

Costa Rica

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Costa Rica is smaller than most U.S. states, yet it has a greater diversity of landscape, climate and habitat than many of the world's larger countries. It is split roughly in two by a long chain of volcanic mountains running from Nicaragua to Panama, and the ecology and habitat change with the differences in altitude going up the mountains. Costa Rica's exceptional National Parks System reflects the strong national commitment to preserving nature. The system maintains naturally existing habitats and natural combinations of plant and animal life in about 12% of the national territory.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

Visas

- ❖ No visas required for US citizens
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas

Health, Immunizations

- ❖ Some immunizations are highly recommended, but none are required for entry
- ❖ Recommended immunizations: hepatitis A & B, typhoid, tetanus, MMR
- ❖ Malaria prophylactic may be recommended
- ❖ SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: 800-311-3435, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

Time Difference

- ❖ Costa Rica is in the Central Time Zone and remains on standard time year-round

Electricity

- ❖ 110 volts, 60 cycles AC
- ❖ Most plugs are American style; generally no adapter is necessary

ARRIVAL

Entry

- ❖ You will be met upon arrival by our representatives and transferred to your hotel
- ❖ Contact information is sent with your Last Minute Reminders from JOURNEYS

Customs

- ❖ Anything you are bringing into the country for personal use - camera gear, snorkeling equipment, binoculars, etc. - will be readily allowed
- ❖ Rules are very liberal on duty-free items such as tobacco and alcohol, with 500 cigarettes and three liters of alcoholic beverage allowed

GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

Food & Restaurants

- ❖ At hotels and most lodges you can drink the tap water, but check with your guide first
- ❖ In the field, or when in doubt, drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice
- ❖ Food at hotels and lodges are safe, and restaurant meals are generally safe especially if you stick with foods that are thoroughly cooked
- ❖ Don't buy food from street vendors or stalls
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water, and avoid dairy products that are



- ❖ unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly
- ❖ Look for a restaurant where lots of local people are eating - chances are the food will be delicious and reasonable
- ❖ Costa Rican food is very similar to North American "home cooked" meals with a wonderful array of exceptionally high quality beef, chicken and seafood that are staples in the Tico diet
- ❖ Besides standard Costa Rican fare, you'll find some good Chinese, Italian, French and other international restaurants in the city
- ❖ There is a 23% sales tax on restaurant meals (10% gratuity + 13% sales tax)

Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ Currency in Costa Rica is the Colon, named for Cristobal Colon (Spanish for Christopher Columbus)
- ❖ Ask for the current exchange rate when you go to Costa Rica, but it will probably be about 475 colones to one US dollar
- ❖ It is a good idea to bring newer dated currency that has no rips, marks, folds, or holes
- ❖ Take part of your money in cash for exchange into colones upon arrival at your hotel
- ❖ Cash and travelers checks are both acceptable, although cash is easier to exchange into local currency
- ❖ Banks will willingly exchange either, but your hotel is your best bet
- ❖ You may need to show your passport when you exchange money or travelers checks, so keep it handy
- ❖ We suggest bringing \$300-\$500 for items not included in the cost of the trip, emergency money, and for shopping. Not included in the trip are meals during stopovers in the city (except the welcome and farewell dinners on some group trips) Recommended to take \$50 of this in \$1 bills
- ❖ Airport departure tax approximately \$26.00 as of June 2005 payable in cash
- ❖ Visa and MasterCard are accepted at most city hotels, restaurants and larger stores. You may need to show your passport when using a credit card. Also, credit card companies are now charging a 3%+ surcharge on all foreign currency purchases (purchases of goods made outside of the US). Check with your credit card company before you travel as the charges change frequently without notice and vary with card and destination.
- ❖ Can use U.S. currency but change will be given in local currency

Language

- ❖ The official language is Spanish
- ❖ All your guides are English-speaking, as are most people in the hotels and other accommodations where you'll be staying
- ❖ Most travelers have no trouble at all getting along well in a Spanish-speaking country, especially one as friendly as Costa Rica

Tipping

- ❖ All tipping is completely optional and is done solely at your discretion. Please keep in mind that the following are guidelines only.
- ❖ Tipping of drivers is customary, but again, is left to your discretion. If you feel your drivers have done an outstanding job, \$2-3 per person, per day is an ample tip
- ❖ When you have the services of local guides, we recommend \$3-5 per traveler/per day. Tips for these individuals are usually given at the end of each day or activity
- ❖ Our Expedition Leaders and Naturalist Guides lead our tours because they love to view wildlife and to educate people about the splendors of the world in which we live. They are not motivated by gratuities. Rather, they take great pride in making your nature vacation an experience of a lifetime and consider all of their travelers friends. In fact, the question of gratuities often makes them uncomfortable, so should you desire to give them a gratuity, we recommend \$7-15 per person/per day. Please remember that the amount is at your discretion and should reflect your level of satisfaction. There is no set amount and no set method for offering these gratuities.
- ❖ You may decide to pool tips as a group, or tip individually.
- ❖ It is common to give \$1-2 per person/per night for the maid service and any special help you received

from hotel personal

- ❖ It is also customary to leave tips for the local staff at lodges, including their waiters, cooks, boatmen, etc.
- ❖ A base tip of 10% is included in the bill for meals in most restaurants. You may want to give an additional tip of around 10% of the bill, when you feel you have received good service and attention.
- ❖ Taxi drivers do not usually expect a tip
- ❖ Anytime you especially appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is always gratefully accepted.

