



Costa Rica

Press Kit 2016



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General information about the country

1.1 FACT SHEET

Location	Costa Rica is located in Central America, south of Nicaragua and north of Panama. The western side of the country is bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the eastern side by the Caribbean Sea
Capital City	San José
Population (est.)	4.8 million
Language	The native language is Spanish and English is spoken throughout various tourist areas of the country
Climate	Temperatures range from 70 to 81 degrees all year round. While many tropical countries have changing weather patterns that affect the entire nation with different seasons, Costa Rica enjoys 12 different tropical microclimates that remain constant throughout the year. The most common microclimate in Costa Rica is the Tropical Moist Forest, which is filled with evergreen trees and bountiful vines, but the Tropical Subalpine Rain Páramo is a microclimate with temperatures ranging around 41 ^o and 57 ^o Fahrenheit, with occasional snowfall and hail. The water temperature on both coasts is at a reliable 28-29 degrees Celsius (84°F)
Currency	The national currency is the Costa Rican Colon (CRC), though U.S. dollars and credit cards are widely accepted. The exchange rate as of 2016 is approximately 536 CRC to \$1, but can vary daily
International Airports	San Jose: Juan Santamaría International Airport and Tobías Bolaños International Airport Liberia: Daniel Oduber International Airport
Airlines	American Airlines, Air Canada, Alaska Airlines, Copa, Delta Air Lines, jetBlue, Spirit Airlines, Avianca Airlines, United, U.S. Airways and Westjet
Entry Requirements	U.S. and Canadian citizens need a valid passport, an entry and exit ticket and the exit tax is currently set at \$29
Tourism Information	For more information, please visit www.visitcostarica.com
Media Contacts	Ines Cano / Gwen Salazar / Monica Kelly Cheryl Andrews Marketing Communications P: 305-444-4033 ines@cam-pr.com gwen@cam-pr.com monica@cam-pr.com

1.2 ABOUT COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is located in Central America, bordered on the east by the Caribbean Sea and the west by the Pacific Ocean. Opportunities for adventure, relaxation, romance and exploration are unlimited, making it one of the most visited international destinations in the Western Hemisphere. With an abundance of unique wildlife, landscapes and climates the country proudly shelters approximately five percent of the existing biodiversity in the world, with protected areas comprising 26 percent of its land mass.

The phrase “Pura Vida” can be heard echoing throughout Costa Rica from coast to coast. Used as a greeting or expression of happiness, the phrase literally translates to “pure life,” however its truer meaning is “full of life,” which accurately describes the adventure and wonder that await visitors. Beach lovers, surfers, divers and anglers quickly feel right at home along the coasts while couples and those in search of a relaxing retreat are captivated and pampered by the country’s natural beauty and diverse spas and retreats. Thrill seekers have met their match further inland as they explore Costa Rica’s volcanoes, rain forests, cloud forests, and rivers primed for white-water adventures. In order to protect and preserve such a wealth of natural resources Costa Rica has become a leader in sustainable tourism and established the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) which has a fundamental purpose of benefitting the environment and supporting the community.

Business is bustling in Costa Rica, as the country is home to headquarter offices for a myriad of multinational corporations in the global marketplace. Business and group travelers will find a plethora of hotel and meeting space options, as the country hosts a sophisticated infrastructure of hotels and international brands.

1.3 GEOGRAPHY

Costa Rica's biodiverse terrain is a key element that attracts visitors from around the world. Bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, with a land portion that occupies only 20 thousand square miles, it is no surprise that Costa Rica's name translates to "rich coast." The Central American country shares borders with Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south.

The nation is comprised of seven provinces: San José, Alajuela, Cartago, Heredia, Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Limón. From mountain ranges and rain forests to active volcanoes and cloud forests to breathtaking beaches, Costa Rica's diversity of landscapes, climates and natural wonders provides visitors with unlimited experiences.



CENTRAL VALLEY

Those in search of cultural and natural attractions will find both in the Central Valley region. Home to the destination's capital, San José, many of Costa Rica's most popular museums can be found in this urban setting including the Gold Museum, Jade Museum, National Museum and Children's Museum, in addition to the architectural jewel of Costa Rica, the National Theater.

Out in the surrounding highlands, visitors can discover two active volcanoes, Poás and Irazú, as well as the Braulio Carrillo National Park. The rural towns of Turrialba and Valle de los Santos are also in the Central Valley, offering a picturesque glimpse of old Costa Rican traditional homes, large coffee plantations, sugar mills and dairies.

MID PACIFIC

Beautiful beaches, wildlife sanctuaries, lagoons, rivers and waterfalls make the Mid Pacific region an ideal destination for visitors in search of variety. The region stretches from the city of Puntarenas to Dominical de Osa and is made up of some of Costa Rica's most visited areas including Monteverde, Quepos, Jacó, Bahía Ballena and Manuel Antonio. The region's climate creates a unique landscape that transitions from tropical wet forest to tropical forest to tropical dry forest, providing the opportunity to observe a wide range of plants and animals. In addition to wildlife, the Mid Pacific region is home to a number of luscious beaches, some of which are less than two hours from San José.

THE CARIBBEAN COAST

The diverse coastline of the Northern Caribbean region attracts anglers, naturists and water enthusiasts in search of unique experiences. The North Caribbean region runs from the San Juan River to Limón City, located just south of Nicaragua, and as far West as the Eastern Sarapiquí canton. Visitors to the region can head out bass fishing, embark on a fascinating excursion through the area's interconnected canals or have the opportunity to witness green turtles nesting at Tortuguero National Park. Limón City, the largest city on the country's Caribbean coast, welcomes thousands of cruise passengers and serves as a popular tourism and distribution center.

The Southern Caribbean boasts some of Costa Rica's best beaches and picturesque parks, which are complemented by the area's inviting culture. The region, which extends from Limón City to the Panama border, features a unique blend of natural wonders and Afro-Caribbean traditions. A wide range of activities allow travelers to mix adventure with natural history, present day culture, gastronomy and music. The region is also home to Cahuita National Park and Gandoca Manzanillo Reserve.

GUANACASTE

The combination of breathtaking white-sand beaches, sweeping mountain views and an ideal tropical climate has made Guanacaste one of Costa Rica's most popular regions. Located in the northwestern corner of Costa Rica, the region presents a diverse geography and boasts many of Costa Rica's most popular beaches, including Playa del Coco, Playa Flamingo, Playa Conchal, Tamarindo and the Papagayo Peninsula. By day visitors can challenge themselves with a surf lesson, cool off under a waterfall at Rincón de la Vieja National Park, discover the craters of an active volcano with the same name and more before enjoying the active nightlife in Tamarindo.

High up in the mountains of Guanacaste, visitors have the opportunity to experience ecological tourism in a natural and picturesque environment. When guests are not setting out on adventures which include zip-lining, a mountain water slide, horseback riding, thermal springs and more, they can be found contributing to various

sustainability efforts resulting in the production of the majority of the products utilized in multiple establishments. Visitors can spot a number of endangered species in the multiple wildlife reserves in the area as they explore the diverse ecosystems either on boat, nature trails or on horseback. For those in search of a folkloric, cultural and historical experience, rural tourism options await. Visitors are transported back in time as they operate a 131-year old ox-powered sugar mill (trapiche), make and enjoy handmade tortillas, sip aromatic fresh coffee and even mix up some homemade candy. Adventure beckons at local horse and cattle ranches that offer tributes to the region's cowboy heritage. Guests also have access to natural hot springs, scenic trails, pristine waterfalls, bubbling volcanic mud pools and more.

Visitors to the region may also enjoy exploring the inlets and mangrove swamps of the south side of the region and marvel at the arrival of the Ridley sea turtles at the Ostional Wildlife National Refuge or discover Barra Honda National Park, home to Costa Rica's only underground caves.

Guanacaste is home to the nation's second international airport, Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport, also known as Liberia International Airport (LIR).

PUNTARENAS

Located on the central Pacific coast the Puntarenas region extends from Punta Conejo south to Puerto Caldera to the mouth of the Bongo River. The region's rich coastline overlooks small islands, inlets, beaches, and beautiful natural wonders above and below sea level. The port town of Puntarenas serves as the center of the region and is home port to a ferry that carries visitors over to the tip of the Nicoya Peninsula as well as chartered boats that carry passengers to Tortuga Island. Cruise lines have also made Puntarenas a destination port, where passengers can choose to enjoy tourist attractions such as Cabo Blanco, Absolute Nature Reserve and San Lucas.

MONTEVERDE

Visitors will discover Monteverde nestled amongst the clouds high above the Caribbean and Pacific coastlines of Costa Rica. The area has been recognized worldwide for its conservation and preservation efforts in large part due to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve and the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve which border the region. At its center sits the small town of Santa Elena which offers a selection of small shops and cafes. Activities in Monteverde's center around nature and history including bird watching, especially for the famous Quetzal, visiting the beautiful butterfly gardens and uncovering the Quaker history of the region.

PLAINS OF THE NORTH

Recognized as home of Arenal Volcano National Park, which boasts 75 percent of Costa Rica's bird population, the plains of the north present endless activities for visitors. Excursions range from hiking and waterfall rappelling to canyoning and exploring via a hanging bridge tour. Those looking for activities on the water will find that Lake Arenal is an ideal location for canoeing, fishing and kite surfing. Visitors can

also take in the spectacular La Fortuna Waterfall as it plummets 200 feet out of the dense forest into a tranquil pool below. For those looking to go thrill-seeking underground Arenal, the nearby Venado Caverns offer a unique cave-hiking experience throughout a 2,700 meter stretch of limestone caves abound with icicle formations believed to have been materialized millions of years ago by streams which still run through the caves. Visitors will have an opportunity to see the subterranean wildlife including bats, monochrome frogs, fish and marine fossils, many of which are endemic to the area.

SOUTH PACIFIC

Located on the Osa Peninsula, the South Pacific region is a haven for those looking to experience the unspoiled beauty of Costa Rica. The opportunities for exploration and action in the Southern Pacific include watching the magnificent humpback whale migration, exploring the mangrove habitat, casting a line sport fishing or getting out on the water surfing. The area is also home to Corcovado National Park, the largest of Costa Rica's parks and Marino Ballena National Park, which features the recognizable "whale's tail". Outside of the beach there are also many opportunities for visitors to experience rural tourism throughout the surrounding towns. Warm people, beautiful views and biodiversity define this unique region.

1.4 HISTORY AND CULTURE

On September 18, 1502, during his fourth and final voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus arrived in Costa Rica in what is now present day Limón. However, Costa Rica's history dates back thousands of years as evidenced by the many artifacts that have been unearthed such as stone tools, gold and jade jewelry, terra-cotta objects and intricately carved stones such as *Las Esferas*, declared as an official Cultural World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2014.

Attempts to settle Costa Rica were difficult, and as a result the Spanish had little influence over the colony. With hidden natural resources and circumstances that forced settlers to work their own lands, many chose to leave Costa Rica for the spoils of Peru and Mexico, and the colony was nearly forgotten by the Spanish crown. In 1563 the first successful establishment of a colonial city occurred when Juan Vasquez de Coronado founded Cartago. Throughout the 1700's additional cities were built and with the introduction of coffee plants in the 18th century, Costa Rica has established its first cash crop.

