

BIG FIVE

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

COSTA RICA



Travel Guide

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions, and answers to frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

"I have wandered all my life and I have traveled; the difference between the two is this -- we wander for distraction, but we travel for fulfillment." -- Hilaire Belloc

San Jose												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	66	67	69	70	71	70	69	69	70	68	68	66
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.6	0.2	0.8	1.8	9	9.5	8.3	9.5	12	11.8	5.7	1.6
Arenal Volcano												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	75.5	75.5	77.5	78	79	78.5	78	78.5	78	77.5	77	76
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	7.48	5.14	3.58	3.7	10.23	16.15	19.87	17.05	16.07	16.98	12	10.1
Monteverde												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	60.5	71	62	63	64	64	63	63	63	63	62.5	63
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	6.3	3.82	1.65	4.8	13.7	16.54	14.13	18.03	19.41	16.77	16.89	12.99
Manuel Antonio												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	78	78	80	80	80	79	78	78	79	79	79	78
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	2.83	1.42	2.36	6.57	15.43	17.05	18.15	18.82	20.79	25.35	15.28	6.65

WEATHER

Costa Rica is a tropical country that contains several distinct climatic zones. It knows no winter or summer as such. Most regions have rainy seasons from May to November and dry seasons from December to April. Some rain, however, may reasonably be expected in the dry season and rainless periods during the rainy season – particularly on the Atlantic coast. Although some roads are impassable in the wet season, it's still worthwhile to visit at this time, and things are much quieter. April, May and mid-October to mid-December should give you the best of both worlds.

TIME ZONES & TRAVELING TIME

Costa Rica is Greenwich Mean Time –6 hours, which means Costa Rica observes the same time as U.S. Central Standard Time, but it does not use daylight savings time.

Flight Times: Direct from Miami to San José takes just under three hours; from New York to San José, flying time is about five hours or seven hours via Miami. Flying from Los Angeles to San José takes between eight and nine hours or 12, if flying through Dallas or Miami.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

While in Costa Rica, you are required to carry your passport or tourist card with you at all times. A photocopy with your photo, passport number and entry stamp will usually suffice, however, if stopped by officials.

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest Costa Rica consulate.

Important: Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

International airport: International flights arrive at San José's Juan Santamaría International Airport. The airport in Liberia, 217km (135mi) northwest of San José, has been upgraded and now operates as a second-string international airport.

Departure Tax: Currently, the tax is about US\$26 per person on international flights.

CUSTOMS

No customs duties are charged on personal luggage, which includes an array of items for personal and professional use, as long as they do not appear in quantities that suggest commercial intent.

Costa Rican law requires that baggage be examined and that travelers submit customs declarations listing all articles acquired abroad, including fruit, vegetables, meat, meat products, biological products such as vaccinations, serums, etc. Families need to fill out only one declaration for all family members.

Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs are strict and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and heavy fines.

US CUSTOMS

Personal Exemption: U.S. citizens returning from Costa Rica have a \$800 duty-free exemption. There are limits on some items. For a list of exempt items and other current information, you can go to the Customs & Border Protection homepage at www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml or write the US Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

LUGGAGE

Traveling light is always the first and best rule! We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffle bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for charter flights. For charter flights on small planes the total **including** carry-on is usually 11 to 15 pounds, depending on the destination. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US. This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and bring a couple of spare locks in the event, one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.

CURRENCY / BANKING

Currency: Costa Rica's currency is the colon (pronounced like *cologne*). A slow, steady devaluation over the past few years shows no sign of stopping, so it is wise to check the exchange rate before you travel. Coins come in two formats. The older, silver-colored coins are larger and come in 5, 10, 20 colones denominations (only the large coins can be used in the few public telephones that haven't converted to phone cards). The newer, gold-colored coins are smaller and come in 5, 10, 25, 50, 100 and 500 colones denominations. Bills come in different colors – one for each denomination of 50, 100, 500, 1000, 2000, 5000 and 10000 colones.

Credit Cards: Major international credit cards (Master Card/Visa/AMEX) are accepted at most hotels, stores, restaurants and car rental firms, while at smaller businesses one should be prepared to pay in the local currency.

Banking: The main banks of Costa Rica, with branches throughout the country, are Banco Nacional, Banco de Costa and the Banco Popular. In San José, numerous other banks, including a large number of private banks, have recently been chartered. Unless you have an account with them, private banks impose a service charge on all currency transactions. Keep in mind that most businesses throughout the country will accept US travelers' checks as payment for goods or services. You will need to present your passport or a copy of it. If you use US currency, make sure the bills are in good condition. Your change will be in colones, except in very rare circumstances. There is a growing number of ATM machines available in San Jose and in some outlying towns.

