

# Directory

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

The hotel situation in Costa Rica ranges from luxurious ecolodges and sparkling all-inclusive resorts to backpacker palaces and I-can't-believe-I'm-paying-for-this barnyard-style quarters. Given this astounding variety of accommodations, it's rare to arrive in a town and find nowhere to sleep.

High or dry season (December to April) prices are provided throughout this book, though many lodges lower their prices during the low or rainy season (May to November). Keep in mind that prices change quickly in Costa Rica, so it's best to see the prices in this book as approximations rather than facts.

## BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels). You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

Throughout this book, sleeping options are listed in order of budget, unless otherwise specified.

## B&Bs

Almost unknown in the country in the 1980s, the B&B phenomenon has swept through Costa Rica in the past two decades, primarily fueled by the increasing number of resident European and North American expats. Generally speaking, B&Bs in Costa Rica tend to be midrange to top-end affairs. While some B&Bs are reviewed in this guide, you can also find this type of accommodation on several websites (although they are far from exhaustive):

**Bed and Breakfast.com** ([www.bedandbreakfast.com/costa-rica.html](http://www.bedandbreakfast.com/costa-rica.html))

**Costa Rica Innkeepers Association** ([www.costaricainnkeepers.com](http://www.costaricainnkeepers.com))

**Pamela Lanier's Worldwide Bed and Breakfasts Directory** ([www.lanierbb.com](http://www.lanierbb.com))

## Camping

Camping is the way that many Ticos (Costa Ricans) can enjoy the more expensive seaside towns, especially since these days most accommodations cater specifically to foreigners. As a result, most major tourist destinations have at least one campsite, and if not, most budget hotels outside San José accommodate campers on their grounds. Although these sites usually include toilets, cold showers and basic self-catering facilities (a sink and a BBQ pit), they can be crowded, noisy affairs.

In most national parks however, camp sites are generally of excellent quality and are rigorously cleaned and maintained by a dedicated

staff. As a general rule, you will need to carry in all of your food and supplies, and carry out all of your trash.

## Hostels

Although there are still a handful of Hostelling International (HI) hostels left in Costa Rica, the backpacker scene has gone increasingly top end in recent years. Compared to other destinations in Central America, hostels in Costa Rica tend to be fairly expensive affairs, though the quality of service and accommodation is unequalled.

## Hotels

It is always advisable to ask to see a room – and a bathroom – before committing to a stay, especially in budget lodgings.

## BUDGET

For the most part, this guide's budget category covers lodging in which a typical double costs up to US\$20. Cheaper places generally have shared bathrooms, but it's still possible to get a double with a private bathroom for US\$10 in some towns off the tourist trail. (Note that 'private' in some low-end establishments consists of a stall in the corner of your hotel room.) On the top end of the budget scale, rooms will frequently include a fan and private bathroom that may or may not have hot water. At the cheapest hotels, rooms will frequently be a stall, with walls that don't go to the ceiling.

Hot water in showers is often supplied by electric showerheads (affectionately termed

the 'Costa Rican suicide shower'). Contrary to traveler folklore, they are perfectly safe – provided you don't fiddle with the showerhead while it's on. The electric showerhead will actually dispense hot water if you keep the pressure low.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

Midrange generally covers hotels that charge between US\$20 and US\$80. These rooms will be more comfortable than budget options, and generally include a private bathroom with gas-heated hot water, a choice between fans and air-con, and cable or satellite TV. The better places will offer tour services, and many will have an onsite restaurant or bar and a swimming pool or Jacuzzi. In this price range, many hotels offer kitchenettes or even full kitchens, and using them is a great way to save money if you're traveling in a large group or as a family.

Anything more than US\$80 is considered top end, and includes ecolodges, all-inclusive resorts, business and chain hotels, in addition to a strong network of more intimate boutique hotels, remote jungle camps and upmarket B&Bs. Many such lodging options will include amenities such as hot-water bath tubs, private decks, satellite TV and air-con as well as concierge, tour and spa services.

Most midrange and top-end places charge 16.39% in taxes. This book has attempted to include taxes in the prices listed throughout. Note that many hotels charge per person, rather than per room – read rates carefully. For information on reserving hotels by credit card, see boxed text, opposite.

## ACTIVITIES

### Bungee Jumping

No vacation appears to be complete without a head-first, screaming plunge off a bridge. **Tropical Bungee** (☎ 2248 2212, 8383 9724; www.bungee.co.cr; 1st/2nd jump US\$65/30) in San José has been organizing jumps off the Río Colorado bridge since 1992.

### Canopy Tours

Life in the rain forest takes place at canopy level. But with trees extending 30m to 60m in height, the average human has a hard time getting a look at what's going on up there. Enter the so-called 'canopy tour.'

Some companies have built elevated walkways through the trees that allow hikers to stroll

## RESERVING BY CREDIT CARD

Some of the pricier hotels will require that you confirm your reservation with a credit card. Before doing so, note that some top-end hotels require a 50% to 100% payment upfront when you reserve. Unfortunately, many of them don't communicate this rule clearly.

Sometimes visitors end up 'reserving' a room only to find out that they have actually paid for it in advance. Technically, reservations can be cancelled and refunded with enough advance notice. (Again, ask the hotel about its cancellation policy.) However, in Costa Rica it's a lot easier to make the reservation than to unmake it. In addition, many hotels charge a 7% service fee for credit card use.

Have the hotel fax or email you a confirmation. Hotels often get overbooked, and if you don't have confirmation, you could be out of a room.

through. SkyTrek (p179) near Monteverde and Rainmaker (p341) near Quepos are two of the most established operations in the country. A somewhat newer but equally popular operation is Actividades Arboreales (p369) near Santa María de Dota.

You can also take a ski-lift-style ride through the tree tops, such as the Rainforest Aerial Tram (p148) near Braulio Carrillo or the smaller Aerial Adventures & Natural Wonders Tram (p179) in Monteverde.

## Diving & Snorkeling

Costa Rica doesn't pretend to rank alongside regional diving and snorkeling heavyweights like Belize, the Cayman Islands and Bonaire. However, Costa Rica's underwater world does offer sheer number and variety of underwater life, and there are few places in the world where you can dive in the Caribbean and the Pacific on the same day.

As a general rule, water visibility is not good during the rainy months, when rivers swell and their outflow clouds the ocean. At this time, boats to locations offshore offer better viewing opportunities.

The water is warm – around 75°F (24°C) to 84°F (29°C) at the surface, with a thermocline at around 20m below the surface where it drops to 73°F (23°C). If you're keeping it shallow, you can skin dive (ie no wetsuit).

For information on the best dive sites in Costa Rica, see p73.

If you want to maximize your diving time, it's advisable to get diving accreditation ahead of time. For more information, check out the **Professional Association of Diving Instructors** (PADI); ☎ in the USA 949-858 7234, 800-729 7234, in Canada 604-552 5969, 800-565 8130, in Switzerland 52-304 1414; www.padi.com). **Divers Alert Network** (☎ in the USA 800-446 2671, 919-684 2948; www.diversalertnetwork.org) is a nonprofit

organization that provides diving insurance and emergency medical evacuation.

If you are interested in diving but are not accredited, you can usually do a one-day introductory course that will allow you to do one or two accompanied dives. If you love it, which most people do, consider getting certified, which takes three to four days and costs around US\$350 to US\$400.

The following dive companies offer tours to Costa Rica:

**JD's Watersports** (☎ in the USA 970-356 1028, 800-477 8971; www.jdwatersports.com)

**Okeanos Aggressor** (☎ in the USA 985-385 2628, in the USA & Canada 800-348 2628; www.aggressor.com)

**Undersea Hunter** (☎ 2228 6613, in the USA 800-203 2120; www.underseahunter.com)

For snorkelers, many coastal areas have popular reefs. Leading destinations include Cahuita (p476), Manzanillo (p492), Isla del Caño (p406) and Isla Tortuga (p301).

## Fishing

Sportfishing is tremendously popular in Costa Rica, though the 'catch-and-release' mantra is strongly encouraged.

Inland, fishing in rivers and lakes is popular. Río Savegre near San Gerardo de Dota is recommended for trout fishing (p372) and Caño Negro for snook (p506). Check with the local operators about closed seasons.

The ocean is always open for fishing. As a general rule, the Pacific coast is best from June and July, though you'll get better fishing on the south coast during that period, while the Caribbean is best during September to November. For more information, see p77.

A good fishing resource is **Costa Rica Outdoors** (☎ 2282 6743, in the USA 800-308 3394; www.costaricaoutdoors.com), a magazine available online or in

## HOTEL SECURITY

Although hotels give you room keys, it is recommended that you carry a padlock for your backpack or suitcase for extra security. Furthermore, don't invite trouble by leaving valuables, cash or important documents lying around your room or in an unlocked bag. Upmarket hotels will have safes where you can keep your money and passport, so it's advised that you take advantage of them. If you're staying in a basic place, it's probably wise to take your valuables with you at all times. Theft is perhaps the number one complaint of travelers in Costa Rica, so it can't hurt to take a few extra precautions.

## RESPONSIBLE DIVING & SAFETY GUIDELINES

Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve the ecology and beauty of reefs.

- Never use anchors on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practice and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time within them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof, creating air pockets that will leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy corals or shells, or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimize your disturbance of marine animals. Never ride on the backs of turtles.

Before embarking on a scuba diving, skin diving or snorkeling trip, carefully consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

- Possess a current diving certification card from a recognized scuba diving instructional agency (if scuba diving).
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable diving.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions at the dive site from a reputable local dive operation.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about marine life and the environment.
- Dive only at sites within your realm of experience; if available, engage the services of a competent, professionally trained dive instructor or dive master.
- Be aware that underwater conditions vary significantly from one region, or even site, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any site and dive conditions. These differences influence the way divers dress for a dive and what diving techniques they use.
- Ask about the environmental characteristics that can affect your diving and how local trained divers deal with these considerations.

hardcopy that carries information on adventure travel, with a focus on fishing.

The following companies offer fishing tours in Costa Rica:

**Discover Costa Rica** (☎ 2257 5780, in the USA 888-484 8227; [www.discover-costa-rica.com](http://www.discover-costa-rica.com)) Offers six-day fishing packages and is based in Quepos.

**JD's Watersports** (☎ in the USA 970-356 1028, 800-477 8971; [www.jdwatersports.com](http://www.jdwatersports.com))

**Rod & Reel Adventures** (☎ in the USA 800-356 6982; [www.rodreeladventures.com](http://www.rodreeladventures.com))

## Hiking & Trekking

With mountains, valleys, jungles, cloud forests and two coastlines, Costa Rica is one of Central America's most varied hiking and trekking destinations. The country also boasts an extensive number of national parks that have well-developed hiking and trekking networks in even the most remote areas.

For long-distance hiking and trekking, it's best to travel in the dry season (December to April). Outside this narrow window, rivers

become impassable and trails are prone to flooding. In the highlands, journeys become more taxing in the rain, and the bare landscape offers little protection. And then there are the mosquitoes, which needless to say, are enough to put a damper on your fun.

The following companies offer trekking tours in Costa Rica:

**Costa Rica Trekking Adventures** (☎ 2771 4582; [www.chirripo.com](http://www.chirripo.com); San Isidro de El General) Offers multi-day treks in Chirripó, Corcovado and Tapanti.

**Ocarina Expeditions** (☎ 2229 4278; [www.ocarinaexpeditions.com](http://www.ocarinaexpeditions.com)) Naturalist-led treks in Corcovado and Chirripó, as well as volcano and cloud-forest hiking.

**Osa Aventura** (☎ 2735 5670; [www.osaaventura.com](http://www.osaaventura.com)) Specializes in treks through Corcovado.

## Horseback Riding

Wherever you go in Costa Rica, you will inevitably find someone giving horseback-riding trips. Rates vary from US\$25 for an hour or two to over US\$100 for a full day. Overnight trips with pack horses can also be arranged, and are a popular way of accessing remote destinations in the national parks. Riders weighing more than 100kg (221lb) cannot expect small local horses to carry them very far.

Travelers should continue to recommend good outfitters (and give the heads up on bad ones) by writing to Lonely Planet.

The following companies organize horse riding in Costa Rica:

**Sarapiquí Aguas Bravas** (☎ 2292 2072; [www.aguas-bravas.co.cr](http://www.aguas-bravas.co.cr)) Offers rafting, biking and horse-riding day trips around Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí and La Virgen.

**Serendipity Adventures** (☎ 2558 1000, in the USA 734-995 0111, 800-635 2325; [www.serendipityadventures.com](http://www.serendipityadventures.com)) Creates quality horse-riding itineraries, including journeys to a Cabécar indigenous reserve.

## Mountain Biking & Motorcycling

Outfitters in Costa Rica and the US can organize multiday mountain-biking trips around Costa Rica that cover stretches of highland and beach. Gear is provided on trips organized by local companies, but US outfitters require that you bring your own.

Most international airlines will fly your bike as a piece of checked baggage if you box it (remember to pad it well, because the box is liable to be roughly handled). Some airlines might charge you an extra handling fee.

You can rent mountain bikes in almost any tourist town, but the condition of the equipment varies. Another option is to buy a decent bike and sell it back at a reduced rate at the end of your trip. It is advisable to bring your own helmet and water bottle as the selection of such personalized items may be wider in your home country. For a monthly fee of US\$10, **Trail Source** ([www.trailsources.com](http://www.trailsources.com)) can provide you with information on trails all over Costa Rica and the world.

The following companies organize bike tours in Costa Rica:

**Backroads** (☎ in the USA 510-527 1555, 800-462 2848; [www.backroads.com](http://www.backroads.com)) Offers a six-day cycling trip around Arenal and the Pacific coast.

**Coast to Coast Adventures** (☎ 2280 8054; [www.ctocadventures.com](http://www.ctocadventures.com)) Everything from short biking excursions to 14-day coast-to-coast multisport trips.

## SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR HIKING & TREKKING

Before embarking on a trip, consider the following points to ensure that you have a safe and enjoyable experience:

- Pay any fees and possess any permits required by local authorities.
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period.
- Obtain reliable information from park authorities about the physical and environmental conditions along your intended route.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.
- Walk in regions and trails within your realm of experience.
- Be aware that weather conditions and terrain vary significantly from one region, or even from one trail, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any trail. These differences influence the way walkers dress and the equipment they carry.
- Before you set out, ask about the environmental characteristics that can affect your walk and how local, experienced walkers deal with these characteristics.

## RESPONSIBLE HIKING & TREKKING

Consider the following tips to help preserve the ecology and beauty of Costa Rica when hiking.

### Rubbish

- Carry out all your rubbish. Don't overlook easily forgotten items, such as silver paper, orange peel, cigarette butts and plastic wrappers. Empty packaging should be stored in a dedicated rubbish bag. Make an effort to carry out rubbish left by others.
- Never bury your rubbish – digging disturbs soil and ground cover and encourages erosion. Buried rubbish will likely be dug up by animals, who may be injured or poisoned by it. It may also take years to decompose.
- Minimize waste by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you will need. Take reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms and toilet paper should be carried out despite the inconvenience. They burn and decompose poorly.

### Human Waste Disposal

- Contamination of water sources by human feces can lead to the transmission of all sorts of nasties. Where there is a toilet, please use it. Where there is none, bury your waste. Dig a small hole 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse. Cover the waste with soil and a rock. In snow, dig down to the soil.
- Ensure that the guidelines above are applied to a portable toilet tent if one is being used by a large trekking party. Encourage all party members, including porters, to use the site.

### Washing

- Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, even if they are biodegradable.
- For personal washing, use biodegradable soap and a water container (or even a lightweight, portable basin) at least 50m away from the watercourse. Disperse the waste water widely to allow the soil to filter it fully.
- Wash cooking utensils 50m from watercourses using a scourer, sand or snow (not detergent).

### Fires & Low-Impact Cooking

- Don't depend on open fires for cooking. The cutting of wood for fires in popular trekking areas can cause rapid deforestation. Cook on a lightweight kerosene, alcohol or Shellite (white gas) stove and avoid those powered by disposable butane gas canisters.

.com) Creates custom biking itineraries to fit your schedule and your group.

**Western Spirit Cycling** (☎ in the USA 800-845 2453; www.westernspirit.com) Offers a few different eight-day biking itineraries.