In 1821 Costa Rica, together with many other Central American colonies, declared independence from Spain. In 1838 it became an independent country with an era of peaceful democracy beginning in 1869. In 1949, the country dissolved its armed forces and since then that nation has been one of the few countries to operate within the democratic system without the assistance of a military.

Today, the Costa Rican culture is in many ways a reflection of its ethnic diversity. The predominant influence has long been European, which is reflected in everything from the official language -- Spanish -- to the architecture of the country's churches and other historic buildings. The indigenous influence can be found in aspects ranging from the tortillas that make part of a typical Costa Rican meal, to the handmade ceramics sold throughout the country.

The pleasant and peaceful disposition of Costa Ricans – affectionately called “Ticos” for their use of the Spanish diminutive, is known worldwide. For example, instead of saying “más chiquito,” (smaller) Ticos say “chiquitico.” An important aspect of Costa Rica's cultural legacy is the Tico's love for peace and democracy. Ticos are proud that their nation is the exception in Latin America, where military dictatorships have long dominated politics; they have enjoyed of more than one hundred years of democratic tradition. Its nearly 4.8 million citizens are also among the worlds most educated, with a literacy rate of 96 percent. Many Costa Ricans are also fluent in English and are happy to share their knowledge of flora and fauna, Tico history and rich culture with all travelers.

Adventure

2.1 BEACHES

While many visitors come to Costa Rica for the mountains and inland eco-experiences, with close to 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) of pristine coastline, Costa Rica is home to a diverse selection of world-renowned beaches.

REST AND RELAXATION ON THE SOUTH CARIBBEAN COAST

Costa Rica's Caribbean coast borrows the unique culture of the nearby Caribbean islands. With island-infused food, music and a laid-back approach it is easy for visitors to feel as though they have been transported to a beautiful Caribbean island.

Gandoca-Manzanillo Beach, located within the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, is known as one of the country's most beautiful snorkel spots thanks to its myriad of breathtaking coral reefs. With green mountains and tropical forests providing a picturesque backdrop, the miles-long stretch features turquoise waters and white sand beaches, the perfect locale for visitors to kick back and relax.

Beach-goers seeking the ultimate in private escapes can enjoy the unoccupied golden sand and crystal clear waters of Playa Cocles or stake out a choice spot on Puerto Viejo, Cahuita or Playa Bonita.

ADVENTURE ON THE NORTH PACIFIC COAST OF GUANACASTE

Stretching down from the northwestern coast, the shores of the Guanacaste region are met by the waters of the Pacific Ocean. In the far north, Hermosa Beach is known for its calm waves and clear waters framed by rolling green hills. The variety of activities, restaurants and lodging options makes Hermosa an ideal location for families.

The nearly 5,000 acres of Polo Golf Papagayo that is in the northwest province of Guanacaste was formed by volcanic activity and includes tropical dry forests and a number of pristine beaches. Named a top tourist destination, the peninsula is home to a number of international brand name hotels, a selection of residential luxury homes as well as many new projects. Costa Rican law mandates that 70 percent of the land must remain untouched ensuring that the beauty of the land is preserved and not overdeveloped.

Conchal Beach lies on the Costa Rican Gold Coast, recognized for the millions of crushed sea shells along its shoreline. Conchal is one of the most attractive and exotic beaches in the region, peaceful and perfect for unwinding or snorkeling. The beach boasts near-perfect weather year-round, resulting in a dream destination for every beach lover.

Surrounding Conchal, the beaches of Flamingo and Tamarindo are known as some of the country's best. Flamingo Beach is home to the only full-service marina between Acapulco and Panama, thus a popular stop for yachters traveling the Pacific Coast.

The beach's pristine waters are ideal for a variety of water sports and some of the world's best deep sea fishing.

Tamarindo, one of the most developed and popular beaches on the Pacific Coast, offers some of the best surfing and windsurfing in the world with a laid-back vibe to match. Long stretches of sand are perfect for walks, horseback riding and sunbathing. Offering a wide variety of water sports, excursions and restaurants, Tamarindo is a bustling beach town with plenty for visitors to experience.

On the Nicoya Peninsula, picture-perfect beaches offer snorkeling, diving and windsurfing. Samara is one of the region's most pleasant beaches and although it is peacefully secluded, there is no shortage of restaurants, shops, excursions or hotels. Protected by a coral reef, allowing the waters near the coast to be calm and safe, Samara is particularly known for its pleasant swimming conditions. For a more quiet experience, visitors can venture just north or south to the undeveloped sands of Barrigona, Buena Vista or Playa Carrillo.

WHERE THE MOUNTAINS MEET THE SEA IN THE CENTRAL AND SOUTH PACIFIC

Continuing south toward the mid-pacific, Jacó Beach is one of the world's most renowned surfing destinations, known for its consistent waves. A short drive from San José, Jacó is a popular weekend getaway for locals and partygoers ready to paint the town.

Home to the continent's largest Pacific coastal rain forests and some of the world's most endangered species, Puntarenas' beaches are lush and tropical as a result of the frequent rainfall. Bahía Ballena is located south of Dominical and at low tide displays a coastline that resembles a whale's tail. An interesting fact about this bay is that whales from the north and south find the water's reliable temperature of 82 degrees Fahrenheit as ideal for birthing, allowing for two whale watching seasons to take place. Children love to spot the different humpback, pilot and false killer whales. While on these tours, visitors can also sight bottlenose and spotted dolphins all year round.

The neighboring beaches of Manuel Antonio are some of the country's most immaculate. Surrounded by dense forest vegetation, the beaches of Espadilla, Blanca and Puerto Escondido are inside Manuel Antonio National Park, offering visitors often unexpected views of exotic wildlife.

Nearby Dominical is known for its authenticity and world-class surfing. Frequenting by backpackers seeking an experience that differs from usual tourist destinations, the unspoiled nature of Dominical offers thrilling water sports and awe-inspiring sights, including the Dominicalito and Naucaya Waterfalls.

Surfing is particularly noteworthy on Pavones, a simple mile-long beach where surfers can ride the longest left-breaking waves in the world. Home to some of the

best conditions on the entire Pacific coast of North and South America, the rocky beach of Pavones is a surfer's paradise.

2.2 WATER SPORTS

Outdoor enthusiasts can rejoice in the wealth of water-based activities to choose from in [Costa Rica](#). Fishing, surfing, diving and rafting are several popular favorites, and the combination of a wide range of difficulty levels and destinations where visitors can partake create the perfect activity for everyone in a group.

FISHING

The Northern Pacific coast, Central Pacific region, Southern Pacific region, and Caribbean coast all make for great fishing spots. Travelers can enjoy offshore fishing in the area of Quepos on the central Pacific coast, boasting large billfish such as sailfish and marlin and sport fishing in the small harbor town of Golfito on the southern coast. On the Caribbean coast, more unpredictable conditions can cause variation in the day's catches; however, fishermen can generally expect tarpon during the winter and spring and snook during the fall. For those who enjoy inland fishing, Lake Arenal, Costa Rica's largest lake located at the foot of the active Arenal Volcano, boasts rainbow bass. Fishing seasons vary by location and type of fish, and a valid Costa Rican fishing license is required for any freshwater fishing done in the country.

SURFING

Four zones comprise surfing in Costa Rica: the Caribbean coast; the Northern Pacific coast; the Southern Pacific coast and the Central Pacific coast. The Pacific coast boasts the most surfing locations, the majority of which are found in the northwestern province of Guanacaste. Tamarindo Beach in the Northern Pacific is considered one of the country's surfing meccas. Visitors will be able to find surf camps, rental shops and ding repair all throughout the beachfront. Other standout beaches include: Hermosa Beach in the Central Pacific, known for having some of the most consistent waves in the world and the location of the 2009 World Surf Championship; Pavones Beach in the Southern Pacific, spanning waves more than half a mile long; and Puerto Viejo, also called Salsa Brava, advised only for advanced surfers due to its strong waves and enormous tubes. With more than 900 miles (1,466 km) of coastline and ideal surfing conditions year-round between the three coasts, Costa Rica offers a wealth of surfing opportunities for novices and experienced surfers.

DIVING AND SNORKELING

A major eco-tourism destination, Costa Rica's long shores stretching along the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea reveal coral reef formations, hundreds of species of multicolored fish and underwater caves. On the Pacific shore, deep-sea divers can venture out to UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site Coco Island, home to 600 species of marine mollusks, 300 species of fish and 32 species of coral, nine of which are found in the deep waters. Both experienced and beginner divers will enjoy the striking rock formations and underwater cave in Manuel Antonio National Park in the Central Pacific, in addition to the extensive variety of fish found especially during the summer months. Those looking to snorkel will find an underwater playground on the Caribbean side at Mazanillo Beach or the reef at Cahuita National Park, which is home

to more than 120 species of fish and more than 40 crustaceans. In the South Pacific region, year-round humpback whale migration (from both the North and the South) makes for exciting company for divers. It is no wonder that Costa Rica has been voted one of the top five world destinations for advanced scuba diving by Rodale's Magazine.

RAFTING

Thanks to generous rainfall in most parts of the country, Costa Rica's rivers offer exhilarating rafting and kayaking adventures throughout the year. The country's well-established rafting industry makes it simple to find a provider with skilled guides, quality equipment and well-planned excursions.

The country's most renowned rafting spot remains the Pacuare River. Optimum rafting season is from mid-May through March and, as the country's longest river, it is best explored on a two-day trip. Known for its abundant flora and fauna, visitors can marvel at some of Costa Rica's gorgeous wildlife while on a rafting trip. Capuchin monkeys, Toucans, and sloths are just some of the common sights alongside the Pacuare River. Located just inland from Limón, the Pacuare is easily accessible from San José, the country's capital.

Beginners eager to join in on the fun can also find ideal runs on the picturesque Sarapiquí and Saavegre Rivers, located near Puerto Viejo towards the Caribbean Coast and along the Pacific Coast between Manuel Antonio and Quepos. Regardless of skill level, the rivers of Costa Rica promise a memorable ride with eye-opening views of jungles, forests and the thousands of species that inhabit them.

KAYAKING

With the pristine Caribbean Sea to the east, the lively Pacific Ocean to the west and a collection of rivers that flow across the country, Costa Rica is also a premier kayaking course. Tortuguero National Park is among the areas in Costa Rica that's especially great for kayak excursions. Visitors can also kayak down one of Costa Rica's flowing rivers or surrounding oceans giving them an opportunity to see lots of wildlife, including manatees, caimans and crocodiles, as well as an array of birds.

TUBING

With 14 major river systems that flow through the country, natural surroundings can be enjoyed by drifting along on a water tube. The amount of activity one can experience varies by the class of rapids the river has. Helmets and sturdy canvas tubes ensure safety in the event that the pace of the current changes. River tubing is very popular for animal sightings in the rivers in Manuel Antonio National Park and Arenal, as well as the Sarapiquí and North Guanacaste regions. While this is a definite perk of doing tubing in Costa Rica, there are also groups which find this particular activity as an efficient way to cover longer treks of land while floating on refreshing water.