National banks operate quite differently than banks in North America, and can be very frustrating, at times. Tellers only look after certain transactions so you cannot do all transactions at one window. You get in one line to have someone to type up an order for you to change traveler's checks. Then, you go to another teller who gives you money. Make sure you pay attention when they point out the teller because that's where your traveler's checks and passport will be.

Private banks in the Central Valley keep longer hours than the national banks. Some also offer service on Saturday. At private banks, most services can be conducted from the same window and most have an ATM machine. Unless you have an account with them, private banks impose a service charge on all currency transactions.

It's always best to do your banking in the morning because, every once in a while the rules change and certain transactions - like changing dollars - are only carried out before 2:00 p.m. (as is true in much of Latin America).

The best place to change money is in your hotel. Be sure to carry small denominations (\$50.00) of traveler's checks or cash because hotels in rural areas can often only change small amounts.

BUSINESS & BANKING HOURS

Banks: National Banks' hours of operation at vary slightly from one to the other but are generally from 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 or 3:30 p.m., weekdays.

Government offices: from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Commercial offices: from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Stores and other businesses: open from about 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. Malls are open from 10 am to 8 pm.

OFFICIAL HOLIDAYS:

New Year's Day: Jan 1st
Easter Week: March/April
Juan Santamaría Day: April 11th
Labor Day: May 1st
Annexation of Guanacaste Day: July 25th
Our Lady of the Angels Day: Aug 2nd
(*La Virgen de los Angeles – Patron Saint of Costa Rica*)
Mother's Day: August 15th
Independence Day: Sept 15th
Christmas Day: Dec 25th

COMMUNICATION

Costa Rica has one of the most advanced telecommunications systems in Latin America, with telephones and fax machines all over the country, and an increasing number of businesses online. There is also reliable mail service, and an ample selection of courier services in San José. Most large hotels in the San José area have cable television, with US and European stations. Newspapers and magazines from North America and several European nations are sold in many shops and hotels in and around the capital.

Language: Spanish is the official language, however, English is widely spoken, particularly in urban centers, and a growing number of professionals in the tourism business speak French, German and other languages.

Telephone System: For travelers accustomed to the vagaries of the telephone in other developing countries, Costa Rica presents a delightful surprise, whether you are calling within Costa Rica or internationally. All public phone booths are connected to the international system so you can call home from any street corner. The process is made even easier for North Americans because you can directly access an operator in your own country (codes are listed in the telephone directory). You can also make collect or credit card calls. Please note that a large percentage of public phones now require a card with an electromagnetic strip and do not accept coins. There are two kinds of cards – one that uses a chip and the other, known as service 197, which uses a numeric code. A 500 colones 'chip' card and a 300 colones numeric code card are good investments to keep in your wallet, plus a few of the old silver-colored coins, so you can phone from any type of instrument. To call or fax Costa Rica, dial the country code 506 before the number.

Most hotels have telephones in the rooms and they are gradually switching over to the system whereby you can access a long distance line yourself. It is recommended that, even from hotels, you call collect because the rates in Costa Rica are fairly high. In addition, some of the fancier hotels have quite exorbitant surcharges.

Email: Most hotels and lodges are online- ask permission and you might be allowed to send an email. This service is not yet offered as a standard.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS / FACILITIES

There are no required immunizations for entering Costa Rica, which is probably one of the safest destinations in the developing world, from a general health standpoint. This is largely due to the well-educated populace and the government's emphasis on health care and on the individual's basic right to clean water. Costa Rica's public health system (known as the CAJA) has fine hospitals in San José and in the provincial capitals, plus an extensive network of smaller hospitals and medical centers in other towns and cities. Costa Rica also has many private hospitals and clinics. As a matter of fact, Costa Rica's dentists and plastic surgeons are among the best in the world and, because prices are much more reasonable than in North America or Europe, they do a thriving business with international patients. In San José, major clinics have 24-hour pharmacies.

If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip, but do not bring an excessive amount of medication as it will draw suspicion. For Customs inspections, keep all drugs in their original containers.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet homepage at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

SAFETY

As with travel to any destination, common sense should be the prevailing guide to avoid problems. Modern society has seen an increase in crime in Costa Rica and, while one must not minimize this fact, it is important to keep things in perspective. Costa Rica is still much safer than most destinations in the world; much safer, in fact, than many major North American cities. Caution, however, is the best way to prevent an unpleasant situation. During the day, take only the indispensable in your backpack or fanny pack. Do not take your passport, airline tickets, or all your money on day trips. Always leave these and other valuables in hotel safes. Take copies of your documents and only the amount of money you think you will need.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or at the Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page: <http://travel.state.gov>.

