



**Costa Rica**  
*TripKit*

Costa Rica trip planning advice  
from experienced travelers.  
Get inspired and plan your trip  
to Costa Rica today.

# Travel Guide



2017

[www.costaricatripkit.com](http://www.costaricatripkit.com)

Copyright © 2017 Costa Rica TripKit | Inspired by Travel

## Table of Contents

- 2 About Travel Guide
- 4 Practical Matters
  - Time Zone
  - Arrival & Departure
- 7 Language
- 8 Cultural Differences
- 10 When to Visit (Sun, Bugs and Rain)
- 14 Electricity
- 15 What to Wear
- 15 Tipping
- 16 Cell Phones
- 17 Food & Drink
- 18 Health & Safety
  - Getting Sick (or Hurt) in Costa Rica
- 19 Can I drink the water?
- 20 Crime and Safety
- 21 Getting Around
- 23 Money Matters
- 26 Packing List
  - Recommended Reading
- 31 Areas & Destinations Overview
- 36 Things to Do
- 45 Hotels & Restaurants
- 45 Itineraries
  - Classic Costa Rica
  - Costa Rica Adventures
  - Costa Rica Family Vacation
- 50 Common Wildlife
- 52 Recommendations
  - Top National Parks & Private Reserves
  - Top Beaches
  - Top Adventures
  - Top Festivals and Cultural Experiences
- 67 Family Travel
- 68 Senior Travel
- 69 See you soon!

# Costa Rica Trip Kit - Travel Guide

Congratulations! If you downloaded this guide, it means you're going to Costa Rica. And that is great news: Costa Rica's **extraordinary natural beauty, exhilarating adventures, and astonishing biodiversity** are almost within your reach.

You already know that Costa Rica is a popular travel destination. And for good reason: We have powder-soft beaches and lush rainforests, friendly people and white-water rivers. We have year-round sun and endangered animals (lots of 'em!), roaring waterfalls and misty cloud forests.

But what you may not know is, **where should you go?** (Especially if you only have five days, seven days, nine days...) **How much time** do you ideally need? And when's the best time to visit? What are the **must-see, can't-miss, you'll-regret-it-forever-if-you-don't** sights, activities and destinations of Costa Rica?

We get it. And we've got you covered.

[Costa Rica TripKit](#) is all about the **perfect travel experience**, however you, personally, define “perfect.” We’re here to inspire you, to get you excited for your trip. We’re here to help you research all the details, from your [destinations](#), to your [activities](#), to your [hotels](#). And we’re here to **make your trip-planning easy**.

Everything you read here is **written by Costa Rica insiders**. We travel here. We live here. And we love it. We hope our enthusiasm shines through. Because we are big time enthusiastic about Costa Rica!

And finally, when your questions are answered, your destinations are set, your wish-list is made, and your trip has come together, we’re also here to help you book your Costa Rican vacation. We’ll empower you with great **insider info and dynamite itineraries**, so you can plan all the details yourself.

Itty bitty details not your jam? We can also hook you up with [customized trip planning](#), so you can focus on the big picture (the fun stuff!) and not the scheduling, or the logistics, or all the other boring minutiae. Bonus: These travel pros will make sure you get the best hotels, transportation and tours – within your budget.

Welcome. Now, let’s jump into the good stuff.



# Practical Matters



If you're wondering about the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*, look no further.

## Time Zone

Costa Rica stands at **GMT-6** year-round. Since the country doesn't observe Daylight Savings Time, for half the year (March-November) we're two hours behind the EST; the other half of the year (November-March), we're just an hour behind EST.

## Arrival & Departure Logistics

Chances are, you're flying into Costa Rica. That means, you're arriving via either the **Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO)**, also known as the San José airport (although it's technically located in neighboring Alajuela) or the **Daniel Oduber International Airport (LIR)** in Liberia.

First things first: Most airlines will not let you fly without proof of return flight. In other words, **you can't fly in on a one-way ticket.**

Furthermore, while you should be able to enter on any valid passport, some Immigration agents are tougher than others. The rule of thumb: **renew your passport if it expires in fewer than six months.**



While many people refer to so-called “**tourist visas**,” many countries (including the U.S., Canada, and most of Europe) don’t need a visa. (Psst! Check the [Costa Rica Embassy website](#) to see if you need one.) What you will get, however, is an **entrance stamp** from Immigration, typically for the **standard 90 days**, although you should check your passport stamp to confirm. Do not overstay your allotted time!

Not long ago, everyone had to **pay a separate exit tax** upon leaving Costa Rica. Policies changed a few years ago, though, so now all but a handful of airlines include the exit tax in your airline ticket. When in doubt, ask the airline (or just check the cost itemization/fine print of your ticket).





# Language



**The official language of Costa Rica is Spanish.** (Surprise!) And, while English is widely spoken and understood, you'll probably meet at least a few people on your travels who don't speak English.

Our best advice is to brush up on your Spanish before you arrive. Online apps like [Duolingo](#) are excellent if you have the time, but if you're in a pinch, and good [Spanish-English dictionary](#) will do the trick.



One fun thing to note is the favored Costa Rican expression, “**pura vida.**” Keep your ears open, and you’ll hear it absolutely everywhere. It translates as “pure life,” but pura vida is a lot more than that: Costa Ricans use it as a greeting, as a “how are you?” (¿Pura vida?), as an “I’m great!” (¡Pura vida!), and as a general phrase to denote the laidback Costa Rican lifestyle.



## Cultural Differences

Looking around Costa Rica, everything can seem so familiar: We have phone and internet, people have friendly smiles, and our roads are jammed with late model cars.

It's easy to overlook cultural differences, at first glance. But they're there, and they're plentiful. Don't be surprised if someone cuts in line, or if a driver stops their car in the middle of the road after an accident, or if vendors troll traffic jams to sell their wares. Lines are long (avoid the bank at all costs), drivers are downright passive-aggressive, and Tico time ensures nothing ever begins or ends on time. There are no addresses (do yourself a favor, and download the free app [Waze!](#)) and directions are given based on nearest points of reference.