STAND UP PADDLEBOARDING

Stand up paddleboarding is an activity that has gained popularity in Costa Rica's beaches. It requires a person to stand on a board almost double the length and width of the type used to surf. Experts describe this sport as one that builds up resistance and balance since every muscle is engaged to complete it, particularly those above the waist. One class is usually all it takes for novices to zip across the perimeters of beaches such as Golfito, Golfito Dulce, Playa Madrigal, Blanca, Hermosa and many others in the Guanacaste and Central Pacific areas.

PARAGLIDING AND PARASAILING

With its expansive greenery and nearly 1,300 kilometers of coast line, there is plenty to see of Costa Rica from high above. Visitors can experience an exhilarating ride, filled with breathtaking panoramic views of the landscape parasailing or paragliding. This adventure is the perfect way to introduce one to Costa Rica. While a variety of experienced tour operators organize parasailing trips all over the country, Manuel Antonio and Jacó, both on the Pacific Coast, have become hot spots for the activities while visitors can also find paragliding tandem flights and tours in Turrialba for a view of the mountains in the interior.

2.3 FAMILY ACTIVITIES

From volcanoes to howler monkeys and sea turtles, Costa Rica offers families a myriad of opportunities to explore, learn and get a close encounter with nature. Families can strengthen their bond and create a lifetime of memories enjoying everything from sports to nature explorations and relaxation.

A CAPITAL FULL OF CULTURE

As the capital of the country, San Jose is also the cultural, social and amusement capital of Costa Rica. It is a place where families can get together and enjoy museums, theaters, cinemas and recreation centers. Some of the most popular sites are the neoclassic architecture of the National Theater; the Gold Museum, showcasing Pre-Columbian, Costa Rican art; the National Museum, which lets families travel through Costa Rica's history and the Children's Museum, where families can experience an interactive, fun and educational adventure on everything from science to music and history.

ACTIVITIES

Costa Rica offers activities for all different ages, tastes and budgets. Adventure tourism has become a bonding experience in which family ties grow closer and stronger. Zip lining is a great way to take in breath-taking views and experience excitement. Hikes in protected areas of the national parks and biological reserves may offer real-life monkey sightings of one of the four available species: howler, spider, squirrel, and white-faced capuchin. There is also the option to set up a turtle nesting viewing. The peak months for this unforgettable experience are July and August, with an 85 percent chance of witnessing a nesting. River fishing and horseback riding are just a few more of the enjoyed family-friendly activities available throughout the country.

WATER ADVENTURES

In addition to the numerous activities families can enjoy on land, visitors can explore the depths of Costa Rica's marine world. Diving or snorkeling trips offer a great way to have a close encounter with sea turtles and giants schools of fish. Boat or kayak trips also provide a wonderful way to discover the many beaches with calm and peaceful surroundings or those with crashing waves, ideal for surfing. Costa Rica's coasts are blessed by Mother Nature, as waters remain warm throughout the year with an average temperature of 82° F, giving travelers the opportunity of visiting them any time they wish. For those who want a little more adventure in their family vacation, banana boat rides, parasailing and Jet Ski tours are broadly available.

Ecotourism

3.1 ECOTOURISM

Considered one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world, Costa Rica is home to 28 national parks, eight biological reserves and a series of protected areas that captivate ecotourism lovers around the world. The country features a variety of ecotourism activities including horseback riding, hiking mountainous paths in cloud forests and guided bird-watching tours.

NATIONAL PARKS

Even though Costa Rica is a small country, it still boasts about five percent of the world's documented biodiversity. Considered a natural treasure, most of the country's land is protected by the National System of Conservation Areas, preserving a total of 26 percent of the national territory. Ecotourism enthusiasts can visit Costa Rica's magnificent volcanoes, Pacific and Caribbean beaches, rain forests and jungle landscapes.

RAIN FOREST AERIAL TRAMS (CARIBBEAN & PACIFIC)

Many national parks across the Caribbean and Pacific coasts feature aerial trams which provide a bird's eye-view of these tropical paradises. Upon boarding the aerial tram, travelers are exposed to the different forest levels, including tree canopies, a level which is most difficult to reach and least documented by scientists. On the trails, the very heart of the rain forest can be appreciated; there is a great biodiversity of plant and animal species too. A simple stroll through the trails and a ride in the aerial tram are excellent combinations to learn about them, and provide much to appreciate about the rain forest from the ground up to the tree tops.

RIVERS AND LAKES

Costa Rica, with its abundance of rivers, surprisingly has very few lakes. Nearly all the country's rivers begin in the mountains, with many frothy white-water routes perfect for rafting and kayaking. Once those rivers flow into the lowlands, however, they become languid waterways. Those lowland rivers are excellent routes for small boat trips, which allow passengers to observe some of the local flora and fauna. The wetlands of **Caño Negro** are also an excellent spot for wildlife watching, whereas the large **Arenal Lake** is a popular windsurfing destination.

BIRD WATCHING

With an estimated 901 bird species, a number greater than the total amount of birds found in North America, it's hard not to become awestruck by the variety of feathered creatures one encounters throughout Costa Rica. The country features a number of knowledgeable nature guides that can make any bird watching expedition a fun educational experience.

HORSEBACK RIDING

It may come as a surprise to many that Costa Rica has quite the cowboy culture. Guanacaste is one of the country's first regions to be conquered by the Spaniards so it is considered to have preserved more of its "Spanish" tradition, where many cattle ranches cover the forest-draped hills. Nevertheless, mountain resorts and nature lodges all over the country offer horseback riding trips, going through pastures, tropical forests, and down to the beaches and often stopping at waterfalls and lakes.

3.2 SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is not a practice in Costa Rica; it is a way of life. With a goal to be the first carbon neutral country in the world by 2100, sustainable practices are observed in every region of the country, across all industries, adopted by all citizens and embraced by visitors. From local Costa Rican cuisine to artisan crafts to traditional customs and celebrations, sustainability is embedded deeply in the culture and traditions of Costa Rica.

Costa Ricans are proud to live amongst and protect their country's rich environment, as this small nation holds five percent of the world's land-based biodiversity and 3.5 percent of its marine life. Costa Rica produces nearly 93 percent of its electricity from renewable resources and 30 percent of its territory is protected natural land. A pioneer in the area of sustainability, Costa Rica is a model for sustainable practices for many industries within the region and around the world.

3.3 Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST)

The tourism industry in Costa Rica has paved the way for entrepreneurs to receive recognition and reward for its sustainable practices through the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program. The CST program was designed by the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT) to differentiate businesses within the tourism sector based on the degree in which they comply with a sustainable model of natural, cultural and social resource management.

Recognized by United Nations' World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the CST program not only evaluates but also assists business owners in making strategic decisions that will result in the long-term preservation of Costa Rica's environment.

Businesses in the CST program receive recognition by being awarded "leaves" or level markers. One leaf indicates that a business engages in minimal sustainable practices and a distinction of five leaves indicates that a business exemplifies the highest standard of sustainable practices in its respective industry sector. Businesses that hold five leaves in the CST program are frequently carbon neutral integrate authentic locally made products into its offerings, give back to Costa Rica's rural community and more.

CST was introduced in 1997 and has continued to evolve and change with the advancement of technologies over the years. The program began with hotel evaluations but has expanded to include rental cars, parks and restaurants. As of May, more than 347 companies, ranging from lodging, tour companies and car rentals, in Costa Rica earned CST certification. The program hopes to reach its goal of having 425 companies receive the certification by 2017.

3.4 VOLCANOES

As part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, it's no surprise that Costa Rica is home to more than 112 volcanoes – five of which are classified as active. The greatest concentration of volcanoes is located in the Central Highlands and northern Costa Rica. These concentrations are divided into three volcanic range systems: the Guanacaste, Central and Talamanca ranges.

THE GUANACASTE RANGE

Located in one of the country's most diverse national parks, the Guanacaste Range is home to two of the biggest wildlife centerpieces: Rincón de la Vieja and Orosí.

Complete with hot springs, waterfalls and a tremendous variety of wildlife, insects and birds, the Rincón de la Vieja National Park is a sight to see for nature lovers the world over, while Orosí is home to the transitional cloud forest important to wild life and migrating between the Pacific coast and inland highlands.

THE CENTRAL VOLCANIC RANGE

Located in the province of Alajuela in a national park of the same name, the Poás Volcano is another must-see wonder. Comprised of three craters, only one of which is active, Poás is one of the country's most accessible active volcanoes, followed by the Irazú volcano.

Within Poás, in one of the dormant craters, lies an incredible lagoon that can be seen as the clouds part, especially earlier in the day. The best time of year to visit Poás is the green season. From May through November, clear views of Poás' active crater are easy to come by. The nearby La Paz waterfall and local coffee plantations make the trip to Poás a beautiful and fascinating one year-round.

The country's highest volcano is Irazú, standing at 3,432 meters high. A short drive from Costa Rica's capital city of San José, the Irazú Volcano is located within Irazú National Park, one of the country's most popular for its breathtaking panoramic views.

NORTHERN PLAINS

The northern plains of Costa Rica are home to the country's most famous active volcano: Arenal. Its superficial magma chamber has been very quiet but studies lead experts to believe that there is still movement deep inside. Situated in a beautiful natural park that bears the same name, visitors enjoy hiking the area around the volcano that has been determined safe by experts. Another attraction in that area is Lake Arenal, the country's largest landlocked body of water, with a surface that covers nearly 33 square miles (85 square km) and a depth that reaches some 200 feet (60 m).

The country's volcanoes are also responsible for the lush landscape which supports the country's abundance of plant and animal species, as well as its rich and flavorful coffee! The land surrounding volcanoes is lush and fertile thanks to the many minerals deposited by eruptions, which is perfect for the cultivation of coffee beans.

The northern plains are also home to Costa Rica's newest volcano, El Porvenir, was only officially discovered in March of 2008 in the forests of the San Carlos region near the national capital of San José.

3.5 NATIONAL PARKS

Although Costa Rica accounts for just 0.03 percent of the earth's surface, its rich land is home to an astounding 5 percent of the world's biodiversity and its waters contain 3.5 percent of the world's marine life. Costa Rica is home to more than 28 national parks, reserves and wildlife refuges. No matter which region you choose to visit, a nearby park awaits you and expert naturalist guides are available to provide more knowledge. Costa Rica is the first tropical country in the world to reverse deforestation; its forest coverage went from 21 percent in the 1980s to 52 percent in 2012. Twenty six percent of the country is officially zoned-protected territory, which demonstrates the value Costa Rica places on preserving its environment and the natural plant and animal species that call it home.

Some of Costa Rica's amazing national parks are:

MANUEL ANTONIO

One of the country's most famous parks is Manuel Antonio. This small biological peninsula on the country's Pacific Coast is the perfect place to encounter white-faced and squirrel monkeys, a variety of birds and two and three-toed sloths. Iguanas, pelicans, frogs, butterflies and crabs are just a few more critters that can be appreciated during a visit to its hiking trails.