ELECTRICITY

The electricity in Costa Rica is compatible with that of North America, 110 Volts. Three-hole grounded plug-ins are **very uncommon** so, if you have equipment requiring that system be sure to bring an adapter or buy one here at a hardware store. Most two-hole plug-ins accept plugs with either round and flat prongs, including the plugs with flat prongs of two different widths. However, you will occasionally run into the type that accepts only flat prongs of equal width.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Out of politeness, always ask permission before taking photographs of people. The same rule of thumb also applies to photographing places of worship, religious festivals, and rural homesteads.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out problems.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is a good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. A zoom lens in the 70 to 200 mm range will help you capture the sights of the country. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of extension tubes will work very well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean.

Film: It's strongly recommended that you bring what you need with you. You will undoubtedly shoot more pictures than you planned. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot one 36 exposure roll of film per day, and enthusiastic shooters will double or triple that amount. Be sure film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices, including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations.

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries with you. Your camera will be useless without them and batteries tend to be expensive.

Note: Recent news reports warn that new explosive detectors used in more than 100 US airports to scan checked baggage will ruin unprotected, unexposed film. This technology will eventually be in place at all airports worldwide. Experts suggest either carrying your film in your carry-on luggage and/or placing film in safety, lead-lined bags to prevent X-ray damage.

FOOD & DRINK

Drinking Water: With the exception of a few rural areas, Costa Rica is serviced by the National Water Company, and water is safe to drink. Restaurants, hotels and other facilities

with their own water source, usually a well, have their water tested regularly. If you have any doubts about the water, ask the owners. If you prefer bottled water, it is easily available throughout the country. It is highly advisable that you carry water with you on all hikes to avoid dehydration.

In many countries, the concern about eating contaminated food is legitimate. There is very little risk, however, that you will get sick from eating the food anywhere in Costa Rica. But, as you would at home, use your judgment and eat in clean looking restaurants.

Local Cuisine: Costa Rican cuisine is simple and chefs shun spices. Comida tipica, or native dishes, rely heavily on rice and beans. In fact, gallo pinto, the national dish of fried rice and black beans, is as ubiquitous as is the hamburger in North America, particularly as a breakfast (desayuno) staple. Many meals are derivatives, including arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) or arroz con tuna. At lunch, gallo pinto becomes the casado (married): rice and beans supplemented with cabbage-and-tomato salad, fried plantains, and meat. Vegetables do not form a large part of the diet.

Food staples include carne (beef, sometimes called bistek), pollo (chicken), and pescado (fish). Beef and steaks are relatively inexpensive, but don't expect your steak to match its North American counterpart. They're also lean (cattle is grass-fed). Despite 1,227 kilometers (767 miles) of coastline, seafood — especially shrimp (camarones) or lobster (langosto) — is expensive, because Costa Rica exports most of its seafood.

Eating in Costa Rica doesn't present the health problems that plague the unwary traveler elsewhere in Central America, but you need to be aware that pesticide use in Costa Rica is unregulated. Always wash vegetables in water known to be safe. And ensure that any fruits you eat you peel yourself. Otherwise, stick to staples such as bananas and oranges. Remember, too, that the kitchen of a snazzy restaurant with candelabra and silverware may not live up to its facade. Eat where the locals eat. Usually that means tasty and trustworthy food.

Dining in Costa Rica is a leisurely experience, befitting the relaxed pace of a genteel vacation. Restaurants normally open 11 a.m.- 2 p.m. and 6 p.m.- 11 p.m. or midnight. Some restaurants stay open 24 hours.

In San Jose, many fine restaurants serve the gamut of international cuisine at reasonable prices. And though culinary excellence in general declines with distance from the capital city, a growing number of hoteliers and gourmet chefs are opening restaurants worthy of note in even the most secluded backwaters. Take the Caribbean coast, for example, where the local cuisine reflects its Jamaican heritage with mouthwatering specialties such as ackee and codfish (ackee is a small, pink-skinned fruit tasting like scrambled eggs), johnnycakes, curried goat, curried shrimp, and pepperpot soup, with its subtle, lingering flame. Here, simple restaurants such as Defi's, in Cahuita, and The Garden, in Puerto Viejo, are worthy of a review in Bon Appetit.

Many bars in Costa Rica have a delightful habit of serving bocas-savory tidbits ranging from ceviche to tortillas con queso (tortillas with cheese) — with each drink. Some bars provide them free, so long as you're drinking. Others apply a small charge. Turtle (tortuga) eggs are a popular dish in many bars. The eggs may have been legally taken with the first arribadas (mass turtle nesting) of the season. Turtles, however, are an endangered and protected species, and the eggs may have been taken illegally.

As a general rule when traveling anywhere, eat only thoroughly cooked foods. Remember: boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it. Never eat undercooked ground beef and poultry, raw eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products. Raw shellfish is particularly dangerous to persons who have liver disease or compromised immune systems.

Note: If you have food allergies or are on a special/restricted diet, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have any mobility restrictions, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability.