Do yourself a favor and **accept Costa Rica's cultural differences**. Give yourself time to spare. Don't rush. Smile. It'll make your trip a lot more fun.



# When to Visit (Sun, Bugs and Rain)

Let's jump straight to the Big Question: What is rainy season and how rainy is it, really?

**Rainy season lasts from May through November.** During El Niño years, the weather's a bit drier, while La Niña brings the rains down with a fury. No matter the year, the first few months usually see only sporadic rainfall – a few hours in the afternoon, 4-5 times a week. By June, the rains have almost certainly picked up to everyday frequency, and may have lengthened in duration. By August, especially during La Niña years, the rain comes fast and furious. During very, very rainy years, it can rain all day, for days on end, during September and October. But that is very uncommon.





It sounds like a soggy nightmare, but if you talk to a local, you'll soon hear that **rainy season is our favorite season**. That's because it's cool, it's green, and prices are low. There are few tourist crowds. If you don't mind getting a bit wet, and you're okay with scheduling activities for the morning, then rainy season can be a great time to visit. (Just avoid September and October, unless you're really down with getting wet.)

**Dry season lasts December through April**, and is true to its name: typically, it doesn't rain a drop during those months. If you can swing it, try to visit during December and January, as you'll enjoy perfect weather while the landscapes are still green.





But what of the rest of it? There's a lot more to Costa Rica than just rain and sun, after all. So, let's get to it: **Bug season** is year-round. If you're here, you're going to see bugs – no ifs, ands or buts. Few are out to get you, although do be sure to stay away from the ants (they almost all bite).

**Surf season** lasts all year, although on the Pacific coast November through April offer more consistent clean waves and good weather (great for beginners). April through November means you could be surfing in the rain, but can expect bigger swells to appear more often.



Costa Rica has plenty of **official holidays**, some familiar (Holy Week/Easter) and others strictly national (Juan Santamaría Day). That said, this is a festive country (and a Catholic one), so there's almost always something to celebrate: a patron saint, native traditions, local arts, etc.

Before you arrive, check if any [holidays, festivals or other celebrations](#) fall during your visit. They're a lot of fun!



# Electricity

Costa Rica uses **110V, 60-cycle electricity** – the same as what you find in the U.S. Plugs typically offer two-pronged connections, although three-pronged outlets are becoming more readily available. Be aware, however, that electricity is often ungrounded, so you'll definitely want to bring your travel surge protector. And disconnect during thunderstorms!



## What to Wear

You may read that Costa Ricans don't wear shorts, but unless you're talking about a stodgy office environment, that advice is decades old. **Wear what you want** – Costa Ricans do! (Although do be aware that many beach restaurants and other establishments maintain a no shoes-no shirt-no service policy.)

The only warning we'll give, however, is that **machismo** still prevails in much of Costa Rican culture. If you're a woman – especially a young woman with light hair/eyes – you'll probably get your share of wolf whistles and/or comments. By and large, it doesn't matter what you wear, but the comments are often inversely proportional to how much you have on. Eye contact can help but the best line of defense is usually a stiff upper lip.

## Tipping

**Tipping is not a part of Costa Rican culture.** That said, the tourism sector has grown accustomed to tips, so feel free to tip airport porters, tour guides, drivers, hotel staff, and other tourism professionals.



# Cell Phones

Costa Rica has some of the cheapest cell phone service in the world, so take advantage! You'll find SIM cards for all three cell providers (Kolbi, Claro, and Movistar) at both international airports (and in just about every town in the country); ₡5,000-₡10,000 (about \$10-\$20) will probably be more than enough for your entire trip.

**Note:** In order to use your phone in Costa Rica, you must be sure it's **unlocked**. If you don't know, ask your cell phone carrier; if you explain you'll be out of the country, they should be able to unlock it for you.



## Food & Drink

Costa Rican food gets a bad rap, but **we think it's pretty tasty**. The key is in choosing local foods (you've never seen such fresh veggies and juicy fruits!) and ordering homestyle Costa Rican food: arroz con pollo, rice and beans (aka gallo pinto), chifrijo, patacones, and all the other goodies you find on local soda (diner) menus.

Groceries are easy to come by: every town has a **super** (full-fledged grocery store), **minisuper**, **abastecedor** or **pulpería** (corner stores). Know that you'll find all the fresh food you could want, but you may come up short on your favorite U.S. foods.



# Health, Safety & Security

We know, we know – one one wants to think of getting sick, or having an accident, or having personal safety concerns while on vacation. So, let's just consider this a just-in-case section.

## Getting Sick (or Hurt) in Costa Rica

If you get sick in Costa Rica, help is on almost every corner. Start at the **local pharmacy**; by law, there's a doctor always on location, and they can help treat minor maladies. They're not supposed to prescribe antibiotics, though, so if you think you're rocking some sort of infection, head to the nearest **médico general**. For about ₡20,000-₡35,000 (\$35-\$60ish), depending on where you are in Costa Rica, you'll get date with the doc and a prescription for any meds you might need.



Cima Hospital, San José

If you get really sick, there are **public and private hospitals around Costa Rica**. (Note: If you're in an accident, the ambulance will take you to a public hospital. You can transfer to private after you're stabilized.) Public health-care is standard for Costa Ricans – everyone pays into the system monthly – but as a foreigner, you may be charged to use public hospitals. (It's a crap shoot: Some cashiers will charge you, others will wave you along. Be prepared to pay, just in case.)

**Your insurance may cover private hospitals in Costa Rica.** Ask your insurance provider before you visit.

Know that **911 works in Costa Rica**, but your 911 operator may not speak English.