**Wild Rider** (☎ 2258 4604; www.wild-rider.com) Motorcycle tours; see San José, p112.

### River Rafting & Kayaking

The months between June and October are considered to be the wildest time for river rafting and kayaking, though some rivers offer good trips all year. Rafters and kayakers should bring sunblock, a spare change of clothes, a waterproof bag for a camera, and river sandals for foot protection. The govern-

- If you are trekking with a guide and porters, supply stoves for the whole team. In alpine areas, ensure that all members are outfitted with enough clothing so that fires are not a necessity for warmth.
- If you patronize local accommodation, select those places that do not use wood fires to heat water or cook food.
- Fires may be acceptable below the tree line in areas that get very few visitors. If you light a fire, use an existing fireplace. Don't surround fires with rocks. Use only dead, fallen wood. Remember the adage 'the bigger the fool, the bigger the fire.' Use minimal wood – just what you need for cooking. In huts, leave wood for the next person.
- Ensure that you fully extinguish a fire after use. Spread the embers and flood them with water.

### Wildlife Conservation

- Do not feed the wildlife as this can lead to animals becoming dependent on handouts, to unbalanced populations and to diseases.
- Discourage the presence of wildlife by not leaving food scraps behind you. Place gear out of reach and tie packs to rafters or trees.
- Do not engage in or encourage hunting. It is illegal in all parks and reserves.
- Don't buy items made from endangered species.
- Don't attempt to exterminate animals in huts. In wild places, they are likely to be protected native animals.

### Erosion

- Hillsides and mountain slopes, especially at high altitudes, are prone to erosion. Stick to existing trails and avoid short cuts.
- If a well-used trail passes through a mud patch, walk through the mud so as not to increase the size of the patch.
- Avoid removing the plant life that keeps topsoil in place.

### Camping on & Accessing Private Property

- Always seek permission to camp from landowners.
- Always seek permission prior to accessing private property.

**Costa Rica Expeditions** (☎ 2257 0766, 2222 0333; www.costaricaexpeditions.com) Multisport itineraries including biking, hiking, rafting and other adventures.

**Harley Davidson Rentals** (☎ 2289 5552; www.mariaalexandra.com) Motorcycle tours; see p117.

**Lava Tours** (☎ 2281 2458; www.lava-tours.com) Reader-recommended tours include a bike ride (mostly downhill) from the Cerro de la Muerte to Manuel Antonio. Offers day trips, multiday packages and riding clinics.

**MotoDiscovery** (☎ in the USA 800-233 6564, 830-438 7744; www.motodiscovery.com) Organizes motorcycle tours through Central America. An annual trip takes riders from the Rio Grande (known locally as Rio Bravo del Norte) in Mexico to the Panama Canal on their own motorcycles.

**Serendipity Adventures** (☎ 2558 1000, in the USA 734-995 0111, 800-635 2325; www.serendipityadventures

ment regulation of outfitters is poor, so make sure that your guide is well versed in safety and has had emergency medical training.

River kayaking can be organized in conjunction with white-water rafting trips if you are experienced; sea kayaking is a popular activity year-round.

The Adventure Travel chapter (p74) has more detailed information on destinations to raft and kayak.

Many companies specialize in kayaking and rafting trips:

**Aventuras Naturales** (☎ 2225 3939, 2224 0505, in the USA 800-514 0411; www.toenjoynature.com)

**BattenKill Canoe Ltd** (☎ in the USA 802-362 2800, 800-421 5268; www.battenkill.com) Trips include a six-day

canoe journey around Monteverde and an 11-day paddle through Talamanca.

**Coast to Coast Adventures** (☎ 2280 8054; www.ctc.adventures.com) Trips incorporate rafting, biking and trekking.

**Costa Rica Expeditions** (☎ 2257 0766, 2222 0333; www.costaricaexpeditions.com) Multisport itineraries including rafting and other adventures.

**Costa Rica Sun Tours** (☎ 2296 7757; www.crsun.tours.com)

**Exploradores Outdoors** (☎ 2222 6262; www.exploradoresoutdoors.com) With offices in San José and Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, offers one- and two-day rafting trips.

**Gulf Islands Kayaking** (in Canada ☎ 250-539 2442; www.seakayak.ca) Tours on offer include five days of sea kayaking in Corcovado.

**H2O Adventures** (☎ 2777 4092; www.aventurash2o.com) Two- and five-day adventures on the Río Savegre. Also offers day-long river-rafting and sea-kayaking excursions.

**Mountain Travel Sobek** (☎ in the USA 510-594 6000, 888-687 6235; www.mtsobek.com) Offers a 10-day adventure that incorporates sea kayaking and river rafting.

**Ocarina Expeditions** (☎ 2229 4278; www.ocarinaexpeditions.com)

**Rios Tropicales** (☎ 2233 6455; www.riostropicales.com) Offers many day-long river-rafting trips, as well as some two- and three-day adventures on the Río Pacuare and two days of kayaking in Tortuguero.

**Safaris Corobici** (☎ 2669 6191; www.nicoya.com)

These slow-moving rafting trips are less for adventurers and more for birders.

**Sarapiquí Aguas Bravas** (☎ 2292 2072; www.aguas-bravas.co.cr) Offers rafting, biking and horse-riding day trips around Sarapiquí and La Virgen.

## Surfing

Most international airlines accept surfboards (they must be properly packed in a padded board bag) as one of the two pieces of checked luggage, though this is getting more difficult (and expensive) in the age of higher fuel tariffs.

Domestic airlines offer more of a challenge. They will accept surfboards (for an extra charge), but the board must be under 2.1m in length. If the plane is full, there's a chance your board won't make it on because of weight restrictions.

In recent years, it's becoming more popular to buy a board (new or used) in Costa Rica, and then sell it before you leave. Outfitters in many of the popular surf towns rent short and long boards, fix dings, give classes and organize excursions. Jacó (p330), Tamarindo (p273), Pavones (p440) and Puerto Viejo de Talamanca (p478) are good for these types of activities.

For detailed surfing information, including a comprehensive surf map, see p74. The following companies organize tours and/or courses:

**Costa Rica Rainforest Outward Bound** (☎ 2278 6058, in the USA 800-676 2018; www.crrobs.org) Multi-week courses cover surf spots in Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica.

**Discover Costa Rica** (☎ 2257 5780, in the USA 888-484 8227; www.discover-costa-rica.com) Budget surf packages center on Tamarindo, Jacó and the Caribbean coast.

**Pura Vida Adventures** (☎ in the USA 415-465 2162; www.puravidadventures.com; Mal País) Six-day packages for women and couples.

**Tico Travel** (☎ in the USA 800-493 8426; www.ticotravel.com) Offers a great variety of surfing packages and camps.

**Venus Surf Adventures** (☎ 8840 2365, in the USA 800-793 0512; www.venusurfadventures.com; Pavones) Offers a six-day surf camp for women only, including lessons, yoga and other activities.

## Wildlife- & Bird-Watching

Costa Rica's biodiversity is legendary, so it should come as no surprise that the country offers unparalleled opportunities for wildlife- and bird-watching.

Any of Costa Rica's national parks are good places for observing wildlife, as are the various private reserves scattered around the country.

Perhaps the single best area for spotting wildlife is the Península de Osa, specifically Parque Nacional Corcovado (p425). Parque Nacional Santa Rosa (p220), Tortuguero (p460) and Caño Negro (p507) all provide good birding and wildlife-watching opportunities. Quetzals can be found in the areas near the Cerro de la Muerte (p373), such as Parque Nacional Los Quetzales (p372). The reserves around Monteverde and Santa Elena (p170) are good for quetzal-watching too. A map of the protected areas of Costa Rica appears p67.

The following Costa Rican-based companies come highly recommended by our readers. These companies can book everything, from gentle hikes to expeditions in remote wilderness.

**Aratinga Tours** (☎ 2770 6324; www.aratinga-tours.com) Pieter Westra specializes in bird tours in his native Dutch, but he is fluent in English, Spanish and many dialects of bird. His website provides an excellent introduction to birding in Costa Rica.

**Birding Costa Rica** (☎ 2294 0463; www.birdscostarica.com) Highly recommended agency that creates special birding itineraries or custom adventure and hiking tours.

**Condor Journeys & Adventures** (☎ in the USA 318-775 0190, in the UK 01700-841 318, in France 06-14 38 63 94)

**Costa Rica Expeditions** (☎ 2257 0766, 2222 0333; www.costaricaexpeditions.com) Offers custom itineraries and a network of ec lodges.

**Expediciones Tropicales** (☎ 2257 4171; www.costarica.info.com) Offers a variety of one- and two-week itineraries.

**Horizontes** (☎ 2222 2022; www.horizontes.com) An 11-day itinerary (US\$1706) visits Tortuguero, Arenal, Monteverde and Manuel Antonio.

## Windsurfing & Kitesurfing

Laguna de Arenal is the nation's undisputed windsurfing (and kitesurfing) center. From

December to April, winds are strong and steady, averaging 20 knots in the dry season, with maximum winds often 30 knots, and windless days are a rarity. The lake has a year-round water temperature of 64°F (18°C) to 70°F (21°C) with 1m-high swells. For more information see boxed text, p250.

For warmer water (but more inconsistent winds), try Puerto Soley in the Bahía Salinas (p227).

## BUSINESS HOURS

Restaurants are usually open from 7am and serve dinner until 9pm, though upscale places may open only for dinner. In remote areas, even the small *sodas* (inexpensive eateries) might open only at specific meal times. See other business hours on the inside cover of this book. Unless otherwise stated, count on sights, activities and restaurants to be open daily.

## CHILDREN

Generally speaking, Costa Rica is a kid-friendly country, especially since Ticos themselves are extremely family orientated, and will go out of their way to lavish attention on children. Although you will have to take certain precautions to ensure the health and safety of your little ones, Costa Rica is arguably the most popular family destination in Latin America.

For starters, children under the age of 12 receive a discount of 25% on domestic airline flights, while children under two fly free (provided they sit on a parent's lap). Children pay full fare on buses (except for those under the age of three). Infant car seats are not always available at car-rental agencies, so bring your own.

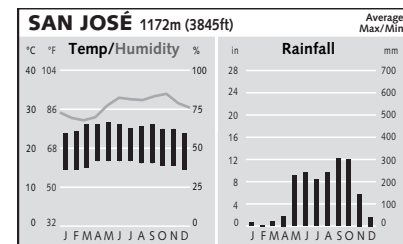
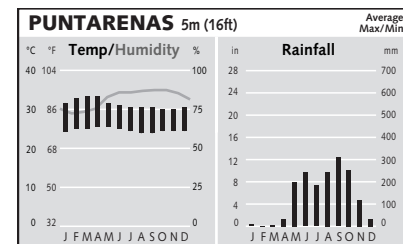
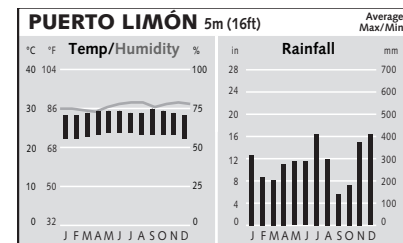
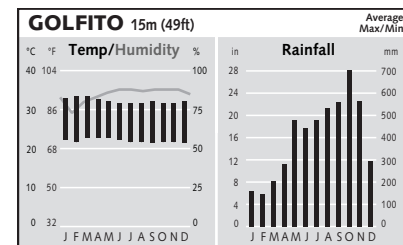
Most midrange and top-end hotels have reduced rates for children under 12, provided the child shares a room with parents. Top-end hotels will provide cribs and usually have activities for children.

If you're traveling with an infant, bring disposable diapers (nappies), baby creams or toiletries, baby aspirin and a thermometer from home, or stock up in San José. In rural areas, supplies may be difficult to find, though cloth diapers are more widespread (and friendlier to the environment).

For a near-infinite number of other travel suggestions, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*.

## CLIMATE

For a small country, Costa Rica's got an awful lot of weather going on. The highlands are cold, the cloud forest is misty and cool, San José and the Central Valley get an 'eternal spring' and both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts are pretty much sweltering year-round. Get ready for some bad-hair days! See below for more information.



## COURSES

### Language

Spanish-language schools operate all over Costa Rica and charge by the hour for instruction. Lessons are usually intensive, with class sizes varying from two to five pupils and classes meeting for several hours every weekday.

Courses are offered mainly in central San José and the suburb of San Pedro, which has a lively university and student scene – see boxed text Talk like a Tico, p93. In the Central Valley, there are a number of institutions offering courses – see boxed text Spanish Schools in the Central Valley, p130.

Language schools can also be found in Santa Elena and Monteverde (p179), Playa Sámara (p294), Jacó (p331), Manuel Antonio (p347), La Fortuna (p235) and Dominical (p361).

It is best to arrange classes in advance. A good clearing house is the **Institute for Spanish Language Studies** (ISLS; ☎ 2258 5111, in the USA 800-765 0025, 626-441 3507, 858-456 9268; www.isls.com), which represents half a dozen schools in Costa Rica.

## CUSTOMS

All travelers over the age of 18 are allowed to enter the country with 5L of wine or spirits and 500g of processed tobacco (400 cigarettes or 50 cigars). Camera gear, binoculars, and camping, snorkeling and other sporting equipment are readily allowed into the country.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

For the latest official reports on travel to Costa Rica see the websites of the **US State Department** (www.travel.state.gov/travel) or the **UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

## Earthquakes & Volcanic Eruptions

Costa Rica lies on the edge of active tectonic plates, so it is decidedly earthquake prone. Recent major quakes occurred in 1990 (7.1 on the Richter scale) and 1991 (7.4). Smaller quakes and tremors happen quite often – particularly on the Peninsula de Nicoya – cracking roads and knocking down telephone lines. The volcanoes in Costa Rica are not really dangerous as long as you stay on designated trails and don't try to peer into the crater of an active volcano. As a precaution, always check with park rangers before setting out in the vicinity of active volcanoes.

## Hiking Hazards

Hikers setting out into the wilderness should be adequately prepared for their trips. Most importantly, don't bite off more than you can chew. If your daily exercise routine consists of walking from the fridge to the TV, don't start your trip with a 20km trek. There are plenty of 3km and 5km trails that are ideally suited to the less active.

In addition, carry plenty of water, even on very short trips. The hiking is hot and dehydration sets in quickly. In Corcovado, at least one hiker dies every year of heat exhaustion on the scorching trail between San Pedrillo and Sirena. Hikers have also been known to get lost in rain forests, so carry maps, extra food and a compass. Let someone know where you are going, so they can narrow the search area in the event of an emergency.

There is also wildlife to contend with. Central America's most poisonous snakes, the fer-de-lance (the 'Costa Rican landmine') and the bushmaster, are quite assertive, and crocodiles are a reality at many estuaries. As if these creatures weren't enough to make you worried, it's also worth mentioning that bull sharks love to lounge at the mouth of Río Sirena in Corcovado.

## Ocean Hazards

Approximately 200 drownings a year occur in Costa Rican waters, 90% of which are caused by riptides, which are strong current that pulls the swimmer out to sea. Many deaths in riptides are caused by panicked swimmers struggling to the point of exhaustion. If you are caught in a riptide, do not struggle. Simply float and let the tide carry you out beyond the breakers, after which the riptide will dissipate, then swim parallel to the beach and allow the surf to carry you back in. For more information on riptides see boxed text, p278.

## River-Rafting Hazards

River-rafting expeditions may be particularly risky during periods of heavy rain – flash floods have been known to capsizе rafts. Reputable tour operators will ensure conditions are safe before setting out; see p526 for a list of operators.

## Thefts & Muggings

The biggest danger that most travelers face is theft, primarily from pickpockets. There is a lot of petty crime in Costa Rica so keep your

## PRACTICALITIES

- **Electricity** Electrical current is 110V AC at 60Hz; plugs are two flat prongs (same as the USA).
- **Emergency** The local tourism board, Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), is located in San José and distributes a helpful brochure with up-to-date emergency numbers for every region.
- **Magazines** The Spanish-language *Esta Semana* is the best local weekly news magazine.
- **Newspapers** The most widely distributed newspaper is *La Nación* (www.nacion.co.cr), followed by *Al Día* (a tabloid), *La República* and *La Prensa Libre* (www.prensalibre.co.cr). *Tico Times* (www.ticotimes.net), the English-language weekly newspaper, hits the streets every Friday afternoon.
- **Radio** 107.5FM is the English-language radio station, playing current hits and providing a regular BBC news feed.
- **TV** Cable and satellite TV are widely available for a fix of CNN, French videos or Japanese news, and local TV stations have a mix of news, variety shows and *telenovelas* (Spanish-language soap operas).
- **Video Systems** Videos on sale use the NTSC image registration system (same as the USA).
- **Weights & Measures** Costa Ricans use the metric system for weights, distances and measures.

wits about you at all times and don't let your guard down.