CLOTHING

As always, we recommend that travelers pack light! See end of guide for list. You will invariably buy more than you had planned. In general, light weight, fast-drying clothing is preferable. Many people choose all cotton but cotton/synthetic blends are also cool to wear and don't wrinkle as much. Because temperatures can change drastically over the course of a day such as traveling from lowlands to highlands, so be prepared to dress in layers. Those changes in temperature and vagaries of precipitation mean that you must come prepared with the appropriate clothing. You may or may not need all of it so there is some risk you'll to carry a few items you won't use. Bring a jacket for cool, windy conditions at high elevations but you may also need sunscreen if you have a calm, sunny day because it will be hot up there.

If going to remote areas, bring enough of each item to last at least half the trip because you can't count on laundry service everywhere and sometimes hand washing is hard to dry in humid areas.

Generally, Costa Ricans dress very casually, even in San José, although somewhat dressier attire (snappy casual) is the norm for performances at the National Theater, for example, or at first class restaurants. While it used to be inappropriate to wear shorts downtown, it is more common practice -- particularly among young men and women. But women in shorts should be prepared for the male Latin reactions of blatant staring, whistles and comments, which are best ignored.

Because one pair of boots / shoes always gets muddy or wet to some degree, it is important to have dry footwear to change into. Consider bringing a pair of slip-on or river sandals (which fasten at the ankle and were originally designed for rafting) for wet boardings and landings and for showers. Comfortable hiking boots with thick soles and deep tread are best for forest trails.

SHOPPING

An impressive selection of handcrafts is produced in Costa Rica. The tropical hardwoods found in the country's forests are carved into a variety of items ranging from wooden fruit to miniature oxcarts, and production of handicrafts is the most profitable use for those precious woods. Local artisans also produce some attractive jewelry, often integrating traditional indigenous designs and sometimes making exact replicas of museum pieces. Shoppers will also find good prices on quality leather goods as well as on cheaper items such as T-shirts and Costa Rican coffee.

You won't suffer from a lack of shopping opportunities in Costa Rica. Most large hotels have gift shops, and there are plenty of nice stores in most tourist towns. San

Jose has a few craft shops in the area between the Plaza de la Cultura and the National Museum. Artisans sell their wares from a series of stalls on the Plaza de la Democracia. On the road to Cartago, in the town of Curridabat, east of San Jose, an extensive international market stocks plenty of goods from neighboring countries. The town of Moravia, 20 minutes north of San Jose, has a street of souvenir shops, and an hour northwest of the capital is the town of Sarchi, famous for its traditional hand-painted ox carts.

NATIONAL SYMBOLS

National Bird: Since November, 1976. The "Yigüirro" (*Turdus grayi*) is also known as the clay colored robin or gray thrush. The "Yigüirro," found throughout Costa Rica, represents the fertility of the earth, the symbol of the rain fertilizing the earth, the richness of Costa Rican soil. The "Yigüirro" sings to claim rain since it generally sings at the beginning of the rainy season and mate during that season.

The nesting season takes place between April and May. During this time, the "Yigüirro" does not sing and lays from two to three eggs. The "Yigüirro," a friendly and peaceful bird, is not afraid of humans, however, it protects its brood.

National Flower: Since June 15, 1939. An orchid, the "Guaria Morada" (*Cattleya skinneri*), grows on trees, roofs, and buildings. It gets nutrients from the air, rain, dust, and residues stored on the trunk of trees. These plants use trees as a means of support, but they are not parasites. Orchid flowers are large with fantastic shapes, amazing colors, and enchanting fragrances.

The "Guaria Morada" has always been in Costa Rican homes for centuries. The "campesinos" cherish the flower for its beauty and they associate it with the beauty of Costa Rican ladies. It has given Costa Rican people an aesthetic sense for appreciating nature and pursuing its beauty.

According to Native Costa Rican traditions, the "Guaria Morada" brings fortune and good luck. It brings union and family understanding and channels the best cosmic experiences. It evokes peace and love as well as hope for the future. Its flower does not have a special fragrance because it is filled with dreams to be accomplished.

Labor Symbol: Since March 22, 1988. The oxcart is a rustic strong vehicle with two compact wheels moved by two oxen. It can easily pass through muddy places, swamps, beaches, hills, curves, rocky mountains, and deep small rivers.

The oxcart integrated Costa Rica into international commerce by becoming the main means of export transportation after 1840. The first shipment of coffee to London was transported from the coffee plantations to Costa Rica's main ports by oxcart in 1843. Oxcarts transported coffee to Puntarenas on a small road between 1844 and 1846.

After World War II, the oxcart became obsolete due to new inventions. It has been used since then as an ornamental object although some farmers still use it during the coffee harvest season to carry coffee to processing plants in rural areas.