## Can I drink the water?

The Cliff's Notes version: Probably.

**Costa Rica's water is largely considered safe to drink.** That said, certain areas may have water problems from time to time, so ask someone local (or your hotel) if you can drink the water. Also, water is often suspended for pipe maintenance, so it's not a bad idea to carry a bottle of water with you everywhere.



# Crime and Safety



You'll hear a lot about crime and safety in Costa Rica. On the one hand, you have the unicorn club who claims that nothing bad ever happens here; on the other, you have the doom-and-gloomers, who compare Costa Rica to the wrong side of San Salvador.

In truth, Costa Rica is neither of these things: It's safe enough, if you **exercise common sense** and keep your wits about you. Don't parade your valuables around. Leave flashy jewelry at home. Don't venture into unknown areas (especially not at night). Don't flash your cash. Don't seek out the red light district. Don't buy drugs. Etc. etc. In other words, act as you would in an unknown part of a city back home, and you should be alright.

Sounds like common sense, right? It is, but here's the thing: When you're on vacation, it's easy to forget. It's easy to leave your camera under your towel, so you can take a quick dip in the ocean. It's easy to park your car, with your valuables on the floor of the front seat, and then lose track of time. It's easy to slip into the back of a taxi, feel safe, and then count the cash you just took out of the ATM.

Show caution. Err on the side of paranoia. (Yeah, we said it.) **Travel smart.** And enjoy your trip!

## Getting Around

If you're flying into Costa Rica, you're arriving via either the **Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO)**, aka the San José airport (although it's technically located in neighboring Alajuela) or the **Daniel Oduber International Airport (LIR)** in Liberia.

From there, you may rent a car. And if you do, you're going to need to know a bit about Costa Rican directions and addresses. If you can call them directions and addresses.

The short of it is, Costa Rica doesn't use the traditional street-name, house-number system. Instead, **addresses are given as a function of their nearest point of reference**, ex. 100 meters south of the old fig tree. (Yes, you're going to need to be aware of cardinal directions, everywhere.) Cheat sheet: Every 100 meters = 1 block.

The problem? Well, the problem beyond the fact that you don't know what a fig tree looks like? Many of these old reference points no longer exist. That fig tree, for example? It was leveled decades ago. You have no chance, my friend.

Enter [Waze](#), the most incredible invention known to Costa Rica. It's free, it's for your phone, and it works wonders here. The GPS navigator is so popular, in fact, that almost every address, right down to that tiny B&B you booked, is in the Waze search engine.

If you're not going to rent a car, you'll either be taking local flights, or private transportation, or shared shuttles, or public buses, or taxis (or a combination thereof). Whew! And in that case, you're going to want to read our article on [getting around Costa Rica](#), complete with cost comparisons and logistics goodies.

## Money Matters

The currency of Costa Rica is the colón (co-loan), plural colones (co-loan-ays). The exchange rate fluctuates daily ([see the current exchange rate](#)).



In Costa Rica, **cash is still king**. Everyone, everywhere loves cash. That's why it's tempting to exchange as soon as you touch down, but that'd be a bad move; the airport exchange rate is not favorable (to you, that is). If you absolutely must exchange at the airport – for example, if you arrive late and don't want to schlep to an ATM in the dark – exchange just enough to make it until your ATM run.

Speaking of **ATMs**, they're available at banks and strategic points throughout the country. Just look for the sign for a cajero (kah-hey-ro) or ATH (a todas horas, or "at all hours"); at night, note that state banks (Banco Nacional, BCR, and Banco Popular) do not dispense cash between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.



If you don't like to carry boatloads of cash, you'll be happy to hear that **credit cards are accepted almost everywhere**, with the exception of small shops and corner stores. (And many/most of them accept cards.) Visa and MasterCard are the most prevalent; American Express is sometimes accepted, and Discover is rare.

**Don't bring traveler's checks.** No one accepts them but banks, and remember what we said about banks? Friends don't let friends stand in Costa Rican bank lines.

**Note:** In tourist areas, many shops will accept U.S. dollars at an exchange of ₡500 to \$1. That can be acceptable if you're buying a drink for \$1.50, but if you're buying \$100 worth of souvenirs, you're losing dollar power. For example, at current rates your \$100 should buy you about ₡56,000, not ₡50,000; that ₡6,000 difference represents almost \$11 lost. And that's on just a \$100 purchase.



Mercado Central

And since we're on the topic of money, let's talk daily average costs :

- **Budget travelers** can squeak by on \$40 day or less, per person, by staying in shared hostel rooms, eating at sodas (Costa Rican diners), taking DIY hikes and adventures, and traveling via local bus.
- **Mid-range travelers** usually spend \$40-125 per day, per person, staying in basic hotel rooms (\$75-\$100 per night), eating and drinking modestly, traveling in shared shuttles, and doling out their tour-dollars wisely.
- **High-end travelers** generally fall into the \$125-\$200 per day, per person range, staying at smaller boutique hotels, splashing out on the occasional nice meal, renting a car or hiring a private driver, and booking several guided tours.
- **Luxury travelers** can easily spend \$250-\$500+ per person, per day. The bulk of the luxury budget is owed to lodging (Costa Rica's super-luxe hotels range from \$350-\$3,000+ per night), although you can certainly splurge on incredible meals, lots of private tours, a private driver, and other luxuries.

# Packing List



We're all adults here, so let's assume we know the basics of packing a suitcase. (And hey, if not, there's a website for that.)

Skipping past toothbrushes and swimsuits, let's talk a little about the specifics of packing for Costa Rica:

- **Bug repellent:** Pack twice what you think you'll need. Trust us. No one wants to bring home dengue as a trip souvenir.
- **Sunblock:** Bring SPF 50. And again, pack double what you think you'll need. The sun is strong at 9 degrees above the equator! Sunblock is also twice as expensive once you get here.