The dense vegetation of the jungle spills onto the beaches' clean sand, offering a rejuvenating swim for explorers as they exit the lush maze of the rain forest. With annual Fahrenheit temperatures ranging in the 70s, the beaches of Manuel Antonio make for a pleasant stop year-round.

CORCOVADO

Located in the Osa Peninsula, Corcovado National Park is home to the country's most diverse selections of biodiversity. Named one of the most biologically intense places on earth by *National Geographic*, Corcovado is home to thousands of plant and animal species that thrive from its soil, sky and water.

Among the many types of animals that can be seen in Corcovado are hundreds of species of birds, reptiles and mammals. Nearly a dozen walking trails allow visitors to explore the park's wonders up-close. Camping enthusiasts can also receive permission from the Osa Conservation Area (ACOSA) to stay in the park overnight – an excellent opportunity to see the more than 50 species of bats that inhabit the peninsula.

ARENAL

Named after the country's most famous and active volcano, Arenal National Park offers spectacular views of the volcano. Park rangers monitor volcanic activity and its effect on walking trails, so explorers can rest assured that trails are safe to travel.

Comprised predominantly of cloud and rain forests, the park lies within the Arenal Conservation Area – a territory that spans more than 200,000 hectares. Filled with rivers, thermal hot springs, waterfalls and of course wildlife, Arenal is a dream come true for all who enjoy outdoor exploration.

GUANACASTE

This national park is part of the Guanacaste Conservation Area. Officially declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the area and its wildlife are truly astounding. The dry forests in this northern part of the country are well-known as prime hiking grounds, although birding and observing the various monkey species are the main attractions. A variety of species including jaguars, tapirs and sloths can also be seen migrating through the park towards the Cacao volcano.

CAHUITA

Located on the southeastern coast, Cahuita National Park's wildlife area protects Costa Rica's most important coral reef, which is among the most developed of the entire Caribbean Coast. Although Cahuita is, like most of the country's parks, popular for nature observation, its beaches are a major attraction. Surfing and diving conditions in Cahuita's pristine waters, which have been awarded the Ecological Blue Flag, are out of this world.

TORTUGUERO

Created to protect four species of endangered turtles that spawn on the country's Caribbean Coast, Tortuguero National Park is one of the country's most important conservation sites. Many endangered species like jaguars, tapirs and monkeys also rely on the park's protected status for survival. In fact, Tortuguero is home to 13 of the country's 16 endangered species.

The humid tropical rain forest and wetland forests are just a few of the 11 diverse ecological habitats that thrive within the wildlife sanctuary that is Tortuguero. It's not rare to spot canal-dwelling creatures like lizards and crocodiles, as well as fascinating birds and mammals at this national park.

CHIRRIPO

Home of Mt. Chirripó, Costa Rica's highest point, Chirripó National Park offers breathtaking views of the country. On a clear day, both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean can be seen.

Climbing Chirripó is one of the park's main attractions. Those wishing to make the challenging trek will need plenty of water, sunscreen and a permit from the park rangers. Given the strength of the Costa Rican sun at such a high altitude, many explorers opt to make the trip slowly, stopping to camp out overnight in one of the man-made shelters along the way.

To access detailed information about each of the country's parks, including attractions, services and regulations, please visit:
<http://www.visitcostarica.com/ict/paginas/parques.asp>

3.6 BEYOND THE BEACHES with RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism in [Costa Rica](#) is an authentic tourist experience impossible to imitate, offering travelers an intimate glimpse into the country's pastoral heritage and communities. Itineraries include working with local farmers, tasting traditional foods in the warmth of Costa Rican families, hiking into the unspoiled natural landscapes and more. The benefits of tourism dollars reach far beyond strengthening the economy; they help develop local communities, create unforgettable memories and enhance the Costa Rican identity.

One facet of rural tourism involves participation from several families, or even the entire community, as the residents manage the endeavors themselves rather than outside businesses. Numerous organizations aid in coordinating and integrating all the community actions in order to facilitate the development of rural tourism to help local growth.

The following are several examples of unique rural tourism initiatives in Costa Rica.

GUANACASTE

Various hotels offer visitors the opportunity to experience ecological tourism in a breathtaking natural environment. Surrounding the National Park Rincón de la Vieja, lodging options have undertaken ecological strategies with the ultimate intention of regenerating the land. When they are not setting out on adventures which include zip-lining, a mountain water slide, horseback riding, thermal springs and more, guests can be found playing a role in sustainability efforts, such as planting fruits and vegetables, creating arts and crafts or making soaps that will be exhibited and used at the establishments. As a result, ranches and workers produce a majority of the products utilized.

Adventure beckons at the foot of the Rincón de la Vieja Volcano in Guanacaste. Eco-tourism hotels with actual working horse and cattle ranches celebrate the Guanacaste region's cowboy heritage. Guests also have access to natural hot springs, scenic trails, pristine waterfalls, bubbling volcanic mud pools and more. From riding a ranch horse to exploring the natural volcanic springs to taking a cool dip in a spectacular waterfall pool, guests can transform themselves in a cowboy for a day on one of many tours.

There are also various tourist attractions and Wildlife Refuges which frame the Palo Verde National Park. Visitors can spot a number of endangered species as they explore diverse ecosystems either by boat on the waters of Tempisque River, on nature trails or on horseback. For those in search of a folkloric, cultural and historical experience, there are various projects that take place at established farms that are brought back to life with the lively reenactments of respected Costa Rican traditions. Visitors are transported back in time as they operate a 130-year old ox-powered sugar mill (trapiche), make and enjoy handmade tortillas, sip aromatic fresh coffee and even mold up some homemade candy.

LA FORTUNA

Various eco-lodges holistically blend agriculture, education and tourism by offering adventure and ranch tours, hiking trails and botanical gardens. Adventure tours include horseback riding into the rain forest, kayaking and biking and a hike to Arenal Volcano National Park. Community farms and resorts are self-sustainable and carefully reforesting the formerly barren land into an area rich in biodiversity while preserving the essence of the Costa Rican rural heritage.

There are also educational centers and models for sustainable farmers and gardeners. Objectives include motivating visitors from around the world to cultivate and harvest organically and sustainably. Many of the Costa Ricans who support these movements come from peasant families who grew up without electricity, using traditional methods of agriculture which are still used today.

MANUEL ANTONIO

Travelers can experience a guided nature, conservation and cultural expedition beginning with a walk along the Fila Chonta Mountains. Outdoor activities such as swimming beneath a waterfall and organic tilapia fishing, all the while enjoying appearances by local wildlife make several forget about cosmopolitan living. Cultural touches include tours of an authentic sugarcane mill and learning about coffee and citrus production, two crucial commodities that form the backbone of the Costa Rican economy. Many conclude a tour with a farm-style lunch overlooking the impressive landscapes of Manuel Antonio National Park.

3.7 VOLUNTOURISM

Travel is always an enriching experience in Costa Rica, thanks to the destination's wealth of natural and cultural resources. Vacations can be very fulfilling to those who enjoy them and with voluntourism — travel that includes volunteer activities for non-profit organizations — the rewards are even greater, as visitors make a positive impact on the environment, wildlife and local communities. Regardless of age, experience level or interests, travelers will find an increasingly wide array of interesting and exciting volunteer possibilities in Costa Rica. It's a worthwhile way to make any vacation truly memorable.

Conservation Efforts

The **Association of Volunteers for Service in Protected Areas of Costa Rica** offers a variety of ways to volunteer while learning more about Costa Rica's national parks and diverse wildlife. Students can practice their Spanish skills while keeping parks and beaches safe from fires. There is also a research factor that can be used for college credit courses or data for ecologically-themed theses.

- <http://www.asvocr.org/voluntariado/>

The **Children's Eternal Rain Forest (CER)** is the largest private reserve in Costa Rica, covering over 54,000 acres and counting. One of the richest and most diverse natural areas on Earth, CER is home to roughly 17percent of the world's species. The CER is responsible for numerous hydroelectric projects which produce about one third of Costa Rica's electricity. Positions in reception, maintenance, environmental education and at biological stations are available in the city of Monteverde. Helpers are asked to remain for a month to make a significant contribution.

- <http://www.acmcr.org/voluntariado.htm>

Established five years ago as an ecological and cultural organization dedicated to restoring ecosystems, the **Xtremas Foundation** also benefits the indigenous peoples in the Barbilla biological corridor, a heavily deforested strip of land connecting the southern and northern areas of the country. Volunteers who help plant trees, as well as individuals or corporations who are willing to adopt trees are asked to extend a hand. Xtremas won an award in 2013 from Pact for Life, a social network of individuals and organizations concerned with the environment, for its work in Costa Rican reforestation.

- <http://www.crhoy.com/adopte-un-arbol-y-ayude-a-salvar-los-bosques/>

The protection of the geographical area and ensuring fortified connections among all stakeholders in these protected areas and adjacent indigenous territories is the **Talamanca-Caribbean Biological Corridor Association's (ACBTC)** principal objective. Participating in the collaborative efforts and developments on local, national and international scales, volunteers help support different institutions and organizations as needed. Duties for volunteers include supporting agro-ecological projects in the area, joining reforestation campaigns and sharing in education

activities with children. It is recommended that participants possess empathy for working with indigenous peoples, have an interest and willingness to perform field work and be intent on conserving natural resources.

- <http://www.corredortalamanca.org/voluntariado.php?idioma=1>

Volunteers can aid in the sustainable management of wildlife, forest resources and other protected areas with the **National System of Conservation Areas of Costa Rica**, which — together with its stakeholders — plays a leading role in Costa Rica's sustainable efforts. Exciting and rewarding service opportunities are available for individuals, organizations and private companies that are interested in volunteering.

- <http://www.sinac.go.cr/competencias/ASP/Voluntariado/Paginas/default.aspx>

Sabática is a Spanish company founded by professionals with a long history in the world of education and international exchanges. Its mission is to provide volunteers unique experiences abroad. Costa Rica lives off its parks and has amazing landscapes, which require constant work to be done to preserve the environment. Volunteers with the national parks will learn about the country and its unique environment while still having the opportunity to relax on beaches or find adventure. Nature reserves are located on the coast, mountains and rainforests. Activities include cooperating on specific projects being carried out in the park, general maintenance thereof (trail maintenance, trash removal, facility repair), and customer service to visitors.

- <http://www.sabatica.org/es/81501/Voluntariado/Conservacion-Medio-/Proyectos-voluntariado-Costa-Rica-Ecologia-.html>

Another noteworthy option to consider is **Costas Verdes**, a non-profit organization devoted to protecting the coastal region. Helpers can assist with the planting of thousands of trees in deforested areas in the Ostional and Playa Hermosa National Wildlife Refuges and they can also help out at Costas Verdes's nursery, which has more than 2,000 trees ready for planting.