## DISABLED TRAVELERS

Independent travel is difficult for anyone with mobility problems. Although Costa Rica has an equal-opportunity law for disabled people, the law applies only to new or newly remodeled businesses and is loosely enforced. Therefore, very few hotels and restaurants have features specifically suited to wheelchair use. Many don't have ramps, while room or bathroom doors are rarely wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair.

Outside the buildings, streets and sidewalks are potholed and poorly paved, making wheelchair use frustrating at best. Public buses don't have provisions to carry wheelchairs and most national parks and outdoor tourist attractions don't have trails suited to wheelchair use. Notable exceptions include Volcán Poás (p139), INBio (p145) and the Rainforest Aerial Tram (p148). Lodges with wheelchair accessibility are indicated in the reviews.

The following organizations offer specially designed trips for disabled travelers:

- **Accessible Journeys** (☎ in the USA 800-846 4537; www.disabilitytravel.com) Organizes independent travel to Costa Rica for people with disabilities.
- **Vaya con Silla de Ruedas** (☎ 2454 2810; www.go withwheelchairs.com) Offers specialty trips for the wheelchair-bound traveler. The company has specially designed vans and its equipment meets international accessibility standards.

## DISCOUNT CARDS

Students with an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) or a valid ID from a university offering four-year courses are generally entitled to discounts on museum or guided-tour fees. Cards supplied by language schools are not honored.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Mornings are the best time to go to embassies and consulates, as they are at their quietest. Australia and New Zealand do not have consular representation in Costa Rica; the closest embassies are in Mexico City. For visa information see p537. All of the following are located in San José.

- **Canada** (☎ 2242 4400; Oficentro Ejecutivo La Sabana, Edificio 3, 3rd fl, Sabana Sur) Behind La Contraloría.
- **El Salvador** (☎ 2257 7855) Head 500m north and 25m west of the Toyota dealership on Paseo Colón.
- **France** (☎ 2234 4167) On the road to Curridabat, 200m south and 50m west of the Indoor Club.
- **Germany** (☎ 2232 5533) On the 8th floor of Torre La Sabana, on Sabana Norte, 300m west of the ICE building.
- **Guatemala** (☎ 2283 2555; Curridabat) Casa Izquierda, 500m south and 30m west of Pops.
- **Honduras** (☎ 2291 5147; Urbanización Trejos Montelegre) About 100m west of Banca Promérica, Escazú.
- **Israel** (☎ 2221 6444; Edificio Centro Colón, 11th fl, Paseo Colón)
- **Italy** (☎ 2234 2326; Av Central & Calle 41, Los Yoses)
- **Mexico** (☎ 2257 0633) About 250m south of the Subaru dealership, Los Yoses.

**Netherlands** (☎ 2296 1490; Oficentro Ejecutivo La Sabana, Edificio 3, 3rd fl, Sabana Sur) Behind La Contraloría.

**Nicaragua** (☎ 2283 8222; Av Central 2540 btwn Calles 25 & 27, Barrio La California)

**Panama** (☎ 2281 2442) Head 200m south and 25m east from the *antiguo higuero*n (old fig tree), San Pedro.

**Spain** (☎ 2222 1933; Calle 32 btwn Paseo Colón & Av 2)

**Switzerland** (☎ 2221 3229; Edificio Centro Colón, 10th fl, Paseo Colón btwn Calles 38 & 40)

**UK** (☎ 2258 2025; Edificio Centro Colón, 11th fl, Paseo Colón btwn Calles 38 & 40)

**USA** (☎ 2220 3939; Carretera a Pavas) Opposite Centro Comercial del Oeste.

## FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS

The following events are of national significance in Costa Rica:

### JANUARY/FEBRUARY

**Fiesta de Santa Cruz** (mid-January) Held in Santa Cruz, there is a religious procession, rodeo, bullfight, music, dances and a beauty pageant.

**Las Fiestas de Palmares** (mid-January) Ten days of beer drinking, horse shows and other carnival events in the tiny town of Palmares.

**Fiesta de los Diablicos** (December 31 to January 2 in Boruca; February 5 to 8 in Curré) Men wear carved wooden devil masks and burlap masks to re-enact the fight between the Indians and the Spanish. In this one, the Spanish lose.

### MARCH

**Día del Boyero** (second Sunday of the month) A parade is held in Escazú in honor of oxcart drivers.

**Día de San José** (St Joseph's Day; March 19) This day honors the patron saint of the capital.

### JUNE

**Día de San Pedro & San Pablo** (St Peter & St Paul Day; June 29) Celebrations with religious processions held in villages of the same name.

### JULY

**Fiesta de La Virgen del Mar** (Festival of the Virgin of the Sea; mid-July) Held in Puntarenas and Playa del Coco, it involves colorful regattas and boat parades.

**Día de Guanacaste** (July 25) Celebrates the annexation of Guanacaste from Nicaragua. There's a rodeo in Santa Cruz on this day.

### AUGUST

**La Virgen de los Ángeles** (August 2) The patron saint is celebrated with an important religious procession from San José to Cartago.

### OCTOBER

**Día de la Raza** (Columbus Day; October 12) Puerto Limón celebrates with gusto the explorer's landing at nearby Isla Uvita. The four- or five-day carnival is full of colorful street parades and dancing, music, singing and drinking.

### NOVEMBER

**Día de los Muertos** (All Souls' Day; November 2) Families visit graveyards and have religious parades in honor of the deceased.

### DECEMBER

**La Inmaculada Concepción** (Immaculate Conception; December 8) An important religious holiday.

**Las Fiestas de Zapote** (December 25 to January 1) A weeklong celebration of all things Costa Rican (namely rodeos, cowboys, carnival rides, fried food and a whole lot of drinking) in Zapote, southeast of San José.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Let's start with the good news. In Costa Rica, the situation facing gay and lesbian travelers is better than in most Central American countries. Homosexual acts between two consenting adults (aged 18 and over) are legal, though note that travelers may be subject to the laws of their own country in regard to sexual relations. Most Costa Ricans are tolerant of homosexuality only at a 'don't ask; don't tell' level. This is undoubtedly a side effect of the strong role of Catholicism and the persistence of traditionalism in society.

Here's the bad news. In the recent past, there have been an increasing number of outward acts of prejudice. In 1998, a gay-and-lesbian festival planned in San José was cancelled following heavy opposition from Catholic clergy. The church also forced the cancellation of a gay-and-lesbian tour to Manuel Antonio, and encouraged the boycott of a coastal hotel hosting a gay group. Things took an embarrassing turn in 1999 when the tourism minister said that Costa Rica should not be a destination for sex tourism or gays. The gay community made it clear that it was against sex tourism, and that linking gay tourism with sex tourism was untrue and defamatory. The official position in Costa Rica was then modified, stating that gay tourism was neither encouraged nor prohibited.

Although homosexual acts between consenting adults are legal in Costa Rica, gays and lesbians continue to suffer from discrimination in society. Fortunately, discrimination

usually takes the role of subtle nonacceptance, as opposed to violence or outright persecution. Homophobia has declined in recent years, especially in heavily touristy areas – one positive result of the influx of foreigners.

Thankfully, Costa Rica's gays and lesbians have made some strides. In the 1990s the Supreme Court ruled against police harassment in gay nightspots and guaranteed medical treatment to people living with HIV/AIDS. And in June 2003 the first ever gay-pride festival in San José drew more than 2000 attendees. Gays and lesbians traveling in Costa Rica are unlikely to be confronted with poor treatment; nonetheless, outside of gay spots, public displays of affection are not recommended.

The undisputed gay and lesbian capital of Costa Rica is Manuel Antonio – for more information see boxed text, p348.

The monthly newspaper *Gayness* and the magazine *Gente 10* (in Spanish) are both available at gay bars in San José (see p106). There are a number of other resources for gay travelers:

**Agua Buena Human Rights Association** (☎ 2280 3548; www.aguabuena.org, in Spanish) This noteworthy nonprofit organization has campaigned steadily for fairness in medical treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica.

**Cipac** (☎ 2280 7821; www.cipacdh.org, in Spanish) The leading gay activist organization in Costa Rica.

**Gay Costa Rica** (www.gaycostarica.com, in Spanish) Provides up-to-the-minute information on nightlife, travel and many helpful links.

**International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association** (IGLTA; ☎ in the USA 800-448 8550, 954-776 2626; www.igltatour.org) Maintains a list of hundreds of travel agents and tour operators all over the world.

**Tiquicia Travel** (☎ 2256 9682; www.tiquiciatravel.com) Makes arrangements at gay-friendly hotels.

**Toto Tours** (☎ in the USA 800-565 1241, 773-274 8686; www.tototours.com) Gay travel specialists who organize regular trips to Costa Rica, among other destinations.

## HOLIDAYS

*Días feriados* (national holidays) are taken seriously in Costa Rica. Banks, public offices and many stores close. During these times, public transport is tight and hotels are heavily booked. Many festivals (see opposite) coincide with public holidays.

**New Year's Day** January 1

**Semana Santa** (Holy Week; March or April) The Thursday and Friday before Easter Sunday is the official holiday,

though most businesses shut down the whole week. From Thursday to Sunday bars are closed and alcohol sales are prohibited; on Thursday and Friday buses stop running.

**Día de Juan Santamaría** (April 11) Honors the national hero who died fighting William Walker in 1856; major events are held in Alajuela, his hometown.

**Labor Day** May 1

**Día de la Madre** (Mother's Day; August 15) Coincides with the annual Catholic feast of the Assumption.

**Independence Day** September 15

**Día de la Raza** Columbus Day; October 12

**Christmas Day** (December 25) Christmas Eve is also an unofficial holiday.

**Last week in December** The week between Christmas and New Year is an unofficial holiday; businesses close and beach hotels are crowded.

## INSURANCE

No matter where you travel to in the world, getting a comprehensive travel-insurance policy is a good idea. In regards to Costa Rica, a basic theft/loss and medical policy is recommended. Read the fine print carefully as some companies exclude dangerous activities from their coverage, which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and make a claim later.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés abound in Costa Rica, and you don't have to look very far to find cheap and speedy internet access. The normal access rate in San José and tourist towns is US\$1 to US\$2 per hour, though you can expect to pay upwards of US\$5 per hour in the hard-to-reach places.

Wi-fi access is on the rise in Costa Rica. If you keep your eyes open (and computer on), you'll find wireless hotspots in San José, Alajuela, Jacó, Monteverde and Santa Elena, La Fortuna, Tamarindo, Puerto Jiménez and Puerto Viejo de Talamanca. Furthermore, the majority of top-end hotels and, increasingly, upscale backpacker hostels offer secure wireless networks to their customers.

## LEGAL MATTERS

If you get into legal trouble and are jailed in Costa Rica, your embassy can offer limited assistance. This may include an occasional visit from an embassy staff member to make sure your human rights have not been violated,



### PREVENTING CHILD SEX TOURISM IN COSTA RICA *ECPAT/Beyond Borders*

Tragically, the exploitation of local children by tourists is becoming more prevalent throughout Latin America, including Costa Rica. Various socio-economic factors make children susceptible to sexual exploitation, and some tourists choose to take advantage of their vulnerable position.

Sexual exploitation has serious, lifelong effects on children. Sexual exploitation of children is a crime and a violation of human rights, and Costa Rica has laws against it. Many countries have enacted extraterritorial legislation that allows travelers to be charged as though the exploitation happened in their home country.

Travelers can help stop child sex tourism by reporting it – it is important not to ignore suspicious behavior. **Cybertipline** ([www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com)) is a website where the sexual exploitation of children can be reported, you can also report it to local authorities, and if you know the nationality of the perpetrator, you can report it to their embassy.

Travelers interested in learning more about how to fight against the sexual exploitation of children can go to **ECPAT International** (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking; [www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)) or **Beyond Borders** ([www.beyondborders.org](http://www.beyondborders.org)), the Canadian affiliate of ECPAT. ECPAT aims to advance the rights of children and help them to be free from abuse and exploitation without regard to race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. **ECPAT USA** (☎ in the USA 718-935 9192; [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)) is part of a global network working on these issues with over 70 affiliate organizations around the world. The US headquarters is located in New York.

letting your family know where you are and putting you in contact with a Costa Rican lawyer, who you must pay yourself. Embassy officials will not bail you out and you are subject to Costa Rican laws, not the laws of your own country.

In Costa Rica the legal age for driving, voting and having heterosexual sex is 18 years, and you can get married when you are 15 years old. There is no legal age for homosexual sex but sex with anyone under 18 is not advisable. Travelers may be subject to the laws of their own country in regard to sexual relations.

### Drivers & Driving Accidents

Drivers should carry their passport and driver's license at all times. If you have an accident, call the police immediately to make a report (required for insurance purposes) or attend to any injured parties. Leave the vehicles in place until the report has been made and do not make any statements except to members of law-enforcement agencies. The injured should only be moved by medical professionals.

Keep your eye on your vehicle until the police arrive and then call the car-rental company to find out where you should take the vehicle for repairs (do not have it fixed yourself). If the accident results in injury or death, you could be jailed or prevented from leaving the country until legalities are handled.

Emergency numbers are listed on the inside cover of this book.

### MAPS

Detailed maps are unfortunately hard to come by in Costa Rica. An excellent option is the 1:330,000 *Costa Rica* sheet produced by **International Travel Map** (ITMB; [www.itmb.com](http://www.itmb.com); 530 W Broadway, Vancouver, BC, V5Z 1E1, Canada), which is waterproof and includes a San José inset.

The **Fundación Neotópica** ([www.neotropica.org](http://www.neotropica.org)) publishes a 1:500,000 map showing national parks and other protected areas. These are available in San José bookstores and over the internet.

The Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT; see p82) publishes a 1:700,000 Costa Rica map with a 1:12,500 Central San José map on the reverse. These are free at ICT offices in San José.

Online, **Maptak** ([www.maptak.com](http://www.maptak.com)) has maps of Costa Rica's seven provinces and their capitals.

Don't count on any of the national park offices or ranger stations having maps for hikers. Topographical maps are available for purchase from **Instituto Geográfico Nacional** (IGN; ☎ 2257 7798; Calle 9 btwn Aves 20 & 22, San José; ☎ 7:30am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Fri). In the USA, contact **Omni Resources** (☎ 336-227 8300; [www.omnimap.com](http://www.omnimap.com)).

The *Mapa-Guía de la Naturaleza Costa Rica* is an atlas published by Incafo that includes 1:200,000 topographical sheets, as well as English and Spanish descriptions of Costa Rica's natural areas. It is available at Lehmann's (p79) in San José.

### MONEY ATMs

It's increasingly easy to find *cajeros automáticos* (ATMs) in Costa Rica, even in the smallest towns. The Visa Plus network is the standard, but machines on the Cirrus network, which accepts most foreign ATM cards, can be found in larger cities and tourist towns. In these areas, ATMs also dispense US dollars, which is convenient for payments at top-end hotels and tour agencies. Note that some machines will only accept cards held by their own customers.

### Cash & Currency

The Costa Rican currency is the colón (plural colones, ₡), named after Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus). Bills come in 500, 1000, 5000 and 10,000 notes, while coins come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25, 50 and 100. Note that older coins are larger and silver, while newer ones are smaller and gold-colored – this is often a source of confusion for travelers fresh off the plane.

Throughout Costa Rica, you can pay for tours, park fees, hotel rooms, midrange to expensive meals and large-ticket items with US dollars. However, local meals, bus fares and small items should generally be paid with colones.

Paying for things in US dollars should be free of hassle, and at times is encouraged since the currency is viewed as being more stable than colones. Newer US dollars (eg big heads) are preferred throughout Costa Rica.

### Credit Cards

You can expect a transaction fee on all international credit-card purchases. Holders of credit and debit cards can buy colones and sometimes US dollars in some banks, though you can expect to pay a high transaction fee. Cards are widely accepted at some midrange and most top-end hotels, as well as top-end restaurants and some travel agencies. All car-rental agencies accept credit cards.

### Exchanging Money

All banks will exchange US dollars, and some will exchange euros and British pounds; other currencies are more difficult. Most banks have excruciatingly long lines, especially at the state-run institutions (Banco Nacional, Banco de Costa Rica, Banco Popular), though they don't charge commissions on cash ex-

changes. Private banks (Banex, Banco Interfin, Scotiabank) tend to be faster. Make sure the dollar bills you want to exchange are in good condition or they may be refused.