- **Hat:** For when sunblock and sunglasses alone aren't enough. Which is most of the time, at least in coastal areas.
- **Hiking boots or sneakers:** If you're going on any hikes, proper footwear will help protect you from stubbed toes and – don't freak out – snake bites. (The country is well stocked with antivenom, fyi.)
- **Beachy dress clothes:** Bring at least an outfit or two of beach-dressy clothes (ex. a blouse for women and polo for men), as that's what's expected at many tourist restaurants.
- **Rain gear:** At least, if you're visiting during rainy or shoulder season. (So, anywhere from March through December.)





- **Layers:** If you're spending time in the highlands (the Central Valley, Monteverde, Dota, and other mountainous regions), it can dip into the 40s and 50s at night. (Yes, really.)
- **Wet bag:** Even if you're visiting during the height of dry season, chances are you'll visit a waterfall, or a river, or the ocean. Bring a quality wet bag for your phone, camera, etc.
- **Medications:** You know you need to bring your prescriptions, contact lens goodies, and other personal products, but you probably also want to bring some of your favorite OTC meds, too; they're almost always more expensive here. (Ex. Two ibuprofen pills come in around \$2.)
- **Feminine hygiene products:** Selection is thin here, especially if you use tampons.
- **First Aid kit:** Just in case.
- **Travel surge protector:** You may not need a converter, but many outlets aren't grounded. Protect your electronics from getting fried!

## Recommended Reading



If you're a book lover, you're probably hunting down some good material before your trip to Costa Rica. Here are a few of our favorites:

As far as **Spanish-English dictionaries** go, [The New World Spanish/English Dictionary](#) is cheap and relatively robust. That said, we're partial to Lonely Planet's [Costa Rican Spanish Phrasebook & Dictionary](#).

If you plan to go wildlife watching and want to get your nerd on, you're going to want to stock up on **wildlife guides**. A few good ones include [The Wildlife of Costa Rica: A Field Guide](#), [The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide](#), [The Mammals of Costa Rica: A Natural History and Field Guide](#), [Tropical Plants of Costa Rica: A Guide to Native and Exotic Flora](#), and [Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica: A Pocket Guide](#).

If those are too hefty for your taste, you'll love these map-style, folding, waterproof **pocket field guides**: [Costa Rica Wildlife Guide](#), [Costa Rica Birds Guide](#), [Costa Rica Tropical Flowers Guide](#), [Costa Rica Butterflies Wildlife Guide](#), and the [Costa Rica Reptiles Wildlife Guide](#).

For **further reading**, you may enjoy [Monkeys Are Made Of Chocolate: Exotic And Unseen Costa Rica](#), [Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion](#), [Where Tapirs and Jaguars Once Roamed: Ever-Evolving Costa Rica](#), [The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica](#), [The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics](#), and [The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica](#).

## Areas & Destinations Overview

One of the hardest things you'll have to do before your trip, is narrow down the list of where you'd like to go. Our destination overviews will get you started. In no particular order:

[Guanacaste](#) is a sun-splashed province of aquamarine ocean and bleached savannah, of active volcanoes and arid dry forest. This is also Costa Rica's most famous destination for golden beaches and perfect surf. It includes: [Tamarindo](#).





The scenic [Nicoya](#) peninsula, where sea turtles nest and surfers catch perfect waves, is a charming fusion of rugged and refined, of modest and luxe, of beach and jungle. Of something for everyone. It includes: [Santa Teresa & Mal País](#), [Montezuma](#), and [Samara](#).

The [North Central region](#) straddles Lake Arenal, the ethereal cloud forests of Monteverde, and join the near-perfect cone of Arenal, to form a region that is more spectacular, more magical, more astonishing than any expectation. It includes: [Arenal Volcano & La Fortuna](#) and [Monteverde](#).



Volcán Arenal

The [Caribbean](#) is less developed and, some say, more authentic than much of Costa Rica. The quiet Caribbean is a paradise of turtle nesting beaches, oceanfront rainforest, epic surf, and powdery white sands. It includes: [Tortuguero](#).



Lush, mountainous and scenic, the beautiful [Central Valley](#) is home to many of Costa Rica's most worthy sights: active volcanoes and famed coffee plantations, roaring waterfalls and gilded museums. It includes: [Poas Volcano & La Paz Waterfall Gardens](#) and [San Jose](#).





There are few places more beautiful, more beloved and more iconic than Costa Rica's [Central Pacific](#), home to party-hearty Jacó, the surf-paradise of Playa Hermosa, and the extraordinary beauty of Manuel Antonio. It includes: [Manuel Antonio](#) and [Jacó](#).



There's nothing quite like the surprise of Costa Rica's [South Central region](#), a place of chilly mountaintops and resplendent quetzals, of towering waterfalls and sky islands, of freshwater lakes and paramo moonscapes.

Standing guard over the Osa Peninsula – the “most biologically diverse place on Earth” – the towns of Sierpe, Drake Bay and Puerto Jimenez welcome guests to the wonders of the isolated [South Pacific region](#). It includes: [Puerto Jimenez – Corcovado National Park](#) and [Drake Bay – Sierpe](#).





# Things to Do

In large part, you're coming for Costa Rica's incredible activities: high-flying rainforest adventures and wild-life encounters, ocean thrills and volcanic experiences. Here's a look at some of our favorites:

- [ATV Tours](#): All-terrain vehicles are the perfect (and exhilarating) means to bounce down dirt roads, traverse mountainsides, conquer muddy paths and climb into the hinterlands, opening up a world of possibility for your rural explorations.



- [Coffee Tours](#): Costa Rica's coffee tours climb high into the mountains, creeping up the slopes of active volcanoes, weaving through ethereal cloud forests, and unrolling in lush, ruby-dotted carpets of emerald green. It is here that coffee plantations grow, shaded by trees and flourishing in the cool temperatures of Costa Rica's highest altitudes.