- www.costasverdes.org

Operating in Atenas, Costa Rica, **The Green Pet Foundation** offers unique programs in Costa Rica to ensure that volunteers enjoy their enriching ecological and cultural experiences. Programs are designed so that participants contribute to the socio-environmental work in the area while still having time to visit tourist attractions, explore the country's infinite landscapes, learn Spanish and bond with the families that house them. Volunteer opportunities are available at organic honey farms, plant nurseries, coffee plantations, family farms, and schools.

- <http://www.greenpetfoundation.org/?q=es/afortunados>

Research Opportunities

Costa Rica is also known for its abundant wildlife, and voluntourism makes it easy for travelers to help protect the nation's diverse fauna. Among the organizations that excel in this type of voluntourism is the renowned **World Wildlife Fund**, which works both at sea and on land with fishermen, tour operators, governments, industries, farmers and urban groups — as well as local and national authorities — to protect the Western Hemisphere's largest reef. With the organization's sea turtle conservation project in Junquillal, volunteers can help these magnificent creatures, while receiving technical training and gaining experience in the field. The minimum stay for this project is 15 days, although visitors can commit for up to a month in the program.

- http://www.wwfca.org/nuestro_trabajo/especies/tortugas_marinas/conservacion_playa_junquillal/programa_voluntarios/

Several interesting opportunities are available from the **Organization for Tropical Studies**, a non-profit consortium of nearly 60 universities, colleges and research institutions from around the world. In addition to undergraduate and graduate study programs in global health, biology and conservation, the organization offers individual and corporate volunteer programs that include reforestation projects and activities at any of its three biological research stations, located in three ecologically diverse ecosystems: La Selva Biological Station, in the Caribbean lowland at the northern base of Braulio Carillo National Park, Palo Verde Biological Station, in the northwestern Pacific lowlands and Las Cruces Biological Station and Wilson Botanical Garden, on Costa Rica's southern Pacific slope, where an extensive collection of palms, bromeliads and endangered plants are among the beautiful features.

- <http://www.ots.ac.cr/>

At the **Tirimbina Rainforest Center**, volunteers can learn, explore and help in one of Costa Rica's most lush and biodiverse northern regions. Tirimbina's program provides a unique experience for participants in the development of their scientific knowledge of the tropical forest, as they collect data for the center's long-term research projects and learn about the ecosystem. Volunteers develop skills in collecting and analyzing data and writing reports, and can also participate in various activities including tours and educational programs.

- <http://www.tirimbina.org/>

Saving Wildlife

Volunteers in the World has a Puerto Viejo-based group that helps injured and abused animals — including monkeys, cats, sloths, anteaters and snakes — by nursing them back to health and preparing them for a return to their natural habitat. Proper vaccination is asked of volunteers in order to avoid putting any of the animals in a potential health risk.

- <http://www.voluntariosenelmundo.com/paises-donde-colaboramos-2/centroamerica/costa-rica/costa-ricarescate-de-animales>

Reptile lovers of all ages would enjoy donating some time to the volunteers with the **Herpetological Refuge of Costa Rica**. Aside from helping take care of injured reptiles, amphibians, birds and an assortment of mammals, participants also gain a great deal of knowledge by assisting with tours of the facilities.

- <http://www.refugioherpetologico.com/voluntarios.html>

The **Turtle Trax** organization allows volunteers to help prepare and monitor hatcheries and accompany members of the team on nightly, three-hour beach patrols. Since sea turtle nesting is seasonal, their hatchery conservation projects are only open for half of the year; Playa San Miguel and Corozalito are open from July to December and Caletas is open from July to February.

- <http://turtle-trax.com/>

Cooperatour aims to contribute to a society that is more aware and committed to the causes of poverty through training and experience. Nature lovers will enjoy this project located on one of the most popular beaches in Costa Rica, Playa Matapalo. Volunteers will be involved in all aspects of turtle protection: learning how a nursery is created to protect the eggs, caring for and feeding baby turtles, conducting night patrols to collect eggs, cleaning beaches and then marking them.

- <http://www.cooperatour.org/proyectos-de-cooperacion/proteccion-de-tortugas-marinas-en-el-caribe-costa-rica.html>

The **Corcovado Foundation** plays a leading role in strengthening protected areas, promoting environmental education, adopting responsible travel and encouraging community participation in the sustainable use of natural resources in the South Pacific region of Costa Rica. Their program for the conservation of sea turtles runs from July to mid-December in the Osa peninsula. Volunteers participate in various conservation activities as members of the research team. Activities include night patrols, relocating nests in the nursery, recording scientific data, tagging turtles, monitoring the nursery, construction, exhuming nests, and releasing hatchlings.

- <http://www.corcovadofoundation.org/es/programa-conservacion-tortuga-marina.html>

The **KETO Foundation** is an NGO dedicated to the research and conservation of dolphins, whales and sea turtles. The work of volunteers is a vital component to the organization's success. Volunteers gain experience by working in the field with cetaceans and turtles, through contact with coastal communities, or by means of behavioral data analysis and photo identification.

- <http://www.fundacionketo.org/proyectos.php>

Community Development

Local community interaction is another way to make a beneficial use of vacation time in Costa Rica. Volunteers of the **Bríbripa Kanèblö Association** help build facilities for the nation's largest indigenous population. The activities vary in order to address the following objectives: improve the socioeconomic conditions of indigenous

families; strengthen the Bribri culture, developing actions that promote the values of the Bribri community; manage forest conservation areas; develop agricultural activities that present a sustainable development model; institutionalize a self-sustainable indigenous Bribri organization.

- <http://www.redindigena.net/bribripa/quienes.html>

Located close by in the Bríbri indigenous reserve, this **Volunteers in the World** opportunity takes place in the mountain ranges of Talamanca. The indigenous people's culture, stories, customs, legends, rituals, traditions, and close relationship with nature will expand horizons and provide life-altering experiences. Opportunities are available within school, construction and indigenous empowerment programs. Depending on the program of choice, volunteers will take part in a range of activities on a daily basis, ranging from creating campaigns to better the community, teaching school children English or French, reconstructing public infrastructures, or even supporting organic producers in improving their products and expanding their market.

- <http://www.voluntariosenelmundo.com/paises-donde-colaboramos-2/centroamerica/costa-rica/proyecto-educativo>

International professionals founded **Planet Conservation** in order to specialize in environmental topics focused on education and conservation. The organization offers volunteers in Costa Rica the opportunity to make meaningful contributions by working closely with local people and organizations. International teams are working to raise environmental awareness around the country, in social and creative projects with special needs children, developing new ideas for recycling cooperatives in underprivileged communities, developing their ability to follow through with ideas and protecting endangered animals in Costa Rica's amazing ecosystems.

- <http://www.planetconservation.com/web%20espanol/volunteer.html>

Volunteers in direct or indirect lines of care for senior residents in the **Hands of Jesus Nursing Home** perform activities such as providing companionship, listening to their stories, helping with personal care and eating, organizing opportunities for recreation and participating in special event activities. The facility is flexible in welcoming students who wish to complete long-term community service requirements or even the occasional volunteer is only looking to offer their services for specific events.

- <http://www.hmjcr.org/voluntariado.htm>

The **ELI International Volunteers** specialize in five particular segments --childcare, women's support services, local education, healthcare, financing and ecological conservation-- offering a plethora of options for those who would wish to implement their volunteer efforts in a social setting.

- <http://www.voluntariosinternacionales.org/costa-rica-voluntariado-pasantias>

Offering volunteers both short- and long-term programs as well as individual or group experiences, **ACI Costa Rica** promotes and facilitates international volunteer and cultural exchange programs for young people from all around the world. ACI intends to contribute to the solidarity and friendship between the people of this shrinking planet by creating globally aware citizens. Their work takes place throughout Costa Rica, with projects varying by location.

- <http://www.aci.cr/>

Situated in Costa Rica's Southern Pacific region, the Osa Conservation Area contains nearly 2.5% of the planet's biodiversity despite its small size. **MarViva** works hand in hand with fishers from the area to offer them training and strengthening in the development of programs that will allow them, in a way that is compatible with the marine resource, to make a living from different activities related to tourism and responsible fishing. The foundation also fosters community coastal organization with an emphasis on responsible fishing and mangrove management, in order to achieve the active participation and empowerment of local leaders in spaces for discussion and national harmonization in Marine Spatial Planning.

- <http://www.marviva.net/index.php/en/>

Costa Rica is also dedicated to the empowerment of its people. **Caminos de Liderazgo**, a program out of Stanford University, develops leadership skills, and creates a tourism offering based in the vibrant culture of the region. Participants come together to share their vision for their businesses and participated in activities focused on leadership, tourism, sustainability, and culture. The program is a collaboration between local leaders and entrepreneurs, the CRUSA Foundation, INOGO, SINAC, and RBA with the support of businesses such as Nature Air, Travel Excellence and Horizontes. The program will work with about 30 regional leaders to achieve increased prosperity for the inhabitants, their local cultures, and biodiversity of the region.

- <http://inogo.stanford.edu/programs/leadership-program?language=en>

LANGUAGE

It's easy to combine voluntourism with other types of travel. Visitors interested in studying Spanish, for example, can make use of programs offered by the **Costa Rican Language Academy**, which organizes volunteer activities in a variety of fields for students, allowing them to practice what they've learned as they help make Costa Rica an even better place to live and visit.

- <http://www.spanishandmore.com/spanish/volunteer.htm>

At the **Educating Children Foundation**, the main goal is to teach children English while staying in the homes of the local community. Some helpers find their experience so enriching, that they decide to continue to help from home in a very innovative way by offering two hours of conversational English training though Skype.

- <http://www.educatingchildren.org/es/Voluntarios.asp>

3.8 BIRDING

Bird watching in Costa Rica is an activity that will please the entire family. The country's great variety of microclimates, from rain forests to swamps to cloud forests, are often found close together and facilitate viewing a vast variety of birds. To protect the precious species, especially those endangered, 21 important bird areas (IBAs) have been established, spanning over half the country's land.

Bird novices and advanced birders alike will appreciate two can't-miss bird types: the resplendent quetzal and the scarlet macaw. The quetzal is a brilliantly colored bird that in ancient times was worshipped by the Mayans and Aztecs. It can be glimpsed at Cerro de la Muerte, translated as "The Mountain of Death," which is one of the highest points in Costa Rica and serves as a popular bird watching spot. The largest parrot in North and South America, the scarlet macaw, is difficult to miss due to the combination of its vibrant color and its loud calls.

Including these two bird types, there are estimated to be 900 bird species that can be appreciated in Costa Rica. From that number, six are endemic, or native to certain regions of Costa Rica: the Cocos Cuckoo; Cocos Flycatcher; and Cocos Finch of the Coco Island. The other three are found in the Costa Rica mainland: the Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager; the Coppery-headed Emerald; and the Mangrove, the latter two are hummingbirds.

In addition to the many national parks and forests that serve as a natural habitat for birds, key birding regions include the North and South Pacific, the Caribbean Coast, the mountains of the Northern Plains and the Central Valley, which includes metropolitan areas such as Costa Rica's capital San José. For a natural respite in the midst of bustling San José, Parque del Este is home to unique bird varieties such as the radiant oropendolas and blue-crowned motmots.