Driving Distances

- ❖ San Jose to Arenal: 3 hours
- ❖ San Jose to Manuel Antonio: 4.5 hours
- ❖ San Jose to Tortuguero: 7 hours, break with breakfast included
- ❖ Tortuguero to Sarapiquí: 3.5 hours
- ❖ Sarapiquí to Arenal: 3 hours
- ❖ Sarapiquí to Jaco: 3.5 hours
- ❖ Arenal to Monteverde: 4.5 hours
- ❖ Monteverde to Jaco: 4.5 hours
- ❖ Arenal to Tamarindo: 3.5 hours

Flight Distances

- ❖ San Jose to Corcovado/Tiskita: 1 hours
- ❖ San Jose to Jaco: no flight available!
- ❖ San Jose to Quepos: 20 minutes
- ❖ Tortuguero to San Jose: 30 minutes
- ❖ Tamarindo to San Jose: 30 minutes

Climate and Temperature Ranges

- ❖ Because Costa Rica is located just ten degrees north of the equator, there is no appreciable differences in temperature except due to altitude.
- ❖ Conditions are pleasantly moderate all year long and are often compared to a never ending Spring.
- ❖ December through April brings what Costa Ricans refer to as Summer (verano) or the dry season.
- ❖ May to November, the rest of the year, is the rainy or “green” season, although the amount of rain varies greatly in different areas of the country.
- ❖ Rainiest months are September and October

Average Temps	Jan	Apr	July	Oct
High	75°F	79°F	77°F	77°F
Low	58°F	62°F	62°F	60°F

Emergency Services

- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy.
- ❖ There is a complete and modern public hospital system with health services and clinics in all major cities as well as in most smaller towns
- ❖ There are also private medical facilities available in most areas
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need

SPECIAL REMARKS

People

- ❖ You will find the people very friendly and welcoming
- ❖ It is best to ask permission before taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask your guide



Time

- ❖ Relax and enjoy the easy-going rhythm of Latin America
- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Despite best efforts, departures and arrivals could be a little before or after the time given. This applies particularly to aircraft movements. Operating requirements, weather and terrain sometimes present problems, and on these occasions, to ensure your safety, flight times may vary

Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet - most sewage systems can't handle paper. Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt a bulging wallet, always lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist
- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace

Shopping

- ❖ Prices in shops are fixed
- ❖ Bartering is the norm at street markets. The actual price you can expect to pay may be anywhere from 70-80% of the original price. But don't push too hard - remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.
- ❖ Some great souvenirs include: Coffee, ceramics, jewelry, t-shirts, embroidery, leather handbags, briefcases, and wallets, woodcrafts such as utensils, plates, bowls and decorative ornaments.

Equipment & Packing

- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.
- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free.
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage.
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Be aware that weight limits for in-county flights are 25lbs
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items at your hotel in San Jose while you're out in the field, and/or to use on your return for souvenirs

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations
- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

Clothing

- Lightweight hiking boots, well broken-in with good traction for slippery trails in heat, rain and mud
- Washable tennis, running or comfortable walking shoes
- Extra pair shoes, or flip-flops or sandals ("Teva" style sport sandals with Velcro strap)
- Cotton or cotton blend socks
- Shorts - quick dry material
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Nicer pants or skirt (optional)
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt, for warmth and/or protection from sun or mosquitoes
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts and/or tank tops
- Sweater/Jacket and windbreaker
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket and pants
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suits
- Sleepwear
- Under clothes

Personal Items

- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables
- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Underwater camera (disposable kind is very handy)
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Lightweight binoculars
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs
- Small packable umbrella



Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
- Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
- Band-aids, gauze pads
- Antibiotics
- Prescription medicines
- Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
- Anti-diarrhea medicine
- Antibiotic cream/ointment
- Supply of feminine hygiene items
- Motion sickness tablets
- Earplugs

Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Domestic and international air tickets
- Travelers checks, money and credit cards
- Insurance certificates
- Address and telephone number of emergency contact
- Prescription medicines
- Extra set of underclothes
- Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
- Camera gear, film and other valuables

Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Small washcloth
- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family
- Mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit (if applicable)
- Map
- Silica bags for moisture (protect camera equipment)
- Video camera
- Phrase book