### Taxes

Travelers will notice a 13.39% sales tax at mid-range and top-end hotels and restaurants, while hotels also charge an additional 3% tourist surcharge. Everybody must pay a US\$26 airport tax upon leaving the country. It is payable in US dollars or in colones, and credit cards are accepted. Note that some travelers have reported that this fee was charged on their cards as a cash advance, which resulted in a hefty fee.

### Tipping

It is customary to tip the bellhop/porter (US\$1 to US\$3 per service) and the housekeeper (US\$1 to US\$2 per day) in top-end hotels, less in budget places. On guided tours, tip the guide US\$1 to US\$10 per person per day. Tip the tour driver about half of what you tip the guide. Naturally, tips depend upon quality of service. Taxi drivers are not normally tipped, unless some special service is provided. Top-end restaurants may add a 10% service charge onto the bill. If not, you might leave a small tip to show your appreciation, but it is not required.

### Traveler's Checks

Most banks and exchange bureaus will cash traveler's checks at a commission of 1% to 3%. Some hotels will accept them as payment, but check policies carefully as many hotels do not. US dollar traveler's checks are preferred. It may be difficult or impossible to change checks of other currencies.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Costa Ricans make wonderful subjects for photos. However, most people resent having cameras thrust in their faces, and some attach price tags to their mugs. As a rule, you should ask for permission if you have an inkling your subject would not approve.

Since most people use digital cameras these days, it can be quite difficult to purchase high quality film in Costa Rica. However, most internet cafés in the country can burn your digital pictures on CD, and cheap media is available for purchase in most large towns and cities.



## BARGAINING

A high standard of living along with a steady stream of international tourist traffic means that the Latin American tradition of haggling is fast dying out in Costa Rica. In tourist towns especially, fixed prices on hotels cannot be negotiated, and you can expect business owners to be offended if you try. Some smaller hotels in the interior regions still accept the practice.

Negotiating prices at outdoor markets is acceptable, and bargaining is accepted when hiring long-distance taxis. Overall, Ticos respond well to good manners and gentle inquiries. If you demand a service for your price, chances are you won't get it.

## POST

Airmail letters cost about US\$0.35 for the first 20g. Parcels can be shipped at the rate of US\$7 per kilogram. You can receive mail at the main post office of major towns. Mail to San José's central post office should be addressed:

[Name], c/o Lista de Correos, Correo Central, San José, Costa Rica.

Letters usually arrive within a week from North America, longer from more distant places. The post office will hold mail for 30 days from the date it's received. Photo identification is required to retrieve mail and you will only be given correspondence with your name on it.

Note that in addresses, *apartado* means 'PO Box'; it is not a street or apartment address.

## SHOPPING

Avoid purchasing animal products, including turtle shells, animal skulls and anything made with feathers, coral or shells. Wood products are also highly suspicious: make sure you know where the wood came from.

## Coffee & Alcohol

Coffee is the most popular souvenir, and deservedly so. It is available at gift shops, the Mercado Central (p107) in San José and at any supermarket throughout the country.

The most popular alcohol purchases are Ron Centenario, Café Rica (the coffee liqueur) and *guaro* (the local firewater). All are available at duty-free shops inside the airport, or in

supermarkets and liquor stores in every town and city.

## Handicrafts & Ceramics

Tropical hardwood items include salad bowls, plates, carving boards, jewelry boxes and a variety of carvings and ornaments. The most exquisite woodwork is available at Biesanz Woodworks (p123) in Escazú. All of the wood is grown on farms expressly for this purpose, so you needn't worry about forests being chopped down for your salad bowl.

Uniquely Costa Rican souvenirs are the colorfully painted replicas of traditional oxcarts (*carretas*) produced in Sarchí (p136).

## SOLO TRAVELERS

Costa Rica is a fine country for solo travelers, especially if you get in with the backpacking community. Inexpensive hostels with communal kitchens encourage social exchange, while a large number of language schools, tours and volunteer organizations will provide every traveler with an opportunity to meet others. However, it isn't recommended to undertake long treks in the wilderness by yourself.

## TELEPHONE

Public phones are found all over Costa Rica and Chip or Colibrí phonecards are available in 1000, 2000 and 3000 colón denominations. Chip cards are inserted into the phone and scanned. Colibrí cards (the most common) require you to dial a toll-free number (☎ 199) and enter an access code. Instructions are provided in English or Spanish. Colibrí is the preferred card of travelers since it can be used from any phone. Cards can be found just about everywhere, including supermarkets, pharmacies, newsstands, *pulperías* (corner grocery stores) and gift shops.

The cheapest international calls from Costa Rica are direct-dialed using a phonecard. To make international calls, dial '00' followed by the country code and number. Pay phones cannot receive international calls.

Make sure that no one is peeking over your shoulder when you dial your code. Some travelers have had their access numbers pilfered by thieves.

To call Costa Rica from abroad, use the international code (☎ 506) before the eight-digit number. Find other important phone numbers on the inside cover of this book.

Due to the increasing popularity of voice-over IP services like Skype, it's sometimes possible to skip the middle man and just bring a headset along with you to an internet café. Ethernet connections and wireless signals are becoming more common in accommodations, so if you're traveling with a laptop you can just connect and call for pennies.

## TIME

Costa Rica is six hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), so Costa Rican time is equivalent to Central Time in North America. There is no daylight saving time.

## TOILETS

Public restrooms are rare, but most restaurants and cafés will let you use their facilities at a small charge – usually between US\$0.25 to US\$0.50. Bus terminals and other major public buildings usually have bathrooms, also at a charge.

If you're particularly fond of toilet paper, carry it with you at all times as it is not always available. Just don't flush it down! Costa Rican plumbing is often poor and has very low pressure in all but the best hotels and buildings. Dispose of toilet paper in the rubbish bin inside the bathroom.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The government-run tourism board, the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), has two offices in the capital (see p82). However, don't expect to be wowed with any particularly insightful travel advice as it's the staff's job to tell you that it's all good in Costa Rica. That said, the ICT can provide you with free maps, a master bus schedule and information on road conditions in the hinterlands. English is spoken.

## WHAT'S THAT ADDRESS?

Though some larger cities have streets that have been dutifully named, signage is rare and finding a Tico who knows what street they are standing on is even rarer. Everybody uses landmarks when providing directions; an address may be given as 200m south and 150m east of a church. A city block is *cien metros* – literally 100m – so '250 metros al sur' means 2½ blocks south, regardless of the distance. Churches, parks, office buildings, fast-food joints and car dealerships are the most common landmarks used – but these are often meaningless to the foreign traveler who will have no idea where the Subaru dealership is to begin with. Better yet, Ticos frequently refer to landmarks that no longer exist. In San Pedro, outside San José, locals still use the sight of an old fig tree (*el antiguo higuierón*) to provide directions.

Confused? Get used to it...

Consult the ICT's flashy English-language website ([www.visitcostarica.com](http://www.visitcostarica.com)) for information, or in the USA call the ICT's toll-free number (☎ 800-343 6332) for brochures and information.

## VISAS

Passport-carrying nationals of the following countries are allowed 90 days' stay with no visa: Argentina, Canada, Israel, Japan, Panama, the USA, and most western European countries.

Citizens of Australia, Iceland, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and Venezuela are allowed to stay for 30 days with no visa. Others require a visa from a Costa Rican embassy or consulate. For the latest info on visas, check the websites of the ICT ([www.visitcostarica.com](http://www.visitcostarica.com)) or the **Costa Rican embassy** ([www.costarica-embassy.org](http://www.costarica-embassy.org)) in Washington, DC.

If you are in Costa Rica and need to visit your embassy or consulate, see p531 for contact information.

## Extensions

Extending your stay beyond the authorized 30 or 90 days is a time-consuming hassle. It is far easier to leave the country for 72 hours and then re-enter. Otherwise, go to the office of **migración** (immigration; ☎ 2220 0355; ☎ 8am-4pm) in San José, opposite Channel 6, about 4km north of Parque La Sabana. Requirements for extensions change, so allow several working days.

## Onward Tickets

Travelers officially need onward tickets before they are allowed to enter Costa Rica. This requirement is not often checked at the airport, but travelers arriving by land should anticipate a need to show an onward ticket.

If you're heading to Panama, Nicaragua or another Central or South American country from Costa Rica, you may need an onward or roundtrip ticket before you will be allowed entry into that country or even allowed to board the plane if you're flying. A quick check with the appropriate embassy – easy to do via the internet – will tell you whether the country that you're heading to has an onward-ticket requirement.

## VOLUNTEERING

The sheer number of volunteer opportunities in Costa Rica is mind-blowing. 'Voluntourism' is a great way to travel sustainably and make a positive contribution to the local community. Volunteer work is also an amazing forum for self-exploration, especially if you touch a few lives and meet a few new friends along the way. Generally speaking, you will get as much out of volunteering as you put in and the majority of volunteers in Costa Rica walk away from their experiences content.

The following volunteer opportunities provide a general overview of what is currently available in Costa Rica.

### English Teaching

Although most travelers in Costa Rica are extremely keen to learn and/or perfect their Spanish, you can give a lot back by teaching English to kids and adults of all ages. With that said, once class ends and you're outside the school, your students will be happy to swap roles and teach you a bit of Spanish along the way.

**Amerispan Unlimited** ([www.amerispan.com](http://www.amerispan.com)) Offers a variety of educational travel programs in specialized areas.

**Cloud Forest School** ([www.cloudforestschoo.org](http://www.cloudforestschoo.org)) A bilingual school (kindergarten to 11th grade) in Monteverde offering creative and experiential education.

### Institute for Central American Development

**Studies** ([www.icadscr.com](http://www.icadscr.com)) Combines month-long Spanish language programs and volunteer placements.

**Sustainable Horizon** ([www.sustainablehorizon.com](http://www.sustainablehorizon.com)) Arranges volunteering trips such as guest teaching spots and orphanage placements.

**World Language Study** ([www.worldlanguagestudy.com](http://www.worldlanguagestudy.com)) Sends volunteers to teach English in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and foster homes.

### Forestry Management

Despite its relatively small size, Costa Rica is home to an impressive number of national parks, a good number of which protect some

of the most pristine rain forest on the planet. If you're interested in helping to save this threatened ecosystem, and perhaps gaining a valuable skill set in the process, consider a placement in a forest management program. **Bosque Eterno de los Niños** (Children's Eternal Forest; [www.acmcr.org](http://www.acmcr.org)) Volunteers are needed to help manage the remarkable achievement – a rain forest purchased by children who raised money to buy and protect it.

**Cloudbridge Nature Preserve** ([www.cloudbridge.org](http://www.cloudbridge.org)) A private reserve where an ongoing reforestation project is being spearheaded by two New Yorkers.

**Fundación Corcovado** ([www.corcovadofoundation.org](http://www.corcovadofoundation.org)) An impressive network of people and organizations committed to preserving Parque Nacional Corcovado.

**INBio** ([www.inbio.ac.cr/en/default2.html](http://www.inbio.ac.cr/en/default2.html)) A private research center dedicated to biodiversity management throughout Costa Rica's varying ecosystems.

**Monteverde Institute** ([www.mvinstitute.org](http://www.mvinstitute.org)) A nonprofit educational institute offering training in tropical biology, conservation and sustainable development.

### Organic Farming

The entire world is going organic, and Costa Rica is certainly at the forefront of this highly admirable and sustainable movement. Home to virtual living laboratories of self-sufficient farms and plantations, Costa Rica is perfectly suited for volunteers interested in greening their thumbs.

**Finca la Flor de Paraíso** ([www.la-flor-de-paraiso.org](http://www.la-flor-de-paraiso.org)) Offers programs in a variety of disciplines from animal husbandry to medicinal-herb cultivation.

**Finca Lomas** ([www.anaicr.org](http://www.anaicr.org)) Home to a crop experimentation project that includes fruit, nut and spice trees.

**Punta Mona** ([www.puntamona.org](http://www.puntamona.org)) An organic farm and retreat center that is based on organic permaculture and sustainable living.

**Rancho Margot** ([www.ranchomargot.org](http://www.ranchomargot.org)) This self-proclaimed life-skills university offers a natural education emphasizing organic farming and animal husbandry.

**Reserva Biológica Dúrika** ([www.durika.org](http://www.durika.org)) A sustainable community that is centered upon a 7500-hectare biological reserve.

### Wildlife Conservation

Whether you're interested in sea turtles or rehabilitating rescued animals, Costa Rica is one of the best places in the world to get hands-on experience with wild animals. Whether you're an aspiring veterinarian or just concerned with the plight of endangered species, any of the following programs can help you get a little closer to some of Mother Nature's charismatic creatures.

**ANAI** ([www.anaicr.org](http://www.anaicr.org)) A grassroots organization that is fighting hard to save the sea turtles.

**ASCOMOTI** ([www.ascomoti.org](http://www.ascomoti.org)) Protects the squirrel monkey, Costa Rica's most endangered primate.

**CCC** ([www.cccturtle.org](http://www.cccturtle.org)) Assist scientists with turtle tagging and research on green and leatherback turtles.

**Profelis** ([www.grafischer.com/profelis](http://www.grafischer.com/profelis)) A feline conservation program that takes care of confiscated wild cats, both big and small.

**Zoo Ave** ([www.zooave.org](http://www.zooave.org)) A wildlife park offering opportunities for domestic and wild animal care.

## WOMEN TRAVELERS

Most female travelers experience little more than a '*mi amor*' ('my love') or an appreciative hiss from the local men in Costa Rica. But in general, Costa Rican men consider foreign women to have looser morals and to be easier conquests than Ticas (female Costa Ricans). Men will often make flirtatious comments to single women, particularly blondes. Women traveling together are not exempt from this. The best way to deal with this is to do what the Ticas do – ignore it completely. Women who firmly resist unwanted verbal advances from men are normally treated with respect.

In small highland towns, dress is usually conservative. Women rarely wear shorts, but belly-baring tops are all the rage. On the beach, skimpy bathing suits are ok, but topless and nude bathing are not (see boxed text, p339).

As in any part of the world, the possibilities of rape and assault do exist. Use your normal caution: avoid walking alone in isolated places or through city streets late at night, and skip

the hitchhiking. Do not take unlicensed 'pirate' taxis (licensed taxis are red and have medallions) as reports of assaults against women by unlicensed drivers have been reported.

Birth-control pills are available at most pharmacies (without a prescription) and tampons can be difficult to find in rural areas – bring some from home or stock up in San José.

The **Centro Feminista de Información y Acción** (Cefemina; ☎ 2224 3986; [www.cefemina.org](http://www.cefemina.org); San Pedro) is the main Costa Rican feminist organization. It publishes a newsletter and can provide information and assistance to women travelers.

## WORK

It's difficult for foreigners to find work in Costa Rica. The government doesn't like anyone taking jobs away from Costa Ricans and the labor laws reflect this sentiment. Basically, the only foreigners legally employed in Costa Rica work for their own businesses, possess skills not found in the country, or work for companies that have special agreements with the government.

Getting a bona fide job necessitates obtaining a work permit – a time-consuming and difficult process. The most likely source of paid employment is as an English teacher at one of the language institutes, or working in the hospitality industry in a hotel or resort. Naturalists or river guides may be able to find work with private lodges or adventure-travel operators, though you shouldn't expect to make more than survival wages from these jobs.

# Transportation

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## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### ENTERING THE COUNTRY

A few people arrive in Costa Rica by sea, either on fishing or scuba charters or as part of a brief stop on a cruise. Others travel in by bus from neighboring countries. But the vast majority of travelers land at the airport in San José, with a growing number arriving in Liberia.

Entering Costa Rica is usually hassle-free (with the exception of some long queues). There are no fees or taxes payable upon entering the country, though some foreign nationals will require a visa. Be aware that those who need visas cannot get them at the border. For information on visas, see p537.

#### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

### Passport

Citizens of all nations are now required to have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the dates of your trip. When you arrive, your passport will be stamped. The law requires that you carry your passport at all times during your stay in Costa Rica.

### Onward Ticket

Travelers officially need a ticket out of Costa Rica before they are allowed to enter, but the rules are enforced erratically. Those arriving by land can generally meet this requirement by purchasing an outward ticket from the TICA bus company, which has offices in Managua (Nicaragua) and Panama City.

### AIR

#### Airports & Airlines

International flights arrive at Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría (p108), 17km northwest of San José, in the town of Alajuela. As a result, an increasing number of travelers are bypassing the capital all together, and choosing instead to strike out into the country from Alajuela instead.