Costa Rica is home to 37 threatened or near threatened species of birds, as well as six endemic species (found only in Costa Rica). Many birds migrate south during the winter, so birdwatchers from the north can enjoy seeing familiar birds from their homes along with the unique Costa Rican birds.

More than 200 bird species can be found inside Caño Negro and its environment is especially vital for those species that migrate from the north. Many of the birds found in Caño Negro include anhingas, the ibis, jabirú storks, roseate spoonbill, a large population of cormorants, northern jacanas, ducks and egrets.

Southeast of Caño Negro, Puerto Viejo in the area of Sarapiquí, is considered one of the best areas for birding watching in Costa Rica. Almost 50 percent of the species of birds in Costa Rica can be found in the region. Common birds on the grounds of Selva Verde off the Sarapiquí River include violaceous trogon, slaty-tailed trogon, keel-billed toucan, collared aracari, white-necked puffbird, snowy cotinga, red-throated

ant-tanager, northern barred-woodcreeper, fasciated tiger-heron, buff-rumped warbler, the gray-necked wood-rail and many more.

In Sarapiquí's Braulio Carrillo National Park a different habitat exists just before entering the Caribbean Lowlands. A rich mix of birds such as the dull-mantled antbird, ocellated antbird, black-crowned antpitta, spotted barbtail, white-whiskered puffbird, rufous-winged tanager, ornate hawk-eagle, and on occasion the laceolated monklet, rufous-vented ground-cuckoo, sharpbill, rufous-fronted wood-quail, crested eagle and gray-headed piprites will appear. Birding is also quite good in La Tirimbina rain forest where bird enthusiasts can find spotted antbird, bicolor antbird, song wren, white-fronted nun bird, the northern barred woodcreeper among others.

Palo Verde National Park is home to many storks, egrets, ibis, grebes and spoonbills, the great curassow, toucans and macaws. Alongside the Tempisque River, one will most likely be able to find the largest nesting site for the black-crowned night-herons.

April brings the first rains and the forest flourishes once again. Leaves begin to sprout from the bare tree branches as floodwaters drench the alluvial plains that feed the Tempisque basin, attracting tens of thousands of migratory ducks.

Without a doubt, birding is the principal draw of visitors to Palo Verde National Park. Birding is particularly good because there is very little vegetation to obstruct views of the roosting fauna. As resources grow scarce, the birds cluster by waterholes, making for easier viewing. Also, many migratory birds make their way to this region during the summer months.

If time permits only one stop for bird watching, travelers can visit the Santa Rosa National Park, home to more than 250 species of birds. One of the most recognizable bird types, the colorful toucan, can be found in Santa Rosa. For those heading along the Caribbean coast, there are various prime bird-watching spots which boast of more than 300 bird species, including several species of heron.

Numerous tour operators organize bird watching expeditions for visitors. Guides offer light hikes or boat trips ranging from a morning excursion to weeklong or longer trips to see the many varieties in depth. With so many different ecosystems close together, it is guaranteed that there will always be a bird sighting. It is expected that in a 10 day tour, bird watchers can expect to see anywhere between 300 and 400 birds, and with the guidance of local experts and ornithologists, it will definitely be an enriching educational experience as well.

Excellent resources to look into for more detailed birding information are:

- Asociación de Guías de Costa Rica, ACOGUITUR
 - <http://es.costaricabeauty.com/viewprofile.aspx?i=1190&n=Asociaci%C3%B3n-Costarricense-de-Gu%C3%ADas-T%C3%BAristicos---ACOGUITUR>

- Asociación Costarricense de profesionales en turismo, ACOPROT
 - <http://www.acoprot.org/>
- ICT's official tour operator list
 - <http://www.visitcostarica.com/ict/paginas/categoria.asp?idcate=67&sPais=14&cst=1>

CULTURE

4.1 COSTA RICA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FIESTAS OF PALMARES

January

Beginning in the second week of January visitors can experience local food and drinks, music, dancing, parades, fireworks and of course Costa Rican bullfighting and horse parades. One of the largest events in Costa Rica, the parade of lanterns, and a variety of athletic competitions, including mountain biking and soccer, are also popular events during this festival.

FIESTAS TIPICAS SANTA CRUZ

January 14

This religious celebration honors the Black Christ of Esquipulas, a famous Guatemalan statue. The festival includes folk dancing, marimba music and bullfights.

GAM CULTURAL ART CITY TOUR

February – December

Third Wednesday of each month

5 pm – 9pm

This cultural gathering offers visitors free evening access to participating cultural venues in downtown San José. Art tours depart from the *Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo*, *Museos del Banco Central*, *Museo Nacional*, *Museo del Jade* and *Museo de Arte Costarricense*.

- www.gamcultural.com/

CARNAVAL DE PUNTARENAS

February

One of the most popular celebrations in Costa Rica, *Carnaval de Puntarenas* celebrates the Pearl of the Pacific and draws thousands of spectators. This celebration features parades, a beauty pageant, live music, dancing and traditional street food. This event benefits several local businesses, since most are located along the boulevard called *Paseo de los Turistas*, which is on the beach and offers popular food and drinks such as Vigorón and the refreshing Churchill, an icy dessert prepared with either condensed milk, powdered milk or, for an extra treat, ice cream.

FERIA DEL CAFÉ

January

Taking place in Frailes, which is located in the Central Valley region, the *Feria Del Café* (Coffee Fair) is attended by coffee pickers, retailers, tourists and everyone in between. Visitors to the event are entertained with music, dances, a coffee picking competition in which the attendees participate and winners are awarded prizes, the election of the “coffee queen” and religious ceremonies. Throughout the event coffee growers roast, brew and serve coffee to guests and the association’s judges.

- www.feriadelcafe.co.cr
- info@feriadelcafe.co.cr

FESTIVAL NACIONAL DE LAS MULAS

January – February

Held annually in Parrita, *Festival Nacional de las Mulas* (Mule Festival) began as a way to have fun for a few farmers. Over the years, it has become a tradition for the people in Parrita. *La Asociación para el Bienestar Parriteño* (ASOBIPA) is the organizer of this event which attracts

international and national tourists. The main event is the mule race which takes place on the *mulódromo* but that isn't the only attraction. There are also riding competitions, the selection of Miss Parrita, dances, craft shows, livestock and agricultural shows, typical fair food and the atmosphere of *La Mulita Alegre* bar.

OROFRUTA

March

This annual fruit festival takes place in the town of Orotina which is known for having a large number of fruit stands at the side of the highway. Tourists and locals can enjoy many activities including live music and a beauty pageant.

TOUR DEL LAGO ARENAL

March

Overlooking Lake Arenal is the renowned Arenal volcano, which provides a scenic view to one of the most significant mountain biking events in Latin America, *Vuelta al Lago*, which translates to "around the lake." This two-day event, that continues to attract riders from all over the world, circuits a 158 km ride around Lake Arenal. Bikers who know the terrain come prepared with their mountain bikes.

- <http://www.vueltaallagoarenal.com/>

FERIA DEL GUSTICO

March

This fair is a unique opportunity to sample many products from small producers while enjoying cultural activities as well. Taking place in the Old Customs Building in San José, this is an excellent fair for a tourist to attend as there are over 180 companies providing samples of a wide variety of products. Some of the products include coffee, jams, dairy, preserves, gourmet cheeses, gluten-free products, plants, flowers, chocolates, pasta, aloe-flavored drinks, jewelry, clothing and recycled materials.

DÍA NACIONAL DEL BOYERO

March

Celebrated on the second Sunday of March in the town of San Antonio de Escazu, *Día Nacional del Boyero* (Oxcart Driver's Day) is one of the most colorful celebrations in Costa Rica. The oxcart has been the national symbol of labor in Costa Rica for generations. At the center of the event is a parade of over a hundred beautifully handmade and painted oxcarts followed by a celebration with food, dancing and people in traditional costumes. The festival originated from times when the oxcart was used for transporting coffee from Central Valley to Puntarenas.

DÍA DE SAN JOSÉ

March 19

Celebrated across Costa Rica, *Día de San José* is particularly special because Saint Joseph is also the patron saint of San José, the capital city. This is a religious celebration with special masses, displays of beautiful pieces of artwork, parades and food.

FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE LAS ARTES

April (Every two years, last one was held in 2014)

The *Festival Internacional de las Artes* is a program organized by the Ministry of Culture and Youth (MCJ). The event brings together the best national and international artists providing

attendees with the opportunity to enjoy artwork, live theater, music and dance performances. Every exhibition pays tribute to a country with 2014's selection being Russia.

- www.festivaldelasartes.go.cr

FESTIVAL NACIONAL DE LAS ARTES

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The *Festival Nacional de las Artes* is a program organized by the Ministry of Culture and Youth (MCJ). The event brings together the best national artists providing attendees with the opportunity to enjoy artwork, live theater, music and dance performances. Every exhibition is designated by executive decree as a national event of cultural interest.

- <https://www.facebook.com/fiacostarica/info>

IFGA OFFSHORE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

April

The Offshore World Championship is the globe's largest and most anticipated international deep sea fishing competition, offering seasoned anglers four action-packed days to win the coveted first place title for the largest number of record-setting game fish caught and released.

- www.offshoreworldchampionship.com

JUAN SANTAMARIA'S DAY

April 11

A national holiday in Costa Rica, Juan Santamaria's Day is held to commemorate the death of the soldier who is officially recognized as the national hero. He is considered so because it is believed that on April 11, 1856 Santamaria single handedly turned back an invasion and in the process lost his life. His action contributed to a Costa Rican victory which would lead to the nation becoming a free and independent country. Juan Santamaria is honored by two statues in Costa Rica: one in Alajuela and the other in front of the Congress in San José. The main international airport in Costa Rica is also named for him.

ATENAS CLIMATE FAIR AND OXCART PARADE

April

Organized by the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT), the Chamber of Tourism and Commerce of Atenas, CATUCA and the Atenas Cattle Driver Association, this event has been developing over the last eight years. The goal is to bring locals and tourists to Atenas annually to celebrate their reputation for having "the best climate in the world" according to an article featured in National Geographic magazine. There is also a historical significance since Atenas was a key site on the road taken by the oxcarts which carried coffee to the port of Puntarenas. During this celebration the town is filled with color and traditional activities:

EXPOTUR

May

EXPOTUR brings together more than 300 representatives from the tourism sector. This event, organized by the Costa Rican Association of Tourism Professionals (ACOPROT), highlights a wide variety of tourism products ranging from major attractions to products and services. Additionally, EXPOTUR aims to familiarize the industry with Costa Rica's tourism offerings and experiences through a series of pre- and post-event tours.

- www.expotur.com

FESTIVAL AFROCULTURAL LIMON ROOTS

July – August

Advertised as “the biggest cultural, artistic and danceable” event in the history of Costa Rica, Limón Roots magazine hosts festivities around the country. Scheduled events have included jams, an awards ceremony and an African-themed fashion show.