- [Horseback Riding](#): Professional outfitters offer horseback riding tours in almost every area of the country. (Although, do be sure to seek out a reputable company with healthy animals.) The offer: Spend a few hours exploring the Costa Rica of yesteryear – a country where you'll follow beaten footpaths and meandering trails, and where silence is filled with the hoots of howler monkeys, the caw of toucans, and the croak of frogs.



- [Kayaking](#): Kayaking, whether by river, by lake, or by sea is a leisurely past time in Costa Rica. The country's lakes and estuaries provide tranquil waters for an afternoon paddle, while the aquamarine Caribbean and sapphire Pacific welcome kayakers to a challenging blend of waves and currents. And for a truly exhilarating ride, Costa Rica's Class III, IV and V rivers promise the ultimate rush for savvy paddlers.





- [Learn Spanish:](#) They say that if you want to learn a language, there's no better way than on the ground. We say, if you want to learn a language, there's no better place than on the ground in Costa Rica!
- [Nature Tours:](#) Nature tours take you into the most wild, the most wonderful, the most stunning scenery you may ever see. Trek into a misty cloud forest, where epiphytes, lichens and orchids cover every surface. Hike through lowland rainforest, where sloths hang from leafy trees and the distance echoes with the hoots of howler monkeys. Paddle through a river gorge, where emerald moss climbs every cliff.



- [Snorkeling](#): Costa Rica may not have the famed reefs of Belize, but we do have other underwater sights: shipwrecks and coral gardens, underwater abysses and shallow caves. Every place has its underwater personality.



- [Sport Fishing](#): For everyone from first-timers to skilled trawlers, from families with kids to competitive anglers, Costa Rica has just the right fishing excursion. Inshore, reef and rooster fishing are excellent starting points: Popular year-round, more affordable than off-shore fishing, and usually successful, nearshore fishing excursions are fulfilling and fun. (Kids really love helping reel in a roosterfish, a hard fighter that gives everyone a chance to try.) Tarpon and snook are also favorites, for fishing off the north Caribbean.



- [Surfing:](#) In Costa Rica, the waves are always warm. The sun is often shining, and the surf (at least, in the primo surf spots) is consistent. Here, you can while away sunrise after sunrise, day after day, and sunset after sunset, waiting to catch the perfect wave (or ten). And while you wait, you can always drink in the spectacular scenery.



- [Rafting:](#) There's nothing quite like Costa Rica's white-water rivers, world-renowned for their incredible rafting. From tame Class II-III rivers, to all-out Class V beasts, these tropic rapids weave through untouched gorges, through rainforests, and down spring-fed rivers, giving you a front-row seat to a Costa Rica unknown to landlubbers.

- [Waterfalls](#): Guided waterfall tours are popular – access the falls via hike, horseback, or ATV tour – although there are several famed falls you can easily visit on your own, if you have a rental car.

Llano de Cortés  
Waterfall



Rio Celeste  
Waterfall





- [Zip Lining](#): We admit – we’re big fans of canopy tours (zip lining), Costa Rica’s quintessential adventure and the most popular family activity in Costa Rica. This experience is like few others: With the wind in your hair and thrill in your heart, you’ll fly through the forest canopy, leap into the abyss, and even swing like Tarzan.



# Hotels & Restaurants

Wondering where you should stay? We've been there, done that – and tried the bed, too! Read all about it in our [hotel reviews](#), to which we are constantly adding.

## Itineraries

Costa Rica may be small, but it's one of the most biodiverse, most breathtaking destinations in the world.

Planning your dream vacation is no easy task. Because, when it comes to Costa Rica, time is always short. What really qualifies as a **must-see** or **must-do**, and what gets relegated to only-if-you-have-the-time? Not to mention, navigating the transportation logistics and the baggage allowances, the language barriers, and those rental car insurance pitfalls.

Don't you sometimes wish you could just game show-slap one of those **big, red EASY buttons**?

You and us both. That's why we offer the TripKit Easy Way Out: free Costa Rica trip itineraries, designed by professional Costa Rica travel experts. Go on – tweak, change, adapt and copy+paste to your heart's content.

For each, you'll get:

**Brag-worthy Moments:** Like hiking the Continental Divide, flying like Superman, luxuriating in postcard-perfect mineral hot springs, swimming at the base of a baby-blue waterfall, whitewater rafting a Costa Rican river, and spotting critically endangered Central American squirrel monkeys.



**Created by a Costa Rican travel professional**, these itineraries is packed with not only destination and activity suggestions, but also meaty transportation information, logistics, and other pros-would-know info.

**Comprehensive travel tips**, make-the-best-of-your-time advice, suggested add-ons, and so much more. Customize your trip to whatever you want it to be.