In recent years Aeropuerto Internacional Daniel Oduber Quirós (p214) in Liberia has started receiving international flights from the USA. Although there is a lot of talk about airport expansion, at the time of research only American Airlines, Continental, Delta, Northwest, United Airlines and US Airways were flying into Liberia. It is expected that many international airlines will start to offer flights in and out of this airport, including some flights direct from Europe (eliminating the layover in Miami or Dallas). Daniel Oduber airport is convenient for travelers visiting the Peninsula de Nicoya.

Costa Rica is well connected by air to other Central and Latin American countries, as well as the USA. The national airline, Lacs (part of the Central American Airline consortium Grupo TACA), flies to numerous points in the USA and Latin America, including Cuba. The Federal Aviation Administration in the USA has assessed Costa Rica's aviation authori-

ties to be in compliance with international safety standards.

Airlines flying to and from Costa Rica include the following companies; see p108 for details of those with offices in San José.

**Air Canada** (✈ in Canada 514-393 3333; www.aircanada.ca; airline code AC) No office in Costa Rica.

**America West** (✈ in the USA 480-693 6718; www.americawest.com; airline code HP) No office in Costa Rica.

**American Airlines** (✈ 2257 1266; www.aa.com; airline code AA)

**Continental** (✈ 2296 4911; www.continental.com; airline code CO)

**COPA** (✈ 2222 6640; www.copaair.com; airline code CM) www.cubana.cu; airline code CU)

**Delta** (✈ 2256 7909, press 5 for reservations; www.delta.com; airline code DL)

**Grupo TACA** (✈ 2296 0909; www.taca.com; airline code TA)

**Iberia** (✈ 2257 8266; www.iberia.com; airline code IB)

**KLM** (✈ 2220 4111; www.klm.com; airline code KL)

**Lacs** (see Grupo TACA)

**Mexicana** (✈ 2295 6969; www.mexicana.com; airline code MX)

**Northwest** (✈ in the USA 800-225-2525; www.nwa.com; airline code NW) No office in Costa Rica.

**SAM/Avianca** (✈ 2233 3066; www.avianca.com; airline code AV)

### DEPARTURE TAX

There is a US\$26 departure tax on all international outbound flights, payable in cash (US dollars or colones, or a mix of the two). At the Juan Santamaría airport you can pay with credit cards, and Banco de Costa Rica has an ATM (on the Plus system) by the departure-tax station.

**United Airlines** (✈ 2220 4844; www.united.com; airline code UA)

**US Airways** (✈ toll-free reservations in Costa Rica 800-011 0793, 800-011 4114; www.usairways.com; airline code US) No office in Costa Rica.

### Tickets

Airline fares are usually more expensive during the Costa Rican high season (from December through April), with December and January the most expensive months to travel.

### Central & Latin America

American Airlines, Continental, Delta, Northwest, United and US Airways have connections to Costa Rica from many Central and Latin American countries. Grupo TACA usually offers the most flights on these routes.

### CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but also believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

#### Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO<sub>2</sub> (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

#### Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

## BORDER CROSSINGS

There is no fee for travelers to enter Costa Rica. However, the fee for each vehicle entering the country is US\$22. For more information on visa requirements for entering Costa Rica, see p537.

### Nicaragua – Sapoá to Peñas Blancas

Situated on the Interamericana, this is the most heavily trafficked border station between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Virtually all international overland travelers from Nicaragua enter Costa Rica through here. The border station is open from 6am to 8pm daily on both the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan sides – though local bus traffic stops in the afternoon. This is the only official border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica that you can drive across.

The **Tica Bus** (🚌 in Managua 222 6094), **Nica Bus** (🚌 in Managua 228 1374) and **TransNica** (🚌 in Managua 278 2090) all have daily buses to Costa Rica. The fare is US\$14 and the trip takes nine hours. From Rivas (37km north of the border) twice-hourly buses depart for Sapoá from 5am to 4:30pm. Regular buses depart Peñas Blancas, on the Costa Rican side, for La Cruz, Liberia and San José.

The Costa Rican and Nicaraguan immigration offices are almost 1km apart; most people travel through by bus or private car. Travelers without a through bus will find golf carts (US\$2) running between the borders, but walking is not a problem. While Costa Rica does not charge visitors to cross the border, Nicaragua does: people leaving Nicaragua pay US\$2, while folks entering Nicaragua will be charged US\$7 until noon, after which the fee becomes US\$9. All fees must be paid in US dollars.

Note that Peñas Blancas is only a border post, not a town, so there is nowhere to stay. For more information see boxed text Heading North of the Border, p224.

### Nicaragua – San Carlos to Los Chiles

International travelers rarely use this route, though it's extremely hassle-free. There is no land crossing and you cannot drive between the two points. Instead, the crossing must be done by boat. Regular boats (US\$10, 45 minutes) leave San Carlos and travel the Río Frío to Los Chiles at 10:30am and 4pm, with extra boats scheduled as needed. At other times, boatworkers can usually be found by the ENAP dock in San Carlos, but remember that the border closes at 5pm. Although there is a road that travels from the southern banks of the Río San Juan in Nicaragua to Los Chiles, it is reserved for federal employees. You will not be able to enter Costa Rica this way (and you certainly will not be able to drive in).

If you are entering Costa Rica, don't forget to get the US\$2 exit stamp at the San Carlos *migración* (immigration) office, 50m west of the dock. Once you enter Costa Rica, you'll have to stop at Costa Rica *migración* for your entry stamp.

Traveling from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, you will need to pay a US\$7 fee when you enter. For more information, see boxed text Getting to San Carlos, Nicaragua, p510.

Recently, the domestic Costa Rican airlines have begun offering a few international flights. **Nature Air** ([www.natureaire.com](http://www.natureaire.com)) now flies to Granada from both Liberia (one way/round-trip US\$65/130) and San José (one way/round-trip US\$120/240) four times a week, and to Bocas del Toro (one way/round-trip US\$99/199) two times a week. Note that the prices given here are estimates as rates vary considerably on season and availability.

Grupo TACA offers direct flights to Caracas (US\$500, three hours, daily), Guatemala City (US\$250, 1½ hours, twice daily) and San Salvador (US\$235, 1½ hours, three daily).

TACA and Mexicana have daily flights to Mexico City (US\$500, three hours), while both TACA and Copa have several flights a day to Panama City (US\$300, 1½ hours, three daily). Round-trip prices are quoted unless otherwise indicated. Again, the prices given here are estimates as rates vary considerably on season and availability.

### Other Countries

More than one-third of all travelers to Costa Rica come from the USA, so finding a nonstop flight from Houston, Miami or New York is quite simple. Schedules and prices are com-

### Panama – Paso Canoas

This border crossing on the Carretera Interamericana (Pan-American Hwy) is by far the most frequently used entry and exit point with Panama and is open 24 hours a day. The border crossing in either direction is generally straightforward. Be sure to get your exit stamp from Panama at the *migración* office before entering Costa Rica. There is no charge for entering Costa Rica. Travelers without a private vehicle should arrive during the day because buses stop running by 6pm. Travelers in a private vehicle would do better to arrive late in the morning when most of the trucks have already been processed.

**Tica Bus** (🚌 in Panama City 262 2084) travels from Panama City to San José (US\$25, 15 hours) daily and crosses this border post. In David, Tracopa has one bus daily from the main terminal to San José (US\$18, nine hours). In David you'll also find frequent buses to the border at Paso Canoas (US\$2, 1½ hours) that take off every 10 minutes from 4am to 8pm.

If traveling to Panama, you will have to pay US\$5 for a tourist card. For further details, see boxed text Getting to Panama, p390.

### Panama – Guabito to Sixaola

Situated on the Caribbean coast, this is a fairly tranquil and hassle-free border crossing. Immigration guards regularly take off for lunch and you may have to wait a while to be processed. The border town on the Panamanian side is Guabito.

The border is open from 8am to 6pm in Panama and 7am to 5pm in Costa Rica. (Panama is one hour ahead.) Both sides close for an hour-long lunch at around 1pm, which means that there are potentially two hours each day when you'll be unable to make it across the border quickly. Get to Sixaola as early as possible; while there are a couple of sleeping options, it won't be the highlight of your trip if you have to spend the night. Before crossing the bridge, stop at Costa Rica *migración* (🚌 2754 2044) to process your paperwork. Walking across the bridge is kind of fun, in a vertigo-inducing sort of way.

If you are coming from Bocas del Toro, it's faster and cheaper to take the ferry to Changuinola (US\$5, 45 minutes), from where you can take a quick taxi to the border or to the bus station (US\$5). One daily bus travels between Changuinola and San José at 10am (US\$15, eight hours). Otherwise, you can walk over the border and catch one of the hourly buses that go up the coast from Sixaola. For details, see boxed text Getting to Guabito & Bocas del Toro, Panama, p496.

### Panama – Río Sereno to San Vito

This is a rarely used crossing in the Cordillera de Talamanca. The border is open from 8am to 6pm in Panama and 7am to 5pm in Costa Rica. The small village of Río Sereno on the Panamanian side has a hotel and a place to eat; there are no facilities on the Costa Rican side.

Regular buses depart Concepción and David in Panama for Río Sereno. Local buses (four daily) and taxis go from the border to San Vito. See also the boxed text Getting to Panama, p390.

petitive – a little bit of shopping around can get you a good fare.

From Canada, most travelers to Costa Rica connect through US gateway cities, though Air Canada has direct flights from Toronto.

Most flights from the UK and Europe connect either in the USA or in Mexico City, although this may change once the new airport in Liberia starts attracting more flights. High-season fares may still apply during the northern summer, even though this is the beginning of the Costa Rican rainy season.

From Australia and New Zealand, travel routes usually go through the USA or Mexico.

Again, fares tend to go up in June and July even though this is the beginning of the rainy season in Costa Rica.

## LAND Bus

Costa Rica shares land borders with Nicaragua and Panama, and a lot of travelers, particularly shoestringers, enter the country by bus. Furthermore, an extensive bus system links the Central American capitals and it's vastly cheaper than flying.

If crossing the border by bus, note that international buses may cost slightly more than

## DRIVING TO COSTA RICA FROM NORTH AMERICA

Every year, readers send us letters detailing their long-haul road trip across the continent. If you think you're game for a little overland adventure, here is a selection of reader-tested tips for making the most of the big drive:

- **Think it through** Driving yourself through Central America is *not* a cheap option. Having your own car will afford you greater comfort and flexibility, though you will spend more than you expect on petrol, insurance and import fees. Unless you are planning to spend a lot of time off the beaten track or detest the idea of slumping it on local buses, public transport will probably be a cheaper and easier way to go.
- **Buy a Japanese car** Toyotas, Hondas and Nissans are extremely popular in Central America, which makes them substantially easier to service if problems arise.
- **Learn to service your car** A degree of mechanical know-how will allow you to make minor repairs yourself, and help you avoid being ripped off by unscrupulous mechanics. If you do need to repair your vehicle, be advised that mechanics charge much more in Costa Rica than in other Central American countries.
- **Be prepared** It's a good idea to plan for the worst, so make sure that you bring along a good tool kit, an emergency jerry can of petrol, plenty of emergency food and water, and a roll of industrial-strength duct tape for reattaching bits of your battered car. A spare tire or two is also a good idea, especially if you're planning to go off-road or traveling over rough terrain.
- **Know the law** Costa Rican law requires that all vehicles be fitted with a catalytic converter. Bear this in mind if you remove your catalytic converter elsewhere in Central America due to the poorer grades of fuel that can cause the converter to get clogged.
- **And most importantly – drive defensively** As one reader put it, 'Understand that many drivers are clinically insane.' Driving in Costa Rica and the rest of Central America is not for the faint of heart – be smart, be safe and arrive alive.

taking a local bus to the border, then another onwards from the border, but they're worth it. These companies are familiar with border procedures and will tell you what's needed to cross efficiently.

There will be no problems crossing, provided your papers are in order. If you are on an international bus, you'll have to exit the bus and proceed through both border stations. Bus drivers will wait for everyone to be processed before heading on.

If you choose to take local buses, it's advisable to get to border stations early in the day to allow time for waiting in line and processing. Note that onward buses tend to wind down by the afternoon. See boxed text Border Crossings, p542.

International buses go from San José to Changuinola (Bocas del Toro), David and Panama City in Panama; Guatemala City in Guatemala; Managua in Nicaragua; San Salvador in El Salvador; and Tegucigalpa in Honduras. For approximate schedules and fares, see p109.

## Car & Motorcycle

The cost of insurance, fuel and border permits makes a car journey significantly more expensive than buying an airline ticket. Also, the mountain of paperwork required to drive into Costa Rica from other countries deters many travelers, who prefer to arrive here and then buy or rent a vehicle. To enter Costa Rica by car, you'll need the following items:

- valid registration and proof of ownership
- valid driver's license or International Driving Permit (see p547)
- valid license plates
- recent inspection certificate (not essential, but a good idea)
- passport
- multiple photocopies of all these documents in case the originals get lost.

Sometimes border guards can be overzealous when examining a vehicle, so make sure that it doesn't violate any potential or existing safety regulations or you may have to pay a

hefty fee to get it processed. Before departing, check the following elements are present and in working order:

- blinkers, head and tail lights
- spare tire
- jerry can for extra gas (petrol)
- well-stocked toolbox including parts, such as belts, that are harder to find in Central America
- emergency flares, roadside triangles and a fire extinguisher.

Insurance from foreign countries isn't recognized in Costa Rica, so you'll have to buy a policy locally. At the border it will cost about US\$15 a month. In addition, you'll probably have to pay a US\$22 road tax to drive in.

You are not allowed to sell the car in Costa Rica. If you need to leave the country without the car, you must leave it in a customs warehouse in San José.

For tips on driving to Costa Rica from North America, importing your car and selling it afterwards, see boxed text, opposite.

Another option is to ship a car from Miami to Costa Rica. For specifics, contact

**Latii Express International** (☎ in the USA 800-590 3789, 305-593 8929; www.latiexpress.com).

## SEA

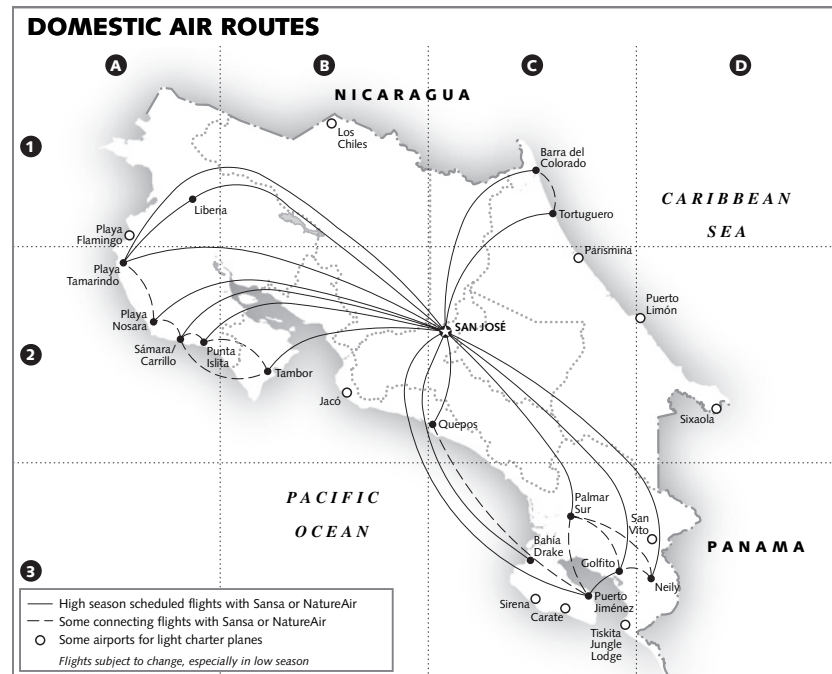
Cruise ships stop in Costa Rican ports and enable passengers to make a quick foray into the country. Typically, ships dock at either the Pacific port of Caldera (near Puntarenas, p319) or the Caribbean port of Puerto Limón (p450). At the time of writing, plans were already underway to construct a cruise ship dock in the town of Quepos (p341).

It is also possible to arrive in Costa Rica by private yacht.

## GETTING AROUND

### AIR Scheduled Flights

Costa Rica's domestic airlines are **NatureAir** (☎ 2220 3054; www.natureair.com) and **Sansa** (☎ 2221 9414; www.flysansa.com); the latter is linked with Grupo TACA.