FIESTA DE LA VIRGEN DEL MAR

July 16

Celebrated on the Puntarenas Beach, *Fiesta de la Virgen del Mar* (Festival of the Virgin of the Sea) is a colorful festival with parades and ornate boats with lights and flags paying homage to the *Virgen del Carmen*. This celebration always takes place during the day on the weekend closest to July 16th.

ANEXIÓN DEL PARTIDO DE NICOYA

July 25

Also known as Guanacaste Day, this is a celebration of Guanacaste’s annexation from Nicaragua in 1824. Everyone is invited to enjoy the festivities which include traditional music, typically played by a quartet and xylophone. Many people also wear their traditional costumes and dance to marimba music. Costumed couples perform “Punto Guanacasteco,” the region’s folkloric dance, which has become the national dance. The cities of Liberia and Nicoya become the center of the action hosting concerts, dancing and bullfights.

ROMERIA A LA VIRGEN DE LOS ANGELES

August 2

This is the annual pilgrimage day of the patron virgin of Costa Rica. Nearly a million people gather to walk from San José to the Basílica in Cartago (approximately 15 miles or 24 km).

ENTRADA DE LOS SANTOS

August 30

More than two dozen statues of saints from various towns are brought to San Ramon, where they are paraded through the streets. This celebration features live music, a variety of entertainment activities and traditional festival food.

DÍA DE LA PERSONA NEGRA Y LA CULTURA AFROCARIBEÑA

August 31

This Caribbean celebration includes a gala parade in Limon, a range of cultural activities, jazz concerts, conferences and educational forums, traditional games for kids, cultural performances, food and more. The event also includes a number of symbolic activities and civic ceremonies paying tribute to honorees.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

September 15

Independence Day commemorates Costa Rica’s independence from Spanish rule in 1821. This national holiday is marked by students in schools across the country hoisting the national flag, completing parades and putting on performances for the community. Parades also take place all across Costa Rica the night of the 14th, and at exactly 6:00 p.m. the entire nation joins in the national anthem. The Independence Torch, which is another symbol of Costa Rica’s liberation from Spain, is carried by thousands of students from Guatemala to Costa Rica’s southern region. In Cartago, the former capital city of Costa Rica, there is a traditional celebration that takes place.

DÍA DE LAS CULTURAS

October 12

Celebrated on October 12th, *Día de las Culturas* is Columbus Day in Costa Rica. This holiday celebrates the country's ethnic and cultural diversity.

CARNAVAL DE LIMÓN

October

This Caribbean street party takes place the week of Columbus Day and is one of the most famous Costa Rican festivals. Described as a smaller-scale version of Mardi Gras, the celebration includes floats, dancing and extravagant street celebrations commemorating Columbus's first arrival to Costa Rica.

LA RUTA DE LOS CONQUISTADORES

November

La Ruta de Los Conquistadores is Costa Rica's premier mountain bike race and one of the most difficult athletic events on the planet. The world's original multi-day fat-tire stage race, *La Ruta*, is the "Grandfather" that created and inspired this now-worldwide genre.

- www.adventurerace.com

DÍA DE LOS DIFUNTOS

November 2

All Soul's Day is observed across Latin America. Costa Ricans visit the cemeteries of their loved ones and decorate their graves with flowers. Catholic masses are also held.

NATIONAL TOURISM FAIR

November

This gathering of the Costa Rican tourism industry aims to strengthen the promotion of domestic tourism. Among the participants are tour operators, national parks, hosting companies, car rental agencies and rural tourism representatives.

ENTRADA DE SANTOS Y DESFILE DE BOYEROS

November

The city of San José, with the support of *Asociación Boyera Nacional*, plays host to this parade and celebration which honors the traditional oxcart and cattle. This event brings together hundreds of cattlemen from all over the country showcasing their wagons and oxen. During the parade, families enjoy typical music and traditional folk dance groups.

FESTIVAL DE LA LUZ

December

Festival de la Luz is a popular festival that takes place in the city of San José. It includes an evening parade with beautifully lit floats (in which the Costa Rica Tourism Board also provides a signature float) and fireworks. This celebration is typically associated with the year-end holidays.

- www.festivaldelaluz.cr

MARATHON COSTA RICA

December

This top-notch marathon is organized by *La Asociación Marathón Internacional Costa Rica* with a goal of providing athletes national and international certifications and endorsements.

- www.marathoncostarica.com

FESTEJOS POPULARES SAN JOSÉ

December 25 – January 1, 2015

The year-end festival guarantees that the old year goes out with a bang. Attendees enjoy festivities held the last week of every year in Zapote, a suburb east of San José. The celebration includes carnival rides, food stands, games, music and dancing.

TOPE NACIONAL

December 27

Considered part of Costa Rican folklore this horse parade, or *tope*, celebrates the Day of the Costa Rican Horse Rider, and takes place in the heart of San José. The event showcases a wide variety of different horse breeds donning their best saddles and is widely regarded as the pinnacle event for those who enjoy equestrian and western style activities.

CARNAVAL NACIONAL

December

Carnaval Nacional is an annual street festival with live music, costumes, food, fanfare and much more. Costumes, decorations and a parade are just a portion of this exciting event that takes place in Desamparados, which is in the San José province.

ENAMORATE DE TU CIUDAD

Every Saturday

Enamorate de Tu Ciudad, which translates to *fall in love with your city*, brings modern Costa Rican culture to life for locals and visitors alike in the capital city of San José. The program began in 2011 by the Ministry of Culture & Youth with the hopes of bringing together the community through engaging programming that promotes relaxation, entertainment, education and physical activity. Cultural Corridor programming is held every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at local parks in downtown San José including Parque España, Parque Jardín de Paz, Parque Morazán and Parque la Merced. Scheduled activities change weekly and include guided visits to museums, art classes, yoga, capoeira and swing dancing lessons, music and circus performances, sports leagues, table games, artisan craft exhibits featuring traditional crafts and environmentally friendly products, literary workshops and poetry readings.

- www.enamoratedetuciudad.com

4.2 GASTRONOMY

Costa Rica's culinary scene offers much more than its traditional staple of *gallo pinto* (a rice and bean side dish). Tropical fruits, an abundance of meat and seafood from the acres of pastures and the country's two coasts and a myriad of dining options provide a delicious variety of culinary offerings. As visitors travel into rain forest areas, great inexpensive meals can be found easily and a stop at a *mirador* (restaurant with a view) also offer amazing views of vast Costa Rican landscapes, from panoramic mountains to exotic beaches. Those seeking a more upscale dining experience will be delighted by the number of upscale dining options available throughout Costa Rica's tourist areas. A large-concentration of upscale dining venues can be found in the bustling area of San José where visitors will be enchanted by a new generation of chefs providing a modern take on classic Costa Rican dishes.

CENTRAL MARKET'S SODAS

Those who want to eat like the locals before heading off to the coast or rainforest can stop in San Jose's Central Market (*Mercado Central*), the largest market in the city, which first opened in 1880. Travelers will find more than 200 shops, stalls, and inexpensive, mom and pop restaurants called *sodas*, which you can also find all throughout Costa Rica. These *sodas* typically offer a variety of traditional and popular fare. Traditional dishes – as opposed to popular dishes – are home-cooked style meals that can be traced back for generations. For example, *casado* is a hearty dish that includes rice, beans, salad, and a vegetable side, served with either chicken, beef, pork or fish.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Although some fruits and vegetables are seasonal, Costa Rica boasts a variety of delicious tropical fruits such as mangoes, papayas, pineapples, melons and bananas and unique varieties such as *marañón*, the fruit of the cashew tree. Plantains, a relative of the banana and found often in tropical climates, have a starchy flavor when green and a sweet taste when ripe, frying being the most common way to prepare them. Roadside stands offer visitors and locals refreshing coconut water, freshly cut and served.

Vegetables are often part of a meal in Costa Rican cooking; there is always *picadillo*, a vegetable and meat stew. *Palmito*, or a hearts of palm salad, features the cooked stalks of small palm trees served with other fresh vegetables. Another edible treat from the palm tree is the *pejibaye*, resembling an orange coconut. It is eaten cooked with a squirt of mayonnaise and can be purchased at street carts in San Jose.

SNACKS AND APPETIZERS

Native Costa Ricans, or Ticos, as they call themselves, love snacking, particularly on mini meat sandwiches called *arreglados*, as well as Tacos Ticos (a rolled up corn tortilla filled with shredded beef and topped with cabbage, and a special tangy sauce, empanadas and *gallos* (meat, chicken, cheese or beans with tortillas). Appetizers, or

bocas, are often served with drinks in bars. Common *bocas* include *ceviche* (marinated raw seafood salad), *patacones* (fried green plantain chips) and fried cassava. Chifrijo are also a favorite delight that consists of white rice on the bottom of the bowl, a layer of savory beans crowned with a portion of chicharrón (small cooked pieces of pork), topped by pico de gallo (a chopped blend of tomato, cilantro, onion, sweet pepper and lime juice) and are served with crispy corn tortilla chips.

MEAT AND SEAFOOD

With an abundance of pastures and two coasts offering fresh seafood, Costa Rican cuisine features many meat and seafood options. *Olla de carne*, a light beef stew with vegetables, is a classic local dish and invariably the recipe is different in each Costa Rican home. Roast pork and chicken are also very popular and are often prepared roasted over wood for a smoky flavor.

Near the coasts, fresh seafood is readily available. The most popular fish is *corvina*, or sea bass, which is prepared a number of ways, a must-try is Costa Rica's Caribbean take on ceviche (raw fish marinated in lemon juice with cilantro and onions, often made with sweet chili). Shrimp and lobster are also available throughout the country as well as dorado (mahi-mahi), swordfish, red snapper and others.

DESSERTS

Many of the sweets found in Costa Rica are prepared with condensed milk and raw sugar. Cakes range from the pound cake-like *queque seco*, meaning "dry cake," to the incredibly moist and rich *arroz con leche* (*rice pudding*). *Mazamorra* is another traditional dessert which resembles porridge, and is made by cooking corn in milk and adding cloves, vanilla and corn starch. For a portable snack option, try *cajetas*, a handmade type of fudge at roadside stands. Costa Rica also offers a variety of desserts that vary by region and that also incorporate seasonal fruits such as oranges, *pejivalle* or peach-palm, as well as *ayote* and *chiverre* squashes; the latter, is cooked with brown sugar and stuffed inside delicious empanadas, particularly popular during Holy Week. It is important to note that desserts vary by region and by the fruit that's in season, making the variety of Costa Rican pastries truly abundant.

BEVERAGES

Costa Rica offers a wide variety of beverages to enjoy from sunrise to sunset. Travelers can start the morning on a sweet note with *agua dulce*, warm melted sugarcane served straight or with milk or lemon. Refrescos, or *frescos* for short, are a refreshing blend of fruit and ice, although other ingredients can be substituted such as rice flour and cinnamon for a *horchata*. For those looking to try authentic alcoholic beverages, are local breweries offering lager-style beer thanks to an influx of German migrants, and coffee-based liqueurs are locally produced.