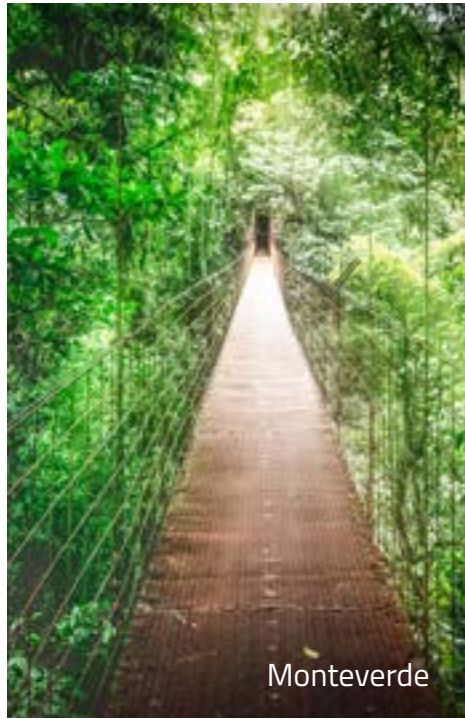


## Classic Costa Rica

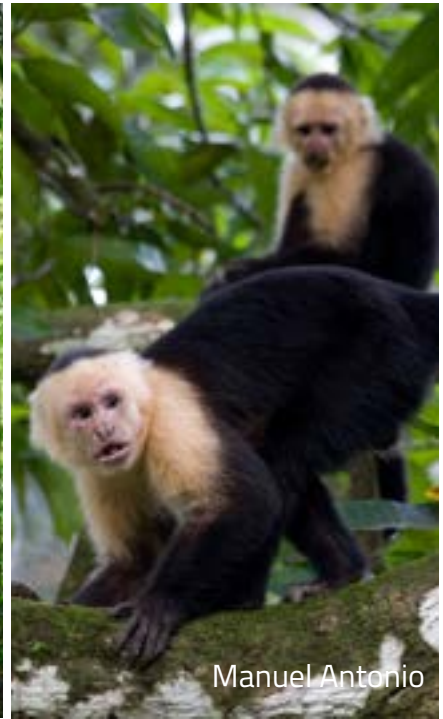
Three classic destinations. Dozens of experiences. One unforgettable vacation.



Volcan Arenal



Monteverde



Manuel Antonio

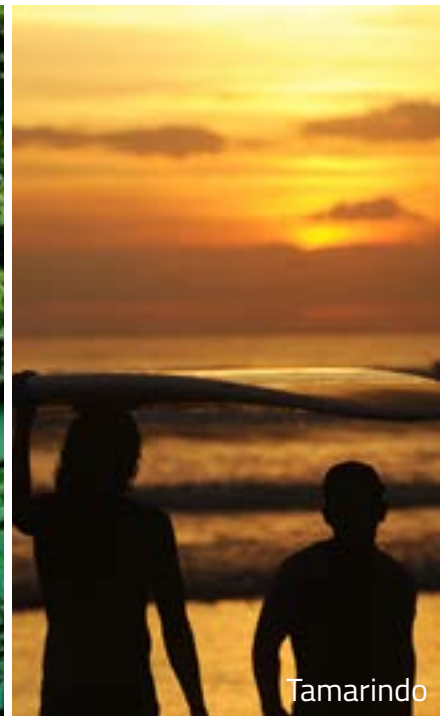
Every year, a million+ travelers make their way to Costa Rica. They're drawn to the country's vast biodiversity, beautiful landscapes, and brag-worthy superlatives. They want to stroll sandy beaches and cloud forest paths, see monkeys and sloths, and experience active volcanoes and mineral hot springs.

They want to experience classic Costa Rica: **Arenal**, **Monteverde**, and **Manuel Antonio** – a 7-10+ day vacation to Costa Rica's classic volcano, cloud forest, and rainforest/beach destinations.



## Costa Rica Adventures

Toe-curling adventure. Heart-pounding thrills. Ditch the mild and embrace the mind-blowing.



Take a wild and rousing romp through the most exciting, most exhilarating adventures in Costa Rica, from cliff-diving off waterfalls, to Superman-flying through the cloud forest, to diving head-first of a nearly 500-foot bungee tower.

**Arenal, Monteverde, and Tamarindo** – a 10+ day vacation to Costa Rica's most thrilling destination trifecta. Only true adrenaline junkies need apply. Do you dare?

## Costa Rica Family Vacation

Thrilling yet safe, memorable but manageable. Costa Rica for the young and young-at-heart.



From wildlife sanctuaries to powdery beaches, from outdoor I-Spy games to surf challenges, from bat encounters to volcano explorations, Costa Rica is a make-everyone-happy kind of place.

In a world where one-size-fits-all rarely fits anyone, this tropical paradise manages to really, truly and genuinely thrill everyone. **Arenal, Monteverde, and Manuel Antonio** – a 7-10+ day vacation to Costa Rica's classic volcano, cloud forest, and rainforest/beach destinations. It's your turn to ask, "are we there yet?!"

# Common Wildlife



Red-Eye Tree Frog

Home to an estimated **5% of the world's total biodiversity**, there's no doubt that Costa Rica is one of the world's most incredible wildlife-viewing destinations. The country's coastal rainforests, puffing volcanoes, craggy mountains, and rushing rivers are home to dozens, if not hundreds of microclimates rich with mammals, reptiles and other fascinating wildlife.

More than **850 bird species** have been spotted in Costa Rica. Add to that, **200+ mammal species** (half of which are bats!), **200+ reptile species**, and **160 species of amphibians**, and you have a recipe for incredible wildlife hikes, night walks, and other nature activities.



The thing is, some animals are easier to see than others. Some are more prolific. Some, you're almost guaranteed to see, if you're here long enough and visit the right destinations.

So, while you may get lucky and spot a jaguar or tapir, you're much more likely to spot [scarlet macaws](#) (Central and South Pacific coasts), [resplendent quetzals](#) (Monteverde and Dota), [keel-billed](#) and [chestnut-mandibled toucans](#) (Caribbean, Central and South Pacific), [red-eyed tree frogs](#) (Caribbean), [poison dart frogs](#) (countrywide), [blue morpho](#) and [owl](#) butterflies (countrywide), [green basilisk lizards](#) (lowlands and coasts), [green iguanas](#) (lowlands and coasts), [Central American squirrel monkeys](#) (Central and South Pacific), [white-faced capuchin monkeys](#) (countrywide), [two-toed](#) and [three-toed](#) sloths (countrywide), [green sea turtles](#) (Caribbean and Pacific coasts), [leatherback sea turtles](#) (Caribbean and Pacific coasts), [olive ridley sea turtles](#) (Caribbean and Pacific coasts), [humpback whales](#) (Pacific coast), and [white-tipped reef sharks](#) (Pacific coast).

And that's just the tip of the wildlife iceberg...