Painting oxcarts developed into a form of original Costa Rican art in the early 20th century. Cowherds decided to add life to oxcarts by hand painting them with bright colors and geometrical figures. There are never two oxcarts painted the same. All of them contain changes in color tones and figures. This art has been passed from generation to generation up to the present time.

Oxcarts portray the peaceful tradition of Costa Rica and the arduous and fervent labor of its people. They are perceived as a window to Costa Rica's optimistic vision of life, humility, patience, sacrifice, and endurance to pursue goals in a pacific and progressive manner.

Oxcarts are the vehicles that brought economic wealth and original art to Costa Rica. They represent the simplicity and aspirations of rural Costa Rican people who in turn have become artisans willing to fulfill their destiny.

National Tree: Since August 31, 1959. The "Guanacaste" (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*) is a native tree to Costa Rica. It belongs to the leguminous family and the subfamily of the Mimosas, and is found along the coasts of Central America as well as Cuba and in the lowlands of the Antilles.

The "Guanacaste" grows on lands at sea level and up to 900 m. (2,952 ft.) Its height varies from 25 m. (82 ft.) to 50 m. (164 ft.) high. The diameter of its trunk is usually 2 m (6.6 ft.). It grows fast in low and sunny lands, especially in Guanacaste. It has a robust trunk and a beautiful appearance.

"Guanacaste" means "ear tree" since its compressed and curled leaves look like ears. During March and April, the "vainas", its fruit, turn dark brown as it ripens and then falls. Its fruit generally carries between 10 and 22 seeds. Its flower is white and rounded.

Its water resistant wood is easy to work with. It is used in carpentry and ornamental crafts. Its rich tannic bark is used as a cold medicine and coloring. Its sap is used to relieve bronchitis. In the fields, it provides shade and food to cattle for they eat its branches, leaves, and fruit.

Its thick long branches grow horizontally. The tree not only supports and takes root on the soil, but also absorbs the surrounding soil forming bulky roots that spread around the surface.

The tree represents universal equilibrium and sacred creation, the renewal of one's faith on earth, the power of Mother Nature, the power of free choice given by God and the transient condition of human life on earth.

It is a symbol of stability and growth; it provides a better perception of the valleys and mountains and represents the growing pride of Costa Rican identity.

The strong and firm roots represent the attachment to life. Its hard trunk represents the will and the branches are the protectors of creative peace. The top of the tree is associated with spiritual consciousness.

TRADITIONS IN COSTA RICA

Costa Ricans are very proud of their country and quite eager to share its natural heritage and culture with visitors. It is important to remember that there is a different culture here, in spite of the North American veneer you will discover. That authentic Costa Rican culture is reflected in obvious areas such as food, architecture, music, dance, folklore, fashion and in facets of everyday life. It is also reflected in the way people think, their attitudes towards work, time, problem-solving (Costa Ricans love to discuss an issue at great length) and even such mundane things as personal space. (People tend to stand much closer together in lines). It will just take some getting used to.

As a visitor, please respect cultural differences rather than trying to impose your own standards. Criticism (not justified complaints you might have) is never welcome. You will find that respect and courtesy are returned. For

example, it is not uncommon for a Costa Rican to actually walk you to familiar territory, if you happen to get disoriented in the city. Your efforts at Spanish are always appreciated and even people with fluent English will patiently converse in Spanish - unless of course you ask if they speak English.

For these and other reasons, a common remark made by people touring Costa Rica is how friendly and welcoming the people are to foreign visitors. In fact, it is often said that the people of Costa Rica are her most valuable asset.

One of the reasons people from North America and Europe feel comfortable in Costa Rica is that the social structure is very similar to home and most people seem to enjoy a relatively comfortable lifestyle. The vast majority of Costa Ricans belong to a hard-working middle class that aspires to a North American, consumer-oriented way of life.

First time visitors may be surprised, for example, at the number of international fast food chains in San José or the number of modern cars on the roads. In addition to eating out and driving a good car, a comfortable home with good furniture and appliances, clothes, sports and vacations are all very important to Costa Ricans. Of course there is poverty here, as well, but even the lowest income families have access to good education and health care so, unlike many developing countries, there is always the possibility of upward mobility in Costa Rica.

Pura Vida: Costa Ricans started using the expression "Pura Vida" after watching the premier of a Mexican movie called "Pura Vida!" in 1956. During that time only a small portion of the population used it, but by 1970 everyone used the expression on a daily basis because the words conveyed the state of happiness, peace, and tranquility that the political stability and freedom bring to Costa Ricans.

Nowadays, the expression "Pura Vida" has become so popular that has been added to Costa Rican Spanish dictionaries as an idiom to greet, or to show appreciation.

Pura Vida is a word that identifies a Costa Rican wherever he or she may be. When you say "Pura Vida" the facial expression of the person changes and the person smiles. It is a word very meaningful to Costa Ricans. It reminds us of home and its beauty.