Both airlines fly small passenger planes, and you're allocated a baggage allowance of no more than 12kg. Space is limited and demand is high in the dry season, so reserve and pay for tickets in advance.

In Costa Rica schedules change constantly and delays are frequent because of inclement weather. Be patient: Costa Rica has small planes and big storms – you don't want to be in them at the same time. You should not arrange a domestic flight that makes a tight connection with an international flight back home.

All domestic flights originate and terminate at San José. High-season fares are listed throughout this book. Destinations reached from San José include Bahía Drake, Barra del Colorado, Golfito, Liberia, Neily, Palmar Sur, Playa Nosara, Playa Sámara/Carrillo, Playa Tamarindo, Puerto Jiménez, Quepos, Tambor and Tortuguero.

## Charters

Tobías Bolaños airport in Pavas has small aircraft that can be chartered to fly just about anywhere in the country. Fares start at about US\$300 per hour for three- or four-seat planes, and it takes 40 to 90 minutes to fly to most destinations. You also have to pay for the return flight. You should be aware that luggage space is extremely limited.

Many tour agencies can book charters, but you can book directly as well. For a list of companies, see San José (p108), Golfito (p434) and Puerto Jiménez (p412).

## BICYCLE

Mountain bikes and beach cruisers can be rented in towns with a significant tourist presence at US\$10 to US\$15 per day. A few companies organize bike tours around Costa Rica (see p525).

## BOAT

Ferries cross the Golfo de Nicoya connecting the central Pacific coast with the southern tip of Península de Nicoya. The **Countermark ferry** (☎ 2661 1069) links the port of Puntarenas with Playa Naranjo four times daily. The **Ferry Peninsular** (☎ 2641 0118) travels between Puntarenas and Paquera every two hours, for a bus connection to Montezuma (see p322).

On the Golfo Dulce, a daily passenger ferry links Golfito with Puerto Jiménez on

the Península de Osa and a weekday water taxi travels to and from Playa Zancudo (see p434). On the other side of the Península de Osa, water taxis connect Bahía Drake with Sierpe (see p397).

On the Caribbean coast, there is a bus and boat service that runs several times a day, linking Cariari and Tortuguero (p465), while another links Parismina and Siquirres (p458). Boats also ply the canals that run along the coast from Moín to Tortuguero, although no regular service exists. A daily water taxi connects Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí with Trinidad on the Río San Juan (p518). The San Juan is Nicaraguan territory, so take your passport. You can try to arrange boat transport in any of these towns for Barra del Colorado.

## BUS Local Buses

Local buses are the best (if rather slow) way of getting around Costa Rica. You can take one just about everywhere, and they're frequent and cheap, with the longest domestic journey out of San José costing less than US\$10.

San José is the transportation center for the country (see p109), though there is no central terminal. Bus offices are scattered around the city: some large bus companies have big terminals that sell tickets in advance, while others have little more than a stop – sometimes unmarked.

Normally there's room for everyone on a bus, and if there isn't, someone will squeeze you on anyhow. The exceptions are days before and after a major holiday, especially Easter, when buses are ridiculously full. Note that there are no buses from Thursday to Saturday before Easter Sunday.

There are two types of bus: *directo* and *colectivo*. The *directo* buses should go from one destination to the next with few stops, though it goes against the instincts of most Costa Rican bus drivers to not pick up every single roadside passenger. As for the *colectivo*, you know you're on one when the kids outside are outrunning your bus.

Trips longer than four hours usually include a rest stop as buses do not have bathrooms. Space is limited on board, so if you have to check luggage watch that it gets loaded and that it isn't 'accidentally' given to someone else at intermediate stops. Keep your day pack with important documents on you at all times. Theft from overhead racks is rampant.

Bus schedules fluctuate wildly, so always confirm the time when you buy your ticket. If you are catching a bus that picks you up somewhere along a road, get to the roadside early. Departure times are estimated and if the bus comes early, it will leave early.

For information on departures from San José, pay a visit to the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT) office (p82) to pick up the (sort of) up-to-date copy of the master schedule, which is also online at [www.visitcostarica.com](http://www.visitcostarica.com).

## Shuttle Bus

The tourist-van shuttle services (aka the gringo buses) are an alternative to the standard inter-city buses. Shuttles are provided by **Grayline's Fantasy Bus** (☎ 2220 2126; [www.graylinecostarica.com](http://www.graylinecostarica.com)) and **Interbus** (☎ 2283 5573; [www.interbusonline.com](http://www.interbusonline.com)). Both companies run overland transport from San José to the most popular destinations, as well as directly between other destinations (see their websites for the comprehensive list). These services will pick you up at your hotel and reservations can be made online, or through local travel agencies and hotel owners.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you plan to drive in Costa Rica, your driver's license from home is normally accepted for up to 90 days. Many places will also accept an International Driving Permit (IDP), issued by the automobile association in your country of origin. After 90 days

however, you will need to get a Costa Rican driver's license.

Gasoline (petrol) and diesel are widely available, and 24-hour service stations dot the entire stretch of the Interamericana. The price of gas is about US\$0.75 per liter, although it can fluctuate to over US\$1 per liter. In more remote areas, fuel will likely be more expensive and might be sold from a drum at the neighborhood *pulperia* (corner grocery store); look for signs that say '*Se vende gasolina*' ('We sell gas'). Spare parts may be hard to find, especially for vehicles with sophisticated electronics and emissions-control systems.

## Hire

Most car-rental agencies can be found in San José and in popular tourist destinations on the Pacific coast. Car rental is not cheap, but if you are going to be doing even a small amount of driving, invest in a 4WD. Many agencies will insist on 4WD for extended travel, especially in the rainy season, when driving through rivers is a matter of course. In fact, ordinary cars are pointless as soon as you leave the Interamericana.

To rent a car you need a valid driver's license, a major credit card and a passport. The minimum age for car rental is 21. Carefully inspect rented cars for minor damage and make sure that any damage is noted on the rental agreement. If your car breaks down, call the rental company. Don't attempt to get the car fixed yourself – most companies won't reimburse expenses without prior authorization.

## ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Liberia	447						
Monteverde	396	112					
Puerto Limón	449	379	318				
Quepos	194	255	118	334			
San Isidro de El General	180	329	294	294	77		
San José	339	220	160	168	174	134	
Turrialba	364	287	227	136	241	159	67
	Golfito	Liberia	Monteverde	Puerto Limón	Quepos	San Isidro de El General	San José

## DRIVING THROUGH RIVERS

You know all those great ads where 4WD monster trucks splash through rivers full speed ahead? Forget you ever saw them.

Driving in Costa Rica will likely necessitate a river crossing at some point. Unfortunately, too many travelers have picked up their off-road skills from watching TV, and every season Ticos (Costa Ricans) get a good chuckle out of the number of dead vehicles they help wayward travelers fish out of waterways.

If you're driving through water, follow the rules below:

- **Only do this in a 4WD** Don't drive through a river in a car. (It may seem ridiculous to have to say this, but it's done all the time.) Getting out of a steep, gravel riverbed requires a 4WD. Besides, car engines flood very easily – *adiós* rental car.
- **Check the depth of the water before driving through** To accommodate an average rental 4WD, the water should be no deeper than above the knee. In a sturdier vehicle (Toyota 4-Runner or equivalent), water can be waist deep. If you're not sure, ask a local.
- **The water should be calm** If the river is gushing so that there are white crests on the water, do not try to cross. Not only will the force of the water flood the engine, it could sweep your car away.
- **Drive sloooooowly** Taxi drivers all over Costa Rica make lots of money towing tourists who think that slamming through a river at full speed is the best way to get across. This is a huge mistake. The pressure of driving through a river too quickly will send the water right into the engine and you'll be cooking that electrical system in no time. Keep steady pressure on the accelerator so that the tail pipe doesn't fill with water, but take it slow.
- **Err on the side of caution** Car-rental agencies in Costa Rica do not insure for water damage, so if you drown your vehicle, you're paying – in more ways than one.

Prices start at US\$450 per week for a 4WD, including *kilometraje libre* (unlimited mileage). Basic insurance will cost an additional US\$15 to US\$25 per day, and rental companies won't rent you a car without it. The roads in Costa Rica are rough and rugged, meaning that minor accidents or car damage is common. On top of this, you can pay an extra fee (about US\$10 to US\$15 per day) for a Collision Damage Waiver, or CDW, which covers the driver and a third party with a US\$750 to US\$1500 deductible.

Above and beyond this, you can purchase full insurance (about US\$30 to US\$50 per day), which is expensive, but well worth it. Note that if you pay basic insurance with a gold or platinum credit card, the company will usually take responsibility for damages to the car, in which case you can forego the cost of the full insurance. Make sure you verify this with your credit card company ahead of time.

Finally, note that most insurance policies do not cover damages caused by flooding or driving through a river (even though this is sometimes necessary in Costa Rica!), so be aware of the extent of your policy.

Rental rates fluctuate wildly, so make sure you shop around before you commit to anything. Some agencies offer discounts if you reserve online or if you rent for long periods of time. Note that rental offices at the airport charge a 12% fee in addition to regular rates.

Thieves can easily recognize rental cars, and many thefts have occurred from them. *Never* leave anything in sight in a parked car – nothing! – and remove all luggage from the trunk overnight. Park the car in a guarded parking lot rather than on the street. We cannot stress enough how many readers write us letters each year detailing thefts from their cars.

Motorcycles (including Harleys) can be rented in San José (p112) and Escazú (p117).

All of the major international car-rental agencies have outlets in Costa Rica, but you can usually get a better deal from one of the local companies:

**Adobe** (☎ 2259 4242, in the USA 800-769 8422; www.adobecar.com) Reader recommended with offices in Liberia, Tamarindo and Quepos.

**Dollar** (☎ 2443 2950, in the USA 866-767 8651; www.dollarcostarica.com) One of the cheapest companies in Costa Rica with offices in both airports.

**Poas** (☎ 2442 6178, in the USA 888-607 POAS; www.carentals.com) Service centers in Liberia, Tamarindo, La Fortuna and Guápiles.

**Solid** (☎ 2442 6000; www.solidcarrental.com) The only agency with offices in Puerto Jiménez and Golfito.

## Road Conditions & Hazards

Overall, driving in Costa Rica is for people with nerves of steel. The roads vary from quite good (the Interamericana) to barely passable (just about everywhere else). Even the good ones can suffer from landslides, sudden flooding and fog. Most roads are single lane and winding, lacking hard shoulders; others are dirt-and-mud affairs that climb mountains and traverse rivers.

Drive defensively. Always expect to come across cyclists, a broken-down vehicle, a herd of cattle, slow-moving trucks or an ox-cart around the next bend. Unsigned speed bumps are placed on some stretches of road without warning. (The locals lovingly refer to them as *muertos*, 'dead people.')

Most roads (except around the major tourist towns) are inadequately signed and will require at least one stop to ask for directions. Always ask about road conditions before setting out, especially in the rainy season; a number of roads become impassable in the rainy season.

## Road Rules

There are speed limits of 100km/h or less on all primary roads and 60km/h or less on secondary roads. Traffic police use radar

and speed limits are enforced with speeding tickets. You can get a traffic ticket for not wearing a seat belt. It's illegal to stop in an intersection or make a right turn on a red. At unmarked intersections, yield to the car on your right. Driving in Costa Rica is on the right and passing is allowed only on the left.

If you are issued with a ticket, you have to pay the fine at a bank; instructions are given on the ticket. If you are driving a rental car, the rental company may be able to arrange your payment for you – the amount of the fine should be on the ticket. A portion of the money from these fines goes to a children's charity.

Police have no right to ask for money and shouldn't confiscate a car, unless: the driver cannot produce a license and ownership papers; the car lacks license plates; the driver is drunk; or the driver has been involved in an accident causing serious injury. (For more on what to do in an accident, see p534).

If you are driving and see oncoming cars with headlights flashing, it often means that there is a road problem or a radar speed trap ahead. Slow down immediately.

## HITCHHIKING

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country and Lonely Planet doesn't recommend it. Travelers who hitchhike should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do hitchhike will be safer if they travel in pairs

## THE CASE OF THE FLAT TIRE AND THE DISAPPEARING LUGGAGE

A serious scam is under way on the streets around Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría. Many readers have reported similar incidents, so take precautions to ensure this doesn't happen to you. Here's how it goes...

After picking up a rental car and driving out of the city, you notice that it has a flat tire. You pull over to try to fix it. Some friendly locals, noticing that a visitor to their fair land is in distress, pull over to help out. There is inevitably some confusion with the changing of the tire, and everybody is involved in figuring it out, but eventually the car repair is successfully accomplished and the friendly Ticos (Costa Ricans) give you a wave and drive off. That's when you get back in your car and discover that your wallet – or your luggage, or everything – is gone.

This incident has happened enough times to suggest that somebody may be tampering with rental cars to 'facilitate' these flat tires. It certainly suggests that travelers should be very wary – and aware – if somebody pulls over to help. Keep your wallet and your passport on your person whenever you get out of a car. If possible, let one person in your party stay inside the car to keep a watchful eye. In any case, lock your doors – even if you think you are going to be right outside. There's nothing like losing all your luggage to put a damper on a vacation.



### USING TAXIS IN REMOTE AREAS

Taxis are considered a form of public transport in remote areas that lack good public-transportation networks. They can be hired by the hour, the half-day or full day, or you can arrange a flat fee for a trip. Meters are not used on long trips, so arrange the fare ahead of time. Fares can fluctuate due to worse-than-expected road conditions and bad weather in tough-to-reach places.

The condition of taxis varies from basic sedans held together by rust, to fully equipped 4WDs with air-con. In some cases, taxis are pick-up trucks with seats built into the back. Most towns will have at least one licensed taxi, but in some remote villages you may have to get rides from whoever is offering – ask at *pulperías* (corner grocery stores).

and let someone know where they are planning to go. Single women should use even greater discretion.

Hitching in Costa Rica is not common on main roads that have frequent buses. On minor rural roads, hitching is easier. To get picked up, most locals wave to cars in a friendly manner. If you get a ride, offer to pay when you arrive by saying, *¿Cuanto le debo?* (How much do I owe you?). Your offer may be waved aside, or you may be asked to help with money for gas.

### LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

#### Bus

Local buses operate chiefly in San José, Puntarenas, San Isidro, Golfito and Puerto Limón, connecting urban and suburban areas. Most local buses pick up passengers on the street and on main roads. The vehicles in service are usually converted school buses imported from the USA, and they are often packed.

#### Taxi

In San José taxis have meters, called *marías*, but many drivers try to get out of using them,

particularly if you don't speak Spanish. With that said, it is illegal not to use the meter, so don't be afraid to point this out if you feel as if you're about to be scammed. Outside of San José however, most taxis don't have meters and fares tend to be agreed upon in advance – some bargaining is quite acceptable.

In some towns, there are colectivo taxis that several passengers are able to share. Although colectivo taxis are becoming increasingly difficult to find, the basic principle is that the driver charges a flat fee (usually about US\$0.50) to take passengers from one end of town to the other.

In rural areas, 4WD jeeps are often used as taxis and are a popular means for surfers (and their boards) to travel from their accommodation to the break. Prices vary wildly depending on how touristy the area is, though generally speaking a 10-minute ride should cost between US\$5 and US\$15.

Taxi drivers are not normally tipped unless they assist with your luggage or have provided an above-average service. However, owing to the increasing number of American travelers, don't be surprised if drivers in tourist towns are quick to hold out their palm.

# Health

Dr David Goldberg

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Travelers to Central America need to be vigilant about food-borne and mosquito-borne infections. Most of these illnesses are not life threatening, but can certainly ruin your trip. Besides getting the proper vaccinations, it's important to use a good insect repellent and exercise care in what you eat and drink.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow fever vaccination upon entry, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Bring medications in their original containers, clearly labeled. A signed, dated letter from your physician describing all medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

## INSURANCE

Most doctors and hospitals expect payment in cash, regardless of whether you have travel

health insurance or not. If you develop a life-threatening medical problem, you'll probably want to be evacuated to a country with state-of-the-art medical care. As this may cost tens of thousands of dollars, be sure you have insurance to cover this before you leave home. A list of medical evacuation and travel insurance companies is on the website of the **US State Department** ([www.travel.state.gov/medical.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/medical.html)).

If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses while you are abroad, you should consider supplemental insurance. Check the Travel Services section of the Lonely Planet website at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_links](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_links) for more information. It might pay to find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or if they reimburse you later for any overseas health expenditures.