# Recommendations

Ah, and now we've come to the recommendations section of our program. Let's start with a little side note that tastes vary and everyone is different. Our picks (and the reasons we pick them) will not resonate with everyone. That said, we think our recommendations are pretty solid and we hope you'll enjoy them!

## Top National Parks & Private Reserves



Red Dart Frog

## Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve / Santa Elena Reserve ([Monteverde](#))

If you're looking for the unexpected, either the Monteverde or Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve is it. Instead of warm weather, tropical everything, and beachy environs, these highland forests drip orchids and rain epiphytes. They straddle the Continental Divide, which means spectacular wildlife viewing. They're chilly and misty – everything you dreamed a fairy tale would be. And they're just gorgeous.





## Manuel Antonio National Park

### [\(Manuel Antonio / Quepos\)](#)

Want rainforest? How about clear, sapphire waters? Powder-soft sands? Safe swimming? Inquisitive monkeys? Manuel Antonio National Park, located in the Central Pacific, has all that – and more. The absolute embodiment of tropical paradise, here is where jungle falls into sea. Here is where humpback whales breach off the coast. Here is where nature hikes end in a three-hour swim and a nap beneath the sea almonds. Here begins the last remaining environment for critically endangered Central American squirrel monkeys.



Manuel Antonio

## Corcovado National Park ([Puerto Jimenez](#) / [Drake Bay](#))

Dubbed by National Geographic, “the most biologically diverse place on Earth,” Corcovado is an absolute treat for nature lovers. It’s like the land that time forgot – here, there are few roads, little electricity, and even fewer signs of civilization – and it’s perfect that way. Corcovado is your best chance to spot once-in-a-life-time wildlife (how ‘bout that jaguar?) or simply to enjoy Costa Rica, the way people have enjoyed it for hundreds and thousands of years.



Sirena River,  
Corcovado

## Tortuguero National Park ([Tortuguero](#))

You don't find Tortuguero National Park on many lists, but it's not for lack of merit; rather, it's because Tortuguero is so remote, you have to really want to visit. But if you do, you'll find mile after mile of wending canals, some with waters so transparent, you can see to the bottom and others, with obsidian waters rife with tannins. Best of all, this secluded park is an important nesting site for four species of sea turtle: hawksbill (March to October), green (June to October), leatherback (March to May), and loggerheads (July to October). Be sure to book a night tour!





## Top Beaches

It's hard, if not impossible, to designate "top" or "best" beaches in Costa Rica. And we don't say that from a snobby, it's-all-so-wonderful perspective, either. Rather, we mean that what one person defines as "perfect" is another person's "nightmare." So, let's break down a few of our favorites, based on what you're looking for:

**Most Popular Beaches:** If we're talking sheer numbers, plenty of hotels, and guidebook fame, the winners include Playa Conchal (Conchal, [Guanacaste](#)), Playa Grande ([Tamarindo](#)), Playa Manuel Antonio ([Manuel Antonio](#)), Playa Flamingo (Flamingo, [Guanacaste](#)), and Playa Santa Teresa ([Santa Teresa](#)).



Playa Carmen,  
Santa Teresa

**Best Swimming Beaches:** To us, swimming beaches mean calm and protected – somewhere you don't have to worry much about currents, riptides, or massive waves. (Note: Always be on your guard, even at the so-called safest swimming beaches!) In this category, we have Playa Blanca (Punta Leona/[Jaco](#)), Playa Nacascolo (Papagayo, [Guanacaste](#)), Playa Pelada (Nosara, [Nicoya Peninsula](#)), Playa Conchal (Conchal, [Guanacaste](#)), and Playas Punta Uva & Manzanillo (Southern [Caribbean](#)).



Playa Nosara

**Best Surfing Beaches:** If you love nothing more than testing your mettle and hanging ten, Costa Rica has you more than covered. Great surf lines the beaches from north to south, although expert surfers do have their favorites, among them Playa Hermosa (Hermosa/[Jaco](#)), Playa Pavones ([southern Pacific](#)), Salsa Brava at Playa Cocles (southern [Caribbean](#)), Playa Avellanas ([Tamarindo](#)), Playas Malpaís & Santa Teresa ([Malpaís & Santa Teresa](#)), and Witches Rock and Ollie's Point (northern Guanacaste, access via [Tamarindo](#)).





**Best Snorkeling/Scuba Beaches:** Let's start with the honest truth: Costa Rica is not the world's best snorkeling or scuba destination. We get a lot of rain and have lots of mountains, so river runoff can cloud up our underwater visibility.



Our only living coral reef is in the southern [Caribbean](#), near Cahuita, Puerto Viejo, and Manzanillo; in Costa Rica, you really can't beat the snorkeling Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge and Cahuita National Park. That said, you can find some good snorkeling in the Gulf of Papagayo (northern [Guanacaste](#)) and the Golfo Dulce ([Puerto Jimenez](#)), and scuba diving is decent around Caño Island Biological Reserve ([Sierpe-Drake Bay](#)) and the Catalina Islands (Flamingo, [Guanacaste](#)). If you have a week to spare, some of the world's most jaw-dropping scuba happens many miles off the coast, at the renowned Isla del Coco.

**Best Secluded / Deserted Beaches:** With 800+ miles of coastline, there are dozens, if not hundreds of beaches where you'll have the sands all to yourself. Some are teeny tiny, while others let you walk for miles on end. Bear in mind that many of these beaches are deserted because they're hard to reach, requiring a kayak paddle or sweaty hike in. Our best advice is just to explore, since any published "deserted" beach won't be deserted for long. That said, if you want soft sands and fewer crowds, you'll have good luck at Playa Palo Seco (Parrita, north of [Manuel Antonio](#)), Playa Arcos (Uvita, [southern Pacific](#)), Playa Penca (Flamingo, [Guanacaste](#)), and Playa Nacascolito (Papagayo, [Guanacaste](#)).