Pura Vida has different meanings and it is implemented as an informal Spanish expression:

To greet someone: When you see someone on the streets, shake hands, or just to say hello you would say "Pura Vida!" That means in English Hi, Hello, How are you doing? And / or What's going on?

To say good bye: When you leave a place, you want to say good bye, you say *Hasta luego* todo estuvo Pura Vida.

To show appreciation for a person, object, or situation: If you want to express that a situation, object, or situation is great, cool, abundant, joy, and/or fun. You would say something or someone is Pura Vida. "Usted es Pura Vida!" means You are a great person.

Tippling: It is advisable to carry a quantity of small denominations for tipping, which is expected in most situations. A 10% service charge and 13% sales tax are

always included in restaurant bills. An additional 10% tip is suggested. Taxi drivers generally do not receive a tip.

GOVERNMENT

In 1986, Costa Rica celebrated 100 years of democracy. It is an independent democratic republic with four branches of federal government and the governing party is determined by popular vote every 4 years. The president is elected for a 4-year term, and may serve only one term. He selects two vice-presidents. The legislative branch consists of 56 elected representatives called 'diputados'. The other two branches are the judiciary and the electoral, which is a separate, non-partisan entity that oversees elections.

The two main political parties are the National Liberation Party and the United Social Christian Party. Several minor parties also campaign for election.

Costa Rica is divided into seven provinces and 81 municipalities. Each municipality has an administrative council that is elected by popular vote every 4 years.

When Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias Sánchez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, in 1987, the world at large began to realize what the scientist and nature travelers had known all along. That Costa Rica is a shining example of long-standing democracy, social justice and peace. Costa Rica hasn't even had an army since it was abolished in 1949.

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Unlike many of their Central American neighbors, present-day Costa Ricans are largely of European rather than mestizo descent; Spain was the primary country of origin. Few of the native Indians survived European contact; the indigenous population today numbers about 29,000 or less than 1% of the population. Descendants of 19th century Jamaican immigrant workers constitute an English-speaking minority and -- at 3% of the population -- number about 96,000.

In 1502, on his fourth and last voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus made the first European landfall in the area. Settlement of Costa Rica began in 1522. For nearly three centuries, Spain administered the region as part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala under a military Governor. The Spanish optimistically called the country "Rich Coast." Finding little gold or other valuable minerals in Costa Rica, however, the Spanish turned to agriculture.

The small landowners' relative poverty, the lack of a large indigenous labor force, the population's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and Costa Rica's isolation from the Spanish colonial centers in Mexico and the Andes all contributed to the development of an autonomous and individualistic agrarian society. An egalitarian tradition also arose. This tradition survived the widened class distinctions brought on by the 19th-century introduction of banana and coffee cultivation and consequent accumulations of local wealth.

Costa Rica joined other Central American provinces in 1821 in a joint declaration of independence from Spain. Although the newly independent provinces formed a Federation, border disputes broke out among them, adding to the region's turbulent history and conditions. Costa Rica's northern Guanacaste Province was annexed from Nicaragua in one such regional dispute. In 1838, long after the Central American Federation ceased to function in practice, Costa Rica formally withdrew and proclaimed itself sovereign.

An era of peaceful democracy in Costa Rica began in 1899 with elections considered the first truly free and honest ones in the country's history. This began a trend continued until today with only two lapses: in 1917-19,

Federico Tinoco ruled as a dictator, and, in 1948, Jose Figueres led an armed uprising in the wake of a disputed presidential election.

With more than 2,000 dead, the 44-day civil war resulting from this uprising was the bloodiest event in 20th century Costa Rican history, but the victorious junta drafted a constitution guaranteeing free elections with universal suffrage and the abolition of the military. Figueres became a national hero, winning the first election under the new constitution in 1953. Since then, Costa Rica has held 11 presidential elections, the latest in 1998".

(from *U.S. Department of State Resources*)

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Costa Rica is an active member of the international community and, in 1993, proclaimed its permanent neutrality. Its record on the environment, human rights, and advocacy of peaceful settlement of disputes give it a weight in world affairs far beyond its size. The country lobbied aggressively for the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and became the first nation to recognize the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Human Rights Court, based in San Jose.

Then-President Oscar Arias authored a regional peace plan in 1987 that served as the basis for the Esquipulas Peace Agreement. Arias' efforts earned him the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize. Subsequent agreements, supported by the United States, led to the Nicaraguan election of 1990 and the end of civil war in Nicaragua. Costa Rica also hosted several rounds of negotiations between the Salvadoran Government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), aiding El Salvador's efforts to emerge from civil war and culminating in that country's 1994 free and fair elections. Costa Rica has been a strong proponent of regional arms limitation agreements. President Rodriguez recently proposed the abolition of all Central American militaries and the creation of a regional counter-narcotics police force in their stead.