## MEDICAL CHECKLIST

- acetaminophen (Tylenol) or aspirin
- adhesive or paper tape
- antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- antibiotics
- antidiarrheal drugs (eg loperamide)
- antihistamines for hay fever and allergic reactions
- anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- insect repellent (containing DEET) for the skin
- insect spray (containing permethrin) for clothing, tents and bed nets
- iodine tablets for water purification
- oral rehydration salts
- pocket knife
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- steroid cream or cortisone for poison ivy and other allergic rashes
- sunblock
- syringes and sterile needles
- thermometer.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the website of **Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) is a good place to start. A superb book called *International*

*Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and available online at no cost, is published by the **World Health Organization** ([www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith)). Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com)), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost.

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available:

**Australia** ([www.dfat.gov.au/travel](http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel))

**Canada** ([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html))

**UK** ([www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en))

**USA** ([www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel))

## FURTHER READING

For further information, see *Healthy Travel Central & South America*, also from Lonely Planet. If you're traveling with children, Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* will be useful. The *ABC of Healthy Travel*, by E Walker et al, is another valuable resource.

## IN TRANSIT

### DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots (deep vein thrombosis) may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are re-absorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just the one side. When a blood clot travels all the way to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travelers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek out medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

### JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones, resulting in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic

and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and re-adjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. Ginger is a herbal alternative that works like a charm for some people.

## IN COSTA RICA

### AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Good medical care is available in most major cities, but may be limited in rural areas. For a medical emergency, you should call one of the following numbers:

**CIMA San José** (☎ 2208 1000; Próspero Fernández Fwy, San José) It's 500m west of the tollbooths on the highway to Santa Ana.

**Clínica Bíblica** (☎ 2257 0466, 257 5252; [www.clinica.biblica.com](http://www.clinica.biblica.com); Av 14 btwn Calles Central & 1)

**Hospital Nacional de Niños** (☎ 2222 0122; Calle 14, Av Central, San José) Only for children under 12 years.

**Poison Center** (☎ 2223 1028)

**Red Cross Ambulance** (☎ 911, in San José 2221 5818)

**San Juan de Dios Hospital** (☎ 2257 6282; cnr Calle 14 & Av Central, San José)

For an extensive list of physicians, dentists and hospitals go to the US embassy website ([usembassy.or.cr](http://usembassy.or.cr)). If you're pregnant, be sure to check this site before departure to find the name of one or two obstetricians, just in case.

Most pharmacies are well supplied and the pharmacists are licensed to prescribe medication. If you're taking any medication on a regular basis, be sure you know its generic (scientific) name, since many pharmaceuticals go under different names in Costa Rica. The following pharmacies are open 24 hours:

**Farmacia Clínica Bíblica** (☎ 2257 5252; cnr Calle 1 & Av 14, San José)

**Farmacia Clínica Católica** (☎ 2283 6616; Guadalupe, San José)

**Farmacia el Hospital** (☎ 2222 0985)

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES

#### Chagas' Disease

Chagas' disease is a parasitic infection that is transmitted by triatomine insects (redu-

viid bugs), which inhabit crevices in the walls and roofs of substandard housing in South and Central America. In Costa Rica most cases occur in Alajuela, Liberia and Puntarenas. The triatomine insect lays its feces on human skin as it bites, usually at night. A person becomes infected when he or she unknowingly rubs the feces into the bite wound or any other open sore. Symptoms of the disease include fever and swelling of the spleen, liver and lymph nodes. Chagas' disease is extremely rare in travelers. However, if you sleep in a poorly constructed house, especially one made of mud, adobe or thatch, you should be sure to protect yourself with a bed net and a good insecticide.

#### Dengue Fever (Breakbone Fever)

Dengue fever is a viral infection found throughout Central America. In Costa Rica outbreaks involving thousands of people occur every year. Dengue is transmitted by *Aedes* mosquitoes, which prefer to bite during the daytime and are usually found close to human habitations, often indoors. They breed primarily in artificial water containers such as jars, barrels, cans, cisterns, metal drums, plastic containers and discarded tires. As a result, dengue is especially common in densely populated, urban environments.

Dengue usually causes flu-like symptoms including fever, muscle aches, joint pains, headaches, nausea and vomiting, often followed by a rash. The body aches may be quite uncomfortable, but most cases resolve uneventfully in a few days. Severe cases usually occur in children under the age of 15 who are experiencing their second dengue infection.

There is no real treatment for dengue fever except for you to take analgesics such as acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) and drink plenty of fluids. Severe cases may require hospitalization for intravenous fluids and supportive care. There is no vaccine. The key to prevention is taking insect protection measures (see p555).

#### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is the second most common travel-related infection (after traveler's diarrhea). It's a viral infection of the liver that is usually acquired by ingestion of contaminated water, food or ice, though it may also be acquired by direct contact with infected persons.

The illness occurs throughout the world, but the incidence is higher in developing nations. Symptoms may include fever, malaise, jaundice, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Most cases resolve without complications, though hepatitis A occasionally causes severe liver damage. There is no treatment.

The vaccine for hepatitis A is extremely safe and highly effective. If you get a booster six to 12 months later, it lasts for at least 10 years. You should get vaccinated before you go to Costa Rica or any other developing nation. Because the safety of hepatitis A vaccine has not been established for pregnant women or children under the age of two, they should instead be given a gammaglobulin injection.

#### Hepatitis B

Like hepatitis A, hepatitis B is a liver infection that occurs worldwide but is more common in developing nations. Unlike hepatitis A, the disease is usually acquired by sexual contact or by exposure to infected blood, generally through blood transfusions or contaminated needles. The vaccine is recommended only for long-term travelers (on the road more than six months) who expect to live in rural areas or have close physical contact with the local population. Additionally, the vaccine is recommended for anyone who anticipates sexual contact with the local inhabitants or a possible need for medical, dental or other treatments while abroad, especially if a need for transfusions or injections is expected.

Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and highly effective. However, a total of three injections are necessary to establish full immunity. Several countries added hepatitis B vaccine to the list of routine childhood immunizations in the 1980s, so many young adults are already protected.

#### HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS virus occurs in all Central American countries. Be sure to use condoms for all sexual encounters.

#### Leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis occurs in the mountains and jungles of all Central American countries. The infection is transmitted by sand flies, which are about one-third the size of mosquitoes. Most cases occur in newly cleared forest or areas of secondary growth. The highest incidence is in Talamanca. In Costa Rica it is generally limited

to the skin, causing slow-growing ulcers over exposed parts of the body, but more severe infections may occur in those with HIV. There is no vaccine for leishmaniasis. To protect yourself from sand flies, follow the same precautions as for mosquitoes (opposite), except that netting must be finer mesh (at least 18 holes to the linear inch).

### Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is acquired by exposure to water contaminated by the urine of infected animals. Whitewater rafters are at particularly high risk. In Costa Rica most cases occur in Limón, Turrialba, San Carlos and Golfito. Cases have been reported among residents of Puerto Limón who have bathed in local streams. Outbreaks can occur at times of flooding, when sewage overflow may contaminate water sources. The initial symptoms, which resemble a mild flu, usually subside uneventfully in a few days, with or without treatment, but a minority of cases are complicated by jaundice or meningitis. There is no vaccine. You can minimize your risk by staying out of bodies of fresh water that may be contaminated by animal urine. If you're engaging in high-risk activities, such as river rafting, in an area where an outbreak is in progress, you can take 200mg of doxycycline once weekly as a preventative measure. If you actually develop leptospirosis, the treatment is 100mg of doxycycline twice daily.

### Malaria

Malaria occurs in every country in Central America. It's transmitted by mosquito bites, usually between dusk and dawn. The main symptom is high spiking fevers, which may be accompanied by chills, sweats, headache, body aches, weakness, vomiting or diarrhea. Severe cases may involve the central nervous system and lead to seizures, confusion, coma and death.

Taking malaria pills is recommended for the provinces of Alajuela, Limón (except for Puerto Limón), Guanacaste and Heredia. The risk is greatest in the cantons of Los Chiles (Alajuela Province), and Matina and Talamanca (Limón Province).

For Costa Rica the first-choice malaria pill is chloroquine, taken once weekly in a dosage of 500mg, starting one to two weeks before arrival and continuing through the trip and for four weeks after departure. Chloroquine

is safe, inexpensive and highly effective. Side effects are typically mild and may include nausea, abdominal discomfort, headache, dizziness, blurred vision or itching. Severe reactions are uncommon.

Protecting yourself against mosquito bites (see opposite) is just as important as taking malaria pills, since no pills are 100% effective.

If you may not have access to medical care while traveling, you should bring along additional pills for emergency self-treatment, which you should take if you can't reach a doctor and you develop symptoms that suggest malaria, such as high spiking fevers. One option is to take four tablets of Malarone once daily for three days. If you start self-medication, you should try to see a doctor at the earliest possible opportunity.

If you develop a fever after returning home, see a physician as malaria symptoms may not occur for months.

### Rabies

Rabies is a viral infection of the brain and spinal cord that is almost always fatal. The rabies virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is typically transmitted through an animal bite, though contamination of any break in the skin with infected saliva may result in rabies.

Rabies occurs in all Central American countries. However, in Costa Rica only two cases have been reported over the last 30 years. Rabies vaccine is therefore recommended only for those at particularly high risk, such as spelunkers (cave explorers) and animal handlers.

All animal bites and scratches must be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and water. Local health authorities should be contacted to determine whether or not further treatment is necessary (see Animal Bites, opposite).

### Typhoid

Typhoid fever is caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated by a species of *Salmonella* known as *Salmonella typhi*. Fever occurs in virtually all cases. Other symptoms may include headache, malaise, muscle aches, dizziness, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain. Either diarrhea or constipation may occur. Possible complications include intestinal perforation, intestinal bleeding, confusion, delirium or (rarely) coma.

Unless you expect to take all your meals in major hotels and restaurants, a typhoid vaccine is a good idea. It's usually given orally, but is also available as an injection. Neither vaccine is approved for use in children under the age of two.

The drug of choice for typhoid fever is usually a quinolone antibiotic such as ciprofloxacin (Cipro) or levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry for treatment of traveler's diarrhea. However, if you self-treat for typhoid fever, you may also need to self-treat for malaria, since the symptoms of the two diseases may be indistinguishable.

### TRAVELER'S DIARRHEA

To prevent diarrhea, you should avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets); only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurized milk; and be highly selective when eating food from street vendors.

If you develop diarrhea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day you should begin taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrheal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhea is bloody or persists for more than 72 hours, or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

### ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

#### Animal Bites

Do not attempt to pet, handle or feed any animal, with the exception of domestic animals known to be free of any infectious disease. Most animal injuries are directly related to a person's attempt to touch or feed the animal.

Any bite or scratch by a mammal, including bats, should be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and water, followed by application of an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol. The local health authorities should be contacted immediately for possible postexposure rabies treatment, whether or not you've been immunized against rabies. It may also be advisable to start an antibiotic, since wounds caused by animal bites and scratches frequently become infected. One of the newer quinolones,

such as levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry in case of diarrhea, would be an appropriate choice.

### Insect Bites

No matter how much you safeguard, getting bitten by mosquitoes is part of every traveler's experience in the country. While there are occasional outbreaks of dengue (see p553) in Costa Rica, for the most part the greatest worry you will have with bites is the general discomfort that comes with them, namely itching.

The best prevention is to stay covered up – wearing long pants, long sleeves, a hat and shoes (rather than sandals). Unfortunately, Costa Rica's sweltering temperatures might make this a bit difficult. Therefore, the best measure you can take is to invest in a good insect repellent, preferably one containing DEET. (These repellents can also be found in Costa Rica.) This should be applied to exposed skin and clothing (but not to eyes, mouth, cuts, wounds or irritated skin).

In general, adults and children over 12 can use preparations containing 25% to 35% DEET, which usually lasts about six hours. Children between two and 12 years of age should use preparations containing no more than 10% DEET, applied sparingly, which will usually last about three hours. Neurologic toxicity has been reported from DEET, especially in children, but appears to be extremely uncommon and generally related to overuse. Compounds containing DEET should not be used on children under age two.

Insect repellents containing certain botanical products, including eucalyptus and soybean oil, are effective but last only 1½ to two hours.

A particularly good item for every traveler to take is a bug net to hang over beds (along with a few thumbtacks or nails with which to hang it). Many hotels in Costa Rica don't have windows (or screens) and a cheap little net will save you plenty of nighttime aggravation. The mesh size should be less than 1.5mm.

Dusk is the worst time for mosquitoes, so it's best to take extra precautions once the sun starts to set.

### Snake Bites

Costa Rica is home to all manner of venomous snakes and any foray into forested areas will put you at (a very slight) risk for snake bite.

The best prevention is to wear closed, heavy shoes or boots and to keep a watchful eye on the trail. Snakes like to come out to cleared paths for a nap, so watch where you step. (For more on Costa Rica's fer-de-lance and bushmaster, see p195).

In the event of a bite from a venomous snake, place the victim at rest, keep the bitten area immobilized and move the victim immediately to the nearest medical facility. Avoid tourniquets, which are no longer recommended.

### Sun

To protect yourself from excessive sun exposure you should stay out of the midday sun, wear sunglasses and a wide-brimmed sun hat, and apply sunblock with SPF 15 or higher, with both UVA and UVB protection. Sunblock should be generously applied to all exposed parts of the body approximately 30 minutes before sun exposure and should be reapplied after swimming or vigorous activity. Travelers should also drink plenty of fluids and avoid strenuous exercise when the temperature is high.

### Water

It's generally safe to drink the tap water everywhere in Costa Rica, other than in the most rural and undeveloped parts of the country. However, if you prefer to be cautious, buying

bottled water is your best bet. If you have the means, vigorous boiling for one minute is the most effective means of water purification. At altitudes greater than 2000m, boil for three minutes. Another option is to disinfect water with iodine pills: add 2% tincture of iodine to 1L of water (five drops to clear water, 10 drops to cloudy water) and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cold, longer times may be required.

### TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN

In general, it's safe for children and pregnant women to go to Costa Rica. However, because some of the vaccines listed previously are not approved for use by children or during pregnancy, these travelers should be particularly careful not to drink tap water or consume any questionable food or beverage. Also, when traveling with children, make sure they're up-to-date on all routine immunizations. It's sometimes appropriate to give children some of their vaccines a little early before visiting a developing nation. You should discuss this with your pediatrician.

Lastly, if pregnant, you should bear in mind that should a complication such as premature labor develop while abroad, the quality of medical care may not be comparable to that in your home country.

See p529 for some general information on traveling with children.

# Language

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Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica and the main language the traveler will need. Every visitor to the country should attempt to learn some Spanish, the basic elements of which are easily acquired.

A month-long language course taken before departure can go a long way toward facilitating communication and comfort on the road. Alternatively, language courses are also available in all parts of Costa Rica (see p530). Even if classes are impractical, you should make the effort to learn a few basic phrases and pleasantries. Don't hesitate to practice your new skills – in general, Latin Americans meet attempts to communicate in the vernacular, however halting, with enthusiasm and appreciation.

## PHRASEBOOKS & DICTIONARIES

Lonely Planet's *Costa Rica Spanish Phrasebook* will be very helpful during your trip. If you're traveling outside of Costa Rica, LP's *Latin American Spanish Phrasebook* is another worthwhile addition to your backpack. Another really useful little number is the University of Chicago *Spanish-English, English-Spanish Dictionary*. It's small, light and has thorough entries, making it ideal

## SPANISH IN COSTA RICA

The following colloquialisms and slang (*tiq-uismos*) are frequently heard, and are for the most part used only in Costa Rica.

- ¡Adiós!** – Hi! (used when passing a friend in the street, or anyone in remote rural areas; also means 'farewell,' but only when leaving for a long time)
- bomba** – gas station
- Buena nota** – OK/Excellent (literally 'good note')
- chapulines** – a gang, usually of young thieves
- chunche** – thing (can refer to almost anything)
- cien metros** – one city block
- ¿Hay campo?** – Is there space? (on a bus)
- machita** – blonde woman (slang)
- mae** – buddy (pronounced 'ma' as in 'mat' followed with a quick 'eh'; it's mainly used by boys and young men)
- mi amor** – my love (used as a familiar form of address by both men and women)
- pulperia** – corner grocery store
- ¡Pura vida!** – Super! (literally 'pure life,' also an expression of approval or even a greeting)
- sabanero** – cowboy, especially one who hails from Guanacaste Province
- Salado** – Too bad/Tough luck
- soda** – café or lunch counter
- ¡Tuanis!** – Cool!
- ¡Upe!** – Is anybody home? (used mainly in rural areas at people's homes, instead of knocking)
- vos** – you (informal, same as *tú*)

for travel. It also makes an excellent gift to give to any newfound friends upon your departure.

