upon entry.

Returning US citizens may bring back \$800 worth of merchandise once every 30 days duty-free. Anything over that limit will be charged duty. For mailed goods, this limit is \$200.

Personal Effects

Tourists are allowed to bring in their personal effects duty-free. According to customs regulations, in addition to clothing, personal effects may include one camera, one laptop, one CD/MP3 player, and one cellular phone. Any tourist carrying such items, even if duty-free, should enter the "Merchandise to Declare" lane at the first customs checkpoint. The tourist should be prepared to pay any assessed duty. Failure to declare personal effects routinely results in the seizure of the goods as contraband, plus the seizure of the vehicle in which the goods are traveling for attempted smuggling. The recovery of the seized vehicle involves the payment of substantial fines and attorney's fees.

Language & Customs

It is common to say hello and goodbye to friends and acquaintances with a light kiss on the cheek. Note that women kiss women and women kiss men, but men do not kiss men; instead, they either shake hands or give each other a one-armed hug. In formal or business settings, a firm handshake is the typical greeting.

Similarly, the word "ahora," which is Spanish for "now," means "later" or "tomorrow" in Costa Rica. If someone tells you they'll meet you "ahora" or are leaving "ahora mas tarde," it's best to clarify exactly when you'll see each other.

Common Phrases

Good morning/day	Buenos dias	Good evening	Buenas noches	Coffee/tea	café / te
Hello	Hola	Good-bye	Adios	Where is the bathroom?	Donde esta el bano?
Please	Por favor	Thank you	Gracias	Bottled water	Agua mineral
How much?	Cuanto cuesta esto	Yes	Si	Do you speak English?	Habla usted ingles?