With the establishment of democratically elected governments in all Central American nations by the 1990s, Costa Rica turned its focus from regional conflicts to the pursuit of democratic and economic development on the isthmus. It was instrumental in drawing Panama into the Central American development process and participated in the multinational Partnership for Democracy and Development in Central America.

Regional political integration has not proven attractive to Costa Rica. The country debated its role in the Central American integration process under former President Calderon. Costa Rica has sought concrete economic ties with its Central American neighbors rather than the establishment of regional political institutions, and it chose not to join the Central American Parliament. President Figueres promoted a higher profile for Costa Rica in regional and international circles. Costa Rica gained election as President of the Group of 77 in the United Nations in 1995. That term ended in 1997 with the South-South Conference held in San Jose. Costa Rica occupied a non-permanent seat in the Security Council from 1997 to 1999 and exercised a leadership role in confronting crises in the Middle East and Africa, as well as in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. It is currently a member of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Costa Rica broke relations with Cuba in 1961 to protest Cuban support of leftist subversion in Central America and has not renewed formal diplomatic ties with the Castro

regime. In 1995, Costa Rica established a consular office in Havana.

Costa Rica strongly backed efforts by the United States to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 940, which led to the restoration of the democratically elected Government of Haiti in October 1994. Costa Rica was among the first to call for a postponement of the May 22 elections in Peru when international observer missions found electoral machinery not prepared for the vote count.

U.S. & COSTA RICAN RELATIONS

The United States and Costa Rica have a history of close and friendly relations based on respect for democratic government, human freedoms, and other shared values. During the crisis in Central America in the 1980s, Costa Rica and the United States worked for the restoration of peace and the establishment of democracy on the isthmus. Costa Rica works cooperatively with the United States and other nations in the international fight against narcotics trafficking.

President Clinton met with Costa Rican President Miguel Angel Rodriguez in Washington in May 2000. He also met with then-Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres and other heads of state from Central America and the Dominican Republic in Antigua, Guatemala in 1998. As a follow-up to the summit, regional justice ministers met with Attorney General Janet Reno in San Jose in February 2000 to discuss a range of issues. Also in February, Costa Rica hosted a regional summit on corruption and narcotics trafficking. Labor Secretary Alexis Herman met with Labor ministers from Central America and the Dominican Republic in November 1997 to discuss ways to strengthen labor ministries and promote greater respect for workers' rights.

The United States responded to Costa Rica's economic needs in the 1980s with significant economic and development assistance programs. Through provision of more than \$1.1 billion in assistance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported Costa Rican efforts to stabilize its economy and broaden and accelerate economic growth through policy reforms and trade liberalization. Assistance initiatives in the 1990s concentrated on democratic policies, modernizing the administration of justice, and sustainable development. For decades, Peace Corps volunteers have provided technical assistance in the areas of environmental education, natural resources, management, small business development, basic business education, urban youth, and community education. USAID recently launched a \$9 million project to support refugees of Hurricane Mitch residing in Costa Rica.

There have been some vexing issues in the U.S.-Costa Rican relationship, principal among them longstanding expropriation and other U.S. citizen investment disputes, which have hurt Costa Rica's investment climate and produced bilateral tensions. Significant progress has been made in resolving some expropriation cases. However, several important cases remain outstanding. Land invasions from organized squatter groups who target foreign landowners have also occurred and some have turned violent. The U.S. Government has made clear to Costa Rica its concern that Costa Rican inattention to these issues has left U.S. citizens vulnerable to harm and loss of their property.

The United States and Costa Rica signed the bilateral Maritime Counter-Drug Agreement, the first of its kind in Central America, which entered into force in late 1999. The agreement permits bilateral cooperation on stopping drug trafficking through Costa Rican waters".

(from *U.S. Dept. of State Resources*)

DEALING WITH JET LAG

With the joys and adventures of international travel come certain unavoidable inconveniences such as occasional lost luggage or bouts of jet lag. In fact, studies reveal that as much as 90% of long distance travelers experience a degree of jet lag. Jet lag describes that out-of-sorts feeling associated with long flights, particularly those across time zones. Symptoms and severity vary but may include drowsiness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, headaches, insomnia, and swelling of the extremities.

The number of time zones crossed affects the severity of jet lag. The internal body clock follows circadian rhythm, which is controlled by the hypothalamus that processes nerve signals. That clock is designed for regular cycles of light and darkness. Depending on the number of time zones crossed, it may take several days for that rhythm to be restored.

But that is not the only influence. Other factors include cabin pressure, stale air, lack of humidity, and your overall physical condition at the beginning of your trip. Although jet lag can not be completely avoided, there are some simple things you can do to help minimize its affects.

Consider the following for your next scheduled trip.