## Top Adventures

Imagine standing with your toes dangling off a jungle platform – 30 gaping, cavernous feet separating you from the ground. 1, 2, 3, jump! Just one leap of faith, and you're soaring down the [zipline](#) – the closest you've ever been to flying.

Or perhaps you're surrounded by frothing, churning white river, a paddle in your hands and fellow [whitewater rafters](#) by your side. Your guide is calling out instructions, readying you for the waterfall drop just ahead. Here it comes...





Or imagine this: It's mid-morning and the hot sun is shining. You're surrounded by the companionable camaraderie of your fellow [surfers](#). Suddenly, you spot it – the Big Daddy. It's huge, and it's almost here. Paddle!



Costa Rica is an adventure wonderland ripe for exploration. From [ATVs](#) to [ziplines](#), you can tick almost every letter of the alphabet with [some sort of adventure](#). It really is what you make of it, so whether you get your jollies reeling in a 100+ pound billfish, or prefer to dive head-first off a waterfall, you're going to find it here.

## Top Festivals and Cultural Experiences

Costa Rica is rooted in Latin American customs, Spanish inheritances, and indigenous hand-me-downs – a sometimes surprising mix of people, traditions, and celebrations. As you explore, you're likely to stumble upon a wide array of cultural and social backgrounds. Not to mention, the accompanying festivals, fiestas, and other celebrations that pop up everywhere. Costa Rica loves to party!

Truly, on any given day or week, something is happening, somewhere in Costa Rica. But, if you're looking to experience the country's biggest and most important cultural events, here are a few we recommend: **Día de los Boyeros (second Sunday in March)**: If you want to get a taste of Costa Rican agricultural culture, this Escazú (San José) oxcart festival, which features spectacularly painted ox carts, is the place to be.



**Semana Santa (Easter Week):** Costa Rica is a Catholic country, and Easter week is the highest of holy holidays. Festivities vary from town to town, but you're likely to see flowers carpeting the streets, reenactments of Jesus on the cross, and other traditions.

**Batalla de Rivas (April 11):** A national holiday, the Battle of Rivas celebrates the ousting of would-be conqueror William Walker and his filibusters. Celebrations are particularly thick in Alajuela, home to battle hero Juan Santamaria.

**La Romería (August 1):** To renew their faith and honor Costa Rica's patron saint, the Virgin of Los Ángeles (La Negrita), approximately two million Costa Ricans make an annual pilgrimage (often barefoot!) to La Basílica de Los Ángeles in Cartago.





**Carnival (October):** Though not quite as grand a scale as Brazilian Carnival, Costa Rica's colorful festival celebrates Afro-Caribbean culture. For nearly two weeks, the streets of Limón come alive with a kaleidoscope of cultures represented on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast.

**Festival de la Luz (mid-December):** If you're in town for the Christmas season, there's no tradition more festive than San José's [Festival of Lights](#). Do beware, however, that more than one-quarter of Costa Rica (that's 1+ million people) crowd the streets for the festival.

**Fiesta de los Diablitos (late December/early January):** One of the most celebrated indigenous traditions, this Brunka festival symbolizes the struggle between the Spanish conquistadors and indigenous peoples of Costa Rica.

Beyond visiting during festival time, you can get your culture on by taking a coffee tour in the Central Valley, sampling indigenous pottery in Guaitil (near Tamarindo), riding with the cowboys in Guanacaste, or really, enjoying any rural tourism offering in the country.

# Family Travel

Traveling with kiddos, especially of the pint-sized variety? Costa Rica loves children. LOVES. THEM. You'll be made to feel welcome here, and **your little ones will be treated like royalty**. Everyone will talk to them. Smiles will abound. In-their-favor exceptions will be made.

By and large, Costa Rica is safe and very **family-friendly**. The water is safe to drink (usually) and food hygiene standards are high. You don't need special vaccinations. Kid-friendly activities are many, ranging from safari floats to tame ziplines, butterfly farms to boogie boards, beach swimming holes to hot spring waterparks. Costa Rica is a child's oyster.



## Senior Travel

**Seniors enjoy an elevated status in Costa Rican culture:** here, *ciudadanos de oro* (“golden citizens”) are treated with kindness and respect.

Another perk: Many destinations, attractions and activities offer discounts to visitors 65+. Additionally, certain tour companies cater to seniors, offering senior-minded tours, excursions, and activities – sunset cruises, wildlife hikes, kayaking tours, and other diversions designed for seniors and senior groups.

One of the great things about senior travel in Costa Rica, is that retirees have the luxury of time. Visit during low season (May through mid-November) – shoulder months yield the least amount of rain during rainy season – and take advantage of discounts. Pack light, so you can pick up and travel wherever the wind takes you. One consideration: Costa Rican pharmacies are well-stocked but they may not have your exact medication (or brand), in your exact dosage. And even if they do, they may be more expensive than your copay back home. So **bring your filled prescriptions.**



## See you soon!

As they say, that's all folks! Hopefully, you've learned a few somethings. Hopefully, you now feel more confident in your Costa Rica travel planning. And hopefully, you're excited!

This guide is just the beginning, though. Remember – [Costa Rica TripKit](#) is online and always growing. So please, swing by and check us out. Dig deep into our [destinations](#) and [activities](#), and see what's new on the [blog](#). Discover the full Costa Rica picture.

Before you go, don't forget to download your totally free, [detailed itineraries](#)! Or, if you're hoping to plan an as-perfect-as-possible, dream vacation that goes off without a hitch, we highly recommend a [customized trip plan](#), courtesy of a Costa Rica travel professional. (A [free-to-you service](#), fyi.)

Happy trip planning!



Thanks for reading. We hope you have a wonderful trip to Costa Rica.

For more travel information and booking options on traveling to Costa Rica visit our website:

**[www.CostaRicaTripKit.com](http://www.CostaRicaTripKit.com)**