ETHNIC INFLUENCE

As an alternative to the traditional corner cafes, or "*sodas*," visitors can venture into cosmopolitan San Jose for a variety of different gastronomies. Peruvian, Mediterranean and Japanese are just a sampling of the variety of cuisines available –

and most at a very reasonable price point. Similar to European cultures, diners can linger for hours over a meal and guests will have to request checks as waiters will not drop them automatically at the end of a meal per Costa Rican dining tradition.

CARIBBEAN FLAVORS

Travelers will find a distinctly unique cuisine on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Coconut and coconut milk play a large part in dishes. Another favorite side is the ripe, yellow plantain. The two most common ways to prepare it is either by slicing it into *tajadas* and frying it, or frying the whole, peeled plantain, and then slicing it through the middle in order to add *queso fresco* and then leaving it in the oven for about 10 minutes. The results are amazing!

For those exploring Limon's Caribbean coast, a *patí* will satisfy hunger between meals. The pastry dough is prepared with annatto then stuffed with ground beef that has been seasoned with curry, onions and peppers and finally cooked in an oven for about 25 minutes. This portable snack is a fan-favorite for those who go to the local stadiums to root for their beloved soccer team.

Even the staple of rice and beans has a Caribbean twist in this area; instead of using black beans and the popular *sofrito* made with onions, peppers and cilantro, cooks mix red beans and rice in oil and coconut milk which results in a sweet rather than savory flavor. Visitors of the Caribbean coast are inclined to order *Rondon* ("rundown"), a stew particular to the area, consisting of the seafood catch of the day, fresh vegetables, and coconut cream.

A TASTE OF THE NORTHERN PACIFIC

Corn and rice are key ingredients in Guanacaste's cuisine. Plenty of love is put into the delicious "Tanelas Guanacastecas" (half-moon like pastries filled with cheese, cinnamon and sugar), *bizcochos* (crunchy baked cheese cornmeal rings), and sometimes served with a traditional breakfast drink is *agua dulce* (sweet water), made from real sugar-cane juice and sometimes eaten with a delicious *cuajada*, a non-processed white cheese made by adding salt to milk production.

Tamales may be considered one of Costa Rica's oldest food traditions, with an elaborate preparation method that required the entire family and even close friends to participate in its set-up. Costa Rican tamales are corn cakes stuffed with pork, chicken or beans, along with assorted vegetables, yellow rice, and aromatic seasonings. This would then be wrapped and tied in banana leaves, and boiled to completion. Due to the elaborate steps needed to make tamales, it is common for families to enjoy this delicacy around the holidays, especially during Christmas and Holy Week.

Wellness

5.1 COSTA RICA'S GIFT OF HAPPINESS: WELLNESS

Costa Rica has been recognized as one of the most positive and happiest countries in the world by both the Gallup World Index and the Happy Planet Index in 2011, 2012 and 2013. It is very common to receive sincere smiles and *pura vida* greetings by locals and other tourists alike. Costa Rica's level of joy, health and longevity can be linked to wellness, highlighting its role in a person's determination of happiness. Those motivated by the pursuit of wellness will rejoice in the variety of activities available upon arrival to Central America's "rich coast".

Many believe happiness resides in the Monteverde cloud forest where small groups can elevate themselves through a canopy bridge tour and appreciate bird's eye view of the national park. With an estimated 901 different bird species and a wide array of monkeys and sloths, animal sightings are guaranteed in the rainforests of Costa Rica and many visitors partake in these activities to enhance relaxation and reduce stress levels.

Finding wellness through yoga has become quite popular and many find yogi nirvana in Costa Rica. More than a series of stretches that relax the mind and body, yoga is also a system that uses diet, lifestyle guidelines as well as breathing, physical and mental exercises to help enhance a more peaceful lifestyle and connect to the world. Therefore, completing a yoga retreat in Puerto Viejo's Caribbean surroundings help participants align their beings and reach nirvana while testing their strength and flexibility levels. Rustic, open-air studios in the same region's village of Playa Cocles integrates into the Zen experience which allows vacationing yoga enthusiasts to release tensions that would keep them from reveling in everything *pura vida* stands for.

A region of the country that is creating a leadership position for wellness activities is the Southern Pacific. Both surf camps and yoga teaching centers have opened lodging facilities in order to house those who want to take their hobbies to the next level. Surrounded by organic community gardens, these havens offer a holistic wellness opportunity to those who venture to Quepos, Uvita, Dominical or Ojochal. Some opportunities find a way to combine yoga with surf or paddleboards.

A guided meditation to the sound of waterfalls in Bajos del Toro, followed by a relaxing massage at any of the luxury resorts in the country are available wellness options that can lead to the Tico gift of happiness. Others will feel more in tune with their inner-self by snorkeling alongside the underwater inhabitants of Costa Rica's most important coral reef in the Cahuita National Park.

While wellness activities bring visitors one step closer to happiness, the joy of food can complete that journey. Ticos are experts at devising delicious meals with the freshest ingredients and have been firm believers in the farm-to-table trend since before it was popular. The option to explore the local Central Market in San José and

choose from the colorful array of locally grown fruits and vegetables will have visitors feeling one with Mother Earth. Seasonal items are found in weekend farmers markets across the country. Local *sodas*, or small takeout stands, offer varied menus that change each day and highlight the taste of each region.

Enjoying five-star cuisine is part of many an agenda and downtown San José hosts many international options to satisfy the most particular palates. Many restaurants offer fusion delicacies by incorporating Costa Rican ingredients harvested from their own gardens to recipes respected around the world. The satisfaction provided by a well-devised meal is enough to put a smile on anyone's face.

Weddings

6.1 WEDDINGS AND HONEYMOONS IN COSTA RICA

A casually chic beach ceremony overlooking a spectacular sunset is a spectacular sight, but being able to enjoy the rush of adrenaline from zip-lining through a rain forest during one's honeymoon the very next day, makes [Costa Rica](#) an amazing options for couples considering a destination wedding. The Central American playground also promises honeymoon experiences that the enamored couple will remember forever.

To tie the knot, venues include luxury resorts, charming boutique hotels, and intimate villas. Guests can choose from a number of backdrops such as beautiful waterfalls in the area surrounding the Manuel Antonio National Park, picturesque mountains overlooking the Pacific Ocean, a luxurious beach escape in the Papagayo region or perhaps a quiet retreat at a romantic hideaway in the off-the-beaten-path Nicoya Peninsula. Many hotels offer wedding and honeymoon packages. Complementing that with complete planning services from experts in tropical destination weddings, allow couples to enjoy their surroundings in bliss.

For newlywed couples there are a wealth of options to enjoy during a honeymoon. Romantic activities include horseback riding in the Alajuela region, hiking through rain forests together where couples will spot beautiful wildlife in places such as the Manuel Antonio National Park, rappelling down waterfalls and kayaking along beautiful rivers. For a unique adventure experience, couples can challenge themselves hiking underground rivers and caves in the Venado Caves in the Arenal Volcano region.

Couples who have decided to give love another shot and are bringing together children from previous marriages will find that Costa Rica presents the opportunity for the whole family to delight in "familymoons". Parents and children can choose to enjoy snorkeling excursions in the Caribbean coast, trips to the Children's Museum in the capital city of San José or go horseback riding, which can take you through pastures and tropical forests. The trip will offer excellent bonding moments that will set the tone for the new family's life together.

One feature of a Costa Rican honeymoon is the adventure-laden regions that also offer numerous relaxing activities for couples to simply enjoy each other's company. Options include taking in the breathtaking views of the Arenal Volcano while soaking in the region's hot springs, sailing away on a romantic sunset cruise in the Gulf of

Papagayo and partaking in a dolphin or whale watching excursion off the coast of Corvocado. A full-body chocolate scrub or a pampering couples' massage in a private suite is the perfect way to end a day of adventure or complement a tranquil vacation.

Those couples looking for a more humanitarian experience can enjoy a wide array of options including saving turtles, cleaning beaches, or teaching children how to speak English. Many newlyweds make the most of this opportunity to learn more about the local customs and integrate themselves in the local culture while giving back to a community. Life altering volunteer experiences have led couples to start planning a return trip before they go back home.

Costa Rica has received numerous awards and accolades, including distinctions as a top ten honeymoon destination by Brides Magazine and the Signature Travel Network and a Modern Bride World's Trendiest Honeymoon Local Award. For those couples that are eco-enthusiasts, the Costa Rican government has created the Certificate for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program, a tourism rating system that guests can check to ensure sustainability of hotels, restaurants, tour operators and car rental companies.

Meetings

7.1 MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

Costa Rica sets the standard for one-of-a-kind meetings, conventions and events. With all of the state-of-the-art services and amenities needed to execute meetings large or small, Costa Rica's exotic landscape and unique adventures (think terrific team-building events) set the stage for a memorable group experience. The destination offers modern facilities that can accommodate everything from executive retreats and special interest groups to incentive travel and corporate meetings with first-class service, in every region. It is expected that the country will welcome its first National Convention Center for summer 2016, which will accommodate for conferences, exhibitions, large and small meetings alike.

LOCATION

Situated between two continents, Costa Rica is easily accessible from most major cities in North America, South America and Europe. The destination has two international airports serving 15 foreign airlines with an estimated 431 flights arriving per week.

CONVENTION CENTER

In the capital city of San José, the country's first large National Convention Center is underway and will be complete in 2016. Boasting 19,000 square feet of exhibition space and smaller break out rooms, the new complex will be LEED certified and designed to become a smart event space for small or large functions and gatherings.

GETTING AROUND

As a leading destination for travel and tourism, Costa Rica has the infrastructure in place to easily support group travel. Roads are good and transportation vehicles (vans, buses and motor coaches) are well-kept; they can be easily arranged by meeting planners.

CULTURE

Costa Ricans are proud of their heritage and an event in Costa Rica wouldn't be complete without incorporating the warm hospitality and culture of its people. Groups can organize a large-scale Costa Rican-style rodeo or a simple traditional dinner in any number of charming locales to incorporate a touch of authentic Costa Rican culture.

ACTIVITIES

The unique landscape that makes up the country creates diverse adventures for groups to explore. From zip lining and hiking in the rain forest to surfing and whale watching on the coasts, Costa Rica offers a setting that makes it easy to create once in a lifetime experiences and exceptional opportunities for team building activities. Of course, traditional activities abound with golf, spa and beach packages available throughout the region.

BEACHES

With more than 1,000 miles of shoreline spanning both the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts, there is no shortage of spectacular beaches awaiting groups in Costa Rica. Whether seeking the action of a surf lesson or simply looking to lounge during a team outing in the sun, Costa Rica's pristine beaches offer up a wealth of options that suit every activity level and preference.

SPACE

Member hotels and resorts offer a variety of settings from elegant to comfortable, accommodating every need and budget. Alternative locations such as a butterfly garden, coffee plantation, the National Museum or the Costa Rica Country Club can be a unique choice for groups interested in innovative meetings or events.

Costa Rica Press Materials

Images:

Please click on the following link to acquire access to Costa Rica's online photo library <https://22squared.app.box.com/s/k15p91350jvmw45jwv1r/1/3131810431>. Note: If link does not provide direct access to the gallery, copy link into your browser and press enter.

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