- Start your trip well rested with a good night's sleep prior to departure. Getting adequate rest before starting on your journey will help minimize the amount of catching up you'll have to do when you arrive at the destination. Once home, try to schedule a day of rest before returning to work.
- Drink plenty of fluids -- water and juices will help you to stay well hydrated. Seasoned travelers recommend that you carry a bottle of drinking water with you and drink eight ounces every hour.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine just before and during flights. Both possess diuretic properties that promote dehydration. Alcohol also causes drowsiness and contributes to feeling sluggish.
- Once settled onboard, reset your watch to the time zone to which you are traveling. This small act helps you begin adjusting to your destination's local time.
- As much as possible, create a dark environment during flight. Studies have shown that bright lights strongly affect individuals' body clocks. If necessary, try eye shades and earplugs to help block distractions and convince your body that it is nighttime. Closing window shades and turning off overhead lights may also help. Sleep on the plane if your flight has an early morning arrival time.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes that will help in the event you experience mild swelling. Experienced travelers often bring lightweight slippers to wear during flights.
- Although not always feasible, look for opportunities to walk around while in flight. Do simple isometric exercises (contracting and relaxing as many muscle groups as possible) in your seat. These will improve circulation, help promote increased alertness, and reduce chances of swelling.
- If you arrive in the morning, plan to stay awake. If possible, wait until the local bedtime to sleep. Many people swear that this is key in determining how quickly they adapt to local conditions. You will sleep better and

will be less likely to suffer insomnia than if you nap upon | arrival.

CLOTHING/PACKING CHECKLIST

Check the items below to be taken with you on your trip. Additional items may be added in the blank spaces provided. This is not intended as an all-inclusive list, but only as a suggested packing guide.

CLOTHING - WOMEN

- Comfortable outfit for air travel
 - Sandals or casual shoes
 - Walking shoes or tennis shoes
 - Rubber thongs (shower)
 - Hat
 - Windbreaker or jacket
 - Pullover sweater or sweatshirt
 - Long pants *
 - Shorts *
 - Socks
 - Short sleeve shirts *
 - Long sleeve shirts *
 - T-shirts
 - Pajamas
 - Light-weight robe/cover-up
 - Swim-suit/cover-up
 - Casual slacks/skirt
 - Blouses
 - Belt(s)
 - Underwear
 - Scarves
 - Costume Jewelry
-
-

CLOTHING - MEN

- Comfortable outfit for air travel
- Sandals or casual shoes
- Walking shoes or tennis shoes
- Rubber thongs (showers)
- Hat
- Windbreaker or jacket
- Pullover sweater or sweatshirt
- Long pants *
- Shorts *
- Socks
- Short sleeve shirts *
- Long sleeve shirts *
- T-Shirts
- Pajamas
- Light weight robe/cover-up
- Swim trunks
- Casual slacks
- Shirts
- Belt(s)
- Underwear

TOILETRIES

- Anti-malarial pills
 - Vitamins
 - Aspirin/Tylenol
 - Motion sickness pills
 - Short-acting sleeping pills
 - Decongestant
 - Antibiotic
 - Lomotil / Pepto-Bismol
 - Antacid
 - Antibiotic ointment
 - Insect repellent
 - Sun screen/Sun block
 - Lip balm
 - Shampoo & Conditioner
 - Prescription medications
 - Band-Aids
 - Deodorant
 - Toothpaste & toothbrush
 - Feminine Hygiene supplies
 - Dental floss
 - Mouthwash
 - Hairbrush/comb
 - Razor
 - Q-Tips/cotton balls
 - Nail clippers
 - Nail file
 - Tweezers
 - Make-up
 - Hand lotion
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-
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CAMERA EQUIPMENT

- Camera/Lenses
- Plenty of film
- Lead Protective Film Bags
- Camera bag
- Lens filters
- Cleaning Fluid/Tissues
- Lens Brush/Puffer
- Extra Batteries/Charger
- Flash & Flash batteries
- Zip-lock bags
- Camera instruction book
- Stick-on labels for film
- Video Camera/Charger
- Blank video tapes

SUNDRIES

- Passport
- International Certificate
- Vaccinations-Health Card
- Airline tickets/vouchers
- Money Pouch
- Credit Cards
- Travelers Checks
- Small calculator
- Sunglasses
- Prescription glasses
- Eyeglass case
- Small Alarm Clock
- Converter/plug set
- Binoculars
- Small flashlight
- Sewing kit
- Small scissors
- Kleenex
- Handi-wipes
- Zip-lock bags
- Travel clothes line
- Pillowcase for dirty clothes
- Small notebook or journal
- Pen
- Deck of cards
- Books / Magazines
- Address book for postcards
- Photocopy of passport and airline tickets
- Hard candy
- Bandana
- Extra sm., collapsible bag
- Neck pillow for airline travel

OTHER

***Clothing should be comfortable.**