## LATIN AMERICAN SPANISH

The Spanish of the Americas comes in a bewildering array of varieties. Depending on the areas in which you travel, consonants may be glossed over, vowels squashed into each other, and syllables, even words, dropped entirely. Slang and regional vocabulary, much of it derived from indigenous languages, can further add to the bewilderment. The boxed text above gives you a few insights into the local lingo of Costa Rica.

Throughout Latin America, the Spanish language is referred to as *castellano* more

often than *español*. Unlike in Spain, the plural of the familiar *tú* form is *ustedes* rather than *vosotros*; the latter term will sound quaint and archaic in the Americas. Another notable difference is that the letters **c** and **z** are never lipsped in Latin America; attempts to do so could well provoke amusement.

## OTHER LANGUAGES

Travelers will find English is often spoken in the upmarket hotels, airline offices and tourist agencies, and some other European languages are encountered in hotels run by Europeans. On the Caribbean coast, many of the locals speak some English, albeit with a local Creole dialect.

Indigenous languages are spoken in isolated areas, but unless travelers are getting off the beaten track they'll rarely encounter them. The indigenous languages Bribri and Cabécar are understood by an estimated 18,000 people living on both sides of the Cordillera de Talamanca.

## PRONUNCIATION

Spanish spelling is phonetically consistent, meaning that there's a clear and consistent relationship between what you see in writing and how it's pronounced. Also, most Spanish sounds have English equivalents, so English speakers shouldn't have too much trouble being understood. The words and phrases in this language guide are all accompanied by guides to pronunciation, so the task of getting your message across is made even simpler.

## Vowels

<b>a</b>	as in 'father'
<b>e</b>	as in 'met'
<b>i</b>	as in 'marine'
<b>o</b>	as in 'or' (without the 'r' sound)
<b>u</b>	as in 'rule'; the 'u' is not pronounced after <b>q</b> and in the letter combinations <b>gue</b> and <b>gui</b> , unless it's marked with a diaeresis (eg <i>argüir</i> ), in which case it's pronounced as English 'w'
<b>y</b>	at the end of a word or when it stands alone, <b>y</b> is pronounced as the Spanish <b>i</b> (eg <i>ley</i> ); between vowels within a word it's as the 'y' in 'yonder'

## Consonants

As a rule, Spanish consonants resemble their English counterparts, with the odd

exceptions listed below. While the consonants **ch**, **ll** and **ñ** are generally considered distinct letters, **ch** and **ll** are now often listed alphabetically under **c** and **l** respectively. The letter **ñ** is still treated as a separate letter and comes after **n** in dictionaries.

<b>b</b>	similar to English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b larga'
<b>c</b>	as in 'celery' before <b>e</b> and <b>i</b> ; otherwise as English 'k'
<b>ch</b>	as in 'church'
<b>d</b>	as in 'dog,' but between vowels and after <b>l</b> or <b>n</b> , the sound is closer to the 'th' in 'this'
<b>g</b>	as the 'ch' in the Scottish 'loch' before <b>e</b> and <b>i</b> ('kh' in our guides to pronunciation); elsewhere, as in 'go'
<b>h</b>	invariably silent. If your name begins with this letter, listen carefully if you're waiting for public officials to call you.
<b>j</b>	as the 'ch' in the Scottish 'loch' (written as 'kh' in our guides to pronunciation)
<b>ll</b>	as the 'y' in 'yellow'
<b>ñ</b>	as the 'ni' in 'onion'
<b>r</b>	a short <b>r</b> except at the beginning of a word, and after <b>l</b> , <b>n</b> or <b>s</b> , when it's often rolled
<b>rr</b>	very strongly rolled
<b>v</b>	similar to English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b corta'
<b>x</b>	usually pronounced as <b>j</b> above; in some indigenous place names <b>x</b> is pronounced as the 's' in 'sit'; in other instances, it's as in 'taxi'
<b>z</b>	as the 's' in 'sun'

## Word Stress

Rules for word stress are quite simple. In general, words ending in vowels or the letters **n** or **s** have stress on the next-to-last syllable, while those with other endings have stress on the last syllable. Thus *vaca* (cow) and *caballos* (horses) both carry stress on the next-to-last syllable, while *ciudad* (city) and *infeliz* (unhappy) are both stressed on the last syllable.

Written accents will almost always appear in words that don't follow the rules above, eg *sótano* (basement), *América* and *porción* (portion). Stressed syllables are marked in italics in the guides to pronunciation included in this language guide.

## GENDER & PLURALS

In Spanish, nouns are either masculine or feminine, and there are rules to help determine gender (there are of course some exceptions). Feminine nouns generally end with **-a** or with the groups **-ción**, **-sión** or **-dad**. Other endings typically signify a masculine noun. Endings for adjectives also change to agree with the gender of the noun they modify (masculine/feminine **-o/-a**). Where both masculine and feminine forms are included in this language guide, they are separated by a slash, with the masculine form first, eg *perdido/a*.

If a noun or adjective ends in a vowel, the plural is formed by adding **s** to the end. If it ends in a consonant, the plural is formed by adding **es** to the end.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

<b>I'm looking for ...</b>	<i>Estoy buscando ...</i>	<i>e-stoy boos-kan-do ...</i>
<b>Where is ...?</b>	<i>¿Dónde hay ...?</i>	<i>don-de ai ...</i>
<b>a cabin</b>	<i>una cabina</i>	<i>oo-na ca-bee-na</i>
<b>a camping ground</b>	<i>un camping/ campamento</i>	<i>oon kam-ping/ kam-pa-men-to</i>
<b>a guesthouse</b>	<i>una casa de huéspedes</i>	<i>oo-na ka-sa de wes-pe-des</i>
<b>a hostel</b>	<i>un hospedaje/ una residencia</i>	<i>oon os-pe-da-khe/ oon-a re-see-den-sya</i>
<b>a hotel</b>	<i>un hotel</i>	<i>oon o-tel</i>
<b>a youth hostel</b>	<i>un albergue juvenil</i>	<i>oon al-ber-ge khoo-ve-neel</i>

## Are there any rooms available?

*¿Hay habitaciones libres?  
ay a-bee-ta-syon-es lee-bres*

<b>I'd like a ... room.</b>	<i>Quisiera una habitación ...</i>	<i>kee-sye-ra oo-na a-bee-ta-syon ...</i>
<b>double</b>	<i>doble</i>	<i>do-ble</i>
<b>single</b>	<i>individual</i>	<i>een-dee-vee-dwal</i>
<b>twin</b>	<i>con dos camas</i>	<i>kon dos ka-mas</i>
<b>How much is it per ...?</b>	<i>¿Cuánto cuesta por ...?</i>	<i>kwan-to kwes-ta por ...</i>
<b>night</b>	<i>noche</i>	<i>no-che</i>
<b>person</b>	<i>persona</i>	<i>per-so-na</i>
<b>week</b>	<i>semana</i>	<i>se-ma-na</i>

<b>full board</b>	<i>penión completa</i>	<i>pen-syon kom-ple-ta</i>
<b>private/shared bathroom</b>	<i>baño privado/ compartido</i>	<i>ba-nyo pree-va-do/ kom-par-tee-do</i>

<b>too expensive</b>	<i>demasiado caro</i>	<i>de-ma-sya-do ka-ro</i>
<b>cheaper</b>	<i>más económico</i>	<i>mas e-ko-no-mee-ko</i>
<b>discount</b>	<i>descuento</i>	<i>des-kwen-to</i>

## MAKING A RESERVATION

(for phone or written requests)

<b>To ...</b>	<i>A ...</i>
<b>From ...</b>	<i>De ...</i>
<b>Date</b>	<i>Fecha</i>
<b>I'd like to book ...</b>	<i>Quisiera reservar ...</i> (see the list under 'Accommodations' for bed and room options)
<b>in the name of ...</b>	<i>en nombre de ...</i>
<b>for the nights of ...</b>	<i>para las noches del ...</i>
<b>credit card ...</b>	<i>tarjeta de crédito ...</i>
<b>number</b>	<i>número</i>
<b>expiry date</b>	<i>fecha de vencimiento</i>
<b>Please confirm ...</b>	<i>Puede confirmar ...</i>
<b>availability</b>	<i>la disponibilidad</i>
<b>price</b>	<i>el precio</i>

## Does it include breakfast?

*¿Incluye el desayuno?* *een-kloo-ye el de-sa-yoo-no*

## May I see the room?

*¿Puedo ver la habitación?* *pwe-do ver la a-bee-ta-syon*

## I don't like it.

*No me gusta.* *no me goos-ta*

## It's fine. I'll take it.

*Está bien. La tomo.* *es-ta byen la to-mo*

## I'm leaving now.

*Me voy ahora.* *me voy a-o-ra*

## CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

In their public behavior, Latin Americans are very conscious of civilities. You should never approach a stranger for information without extending a greeting, such as *buenos días* or *buenas tardes*, and you should use only the polite form of address, especially with the police and public officials.

Central America is generally more formal than many of the South American countries. The polite form *usted* (you) is used in all cases in this guide; where options are given, the form is indicated by the abbreviations 'pol' and 'inf.'

<b>Hi.</b>	<i>Hola.</i>	<i>o-la (inf)</i>
<b>Good morning.</b>	<i>Buenos días.</i>	<i>bwe-nos dee-as</i>
<b>Good afternoon.</b>	<i>Buenas tardes.</i>	<i>bwe-nas tar-des</i>
<b>Good evening/ night.</b>	<i>Buenas noches.</i>	<i>bwe-nas no-ches</i>



The three most common greetings are often abbreviated to simply *buenos* (for *buenos días*) and *buenas* (for *buenas tardes* and *buenas noches*).

**Bye/See you soon.** *Hasta luego.* as-ta lwe-go  
**Goodbye.** *Adiós.* a-dyos

(see also the boxed text, p557)

**Yes.** *Sí.* see

**No.** *No.* no

**Please.** *Por favor.* por fa-vor

**Thank you.** *Gracias.* gra-syas

**Many thanks.** *Muchas gracias.* moo-chas gra-syas

**You're welcome.** *De nada.* de na-da

**Excuse me.** *Con permiso.* kon per-mee-so

(to get past or when reaching over to take something)

**Excuse me.** *Perdón.* per-don

(when apologising or before asking directions/advice)

**I'm sorry.** *Disculpe.* dees-kool-pe  
(when apologizing)

**How are things?**

*¿Qué tal?* ke tal

**What's your name?**

*¿Cómo se llama usted?* ko-mo se ya-ma oo-sted (pol)

*¿Cómo te llamas?* ko-mo te ya-mas (inf)

**My name is ...**

*Me llamo ...* me ya-mo ...

**It's a pleasure to meet you.**

*Mucho gusto.* moo-cho goos-to

**The pleasure is mine.**

*El gusto es mío.* el goos-to es mee-o

**Where are you from?**

*¿De dónde es/eres?* de don-de es/er-es (pol/inf)

**I'm from ...**

*Soy de ...* soy de ...

**Where are you staying?**

*¿Dónde está alojado?* don-de es-ta a-lo-kha-do (pol)

*¿Dónde estás alojado?* don-de es-tas a-lo-kha-do (inf)

**May I take a photo?**

*¿Puedo sacar una foto?* pwe-do sa-kar oo-na fo-to

## DIRECTIONS

**How do I get to ...?**

*¿Cómo llego a ...?* ko-mo ye-go a ...

**Is it far?**

*¿Está lejos?* es-ta le-khos

**Go straight ahead.**

*Siga/Vaya derecho.* see-ga/va-ya de-re-cho

**Turn left.**

*Voltée a la izquierda.* vol-te-e a la ees-kyer-da

**Turn right.**

*Voltée a la derecha.* vol-te-e a la de-re-cha

**Can you show me (on the map)?**

*¿Me lo podría señalar  
(en el mapa)?* me lo po-dree-a se-nya-lar  
(en el ma-pa)

## SIGNS

**Entrada** Entrance

**Salida** Exit

**Información** Information

**Abierto** Open

**Cerrado** Closed

**Prohibido** Prohibited

**Comisaría** Police Station

**Servicios/Baños** Toilets

**Hombres/Varones** Men

**Mujeres/Damas** Women

**north** *norte* nor-te

**south** *sur* soor

**east** *este* es-te

**west** *oeste* o-es-te

**here** *aquí* a-kee

**there** *ahí* a-ee

**avenue** *avenida* a-ve-nee-da

**block** *cuadra* kwa-dra

**street** *calle/paseo* ka-lye/pa-se-o

## EMERGENCIAS

**Help!** *¡Socorro!* so-ko-ro

**Fire!** *¡Fuego!* fwe-go

**I've been robbed.** *Me han robado.* me an ro-ba-do

**Go away!** *¡Déjeme!* de-khe-me

**Get lost!** *¡Váyase!* va-ya-se

**Call ...!** *¡Llame a ...!* ya-me a

**the police** *la policía* la po-lee-see-a

**a doctor** *un médico* oon me-dee-ko

**an ambulance** *una ambulancia* oo-na am-boo-

*lan-sya*

**It's an emergency.** *Es una emergencia.* es oo-na e-mer-khen-sya

**Could you help me, please?**

*¿Me puede ayudar,* me pwe-de a-yoo-dar

*por favor?* por fa-vor

**I'm lost.** *Estoy perdido/a.* es-toy per-dee-do/a

**Where are the toilets?**

*¿Dónde están los baños?* don-de es-tan los ba-nyos

## HEALTH

**I'm sick.**

*Estoy enfermo/a.* es-toy en-fer-mo/a

**I need a doctor.**

*Necesito un médico.* ne-se-see-to oon me-dee-ko

**Where's the hospital?**

*¿Dónde está el hospital?* don-de es-ta el os-pee-tal

**I'm pregnant.**

*Estoy embarazada.* es-toy em-ba-ra-sa-da

**I've been vaccinated.**

*Estoy vacunado/a.* es-toy va-koo-na-do/a

**I'm allergic** *Soy alérgico/a* soy a-ler-khee-ko/a

**to ...** *a ...* a ...

**antibiotics** *los antibióticos* los an-tee-byo-tee-kos

**nuts** *las nueces* las nwe-ses

**peanuts** *los cacahuates* los ka-ka-khwa-tes

**penicillin** *la penicilina* la pe-nee-see-lee-na

**I'm ...** *Soy ...* soy ...

**asthmatic** *asmático/a* as-ma-tee-ko/a

**diabetic** *diabético/a* dya-be-tee-ko/a

**epileptic** *epiléptico/a* e-pee-lep-tee-ko/a

**I have ...** *Tengo ...* ten-go ...

**a cough** *tos* tos

**diarrhea** *diarrea* dya-re-a

**a headache** *un dolor de* oon do-lor de

*cabeza* ka-be-sa

**nausea** *náusea* now-se-a

## LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

**Do you speak English?**

*¿Habla/Hablas inglés?* a-bla/a-blas een-gles (pol/inf)

**Does anyone here speak English?**

*¿Hay alguien que hable inglés?* ai al-gyen ke a-ble een-gles

**I (don't) understand.**

*(No) Entiendo.* (no) en-tyen-do

**How do you say ...?**

*¿Cómo se dice ...?* ko-mo se dee-se ...

**What does ...mean?**

*¿Qué significa ...?* ke seeg-nee-fee-ka ...

**Could you please ...?** *¿Puede ..., por* pwe-de ... por

*favor?* fa-vor

**repeat that** *repetirlo* re-pe-teer-lo

**speak more** *hablar más* a-blar mas

**slowly** *despacio* des-pa-syo

**write it down** *escribirlo* es-kree-beer-lo

## NUMBERS

**1** *uno* oo-no

**2** *dos* dos

**3** *tres* tres

**4** *cuatro* kwa-tro

**5** *cinco* seen-ko

**6** *seis* says

**7** *siete* sye-te

**8** *ocho* o-cho

**9** *nueve* nwe-ve

**10** *diez* dyes

11	<i>once</i>	on-se
12	<i>doce</i>	do-se
13	<i>trece</i>	tre-se
14	<i>catorce</i>	ka-tor-se
15	<i>quince</i>	keen-se
16	<i>dieciséis</i>	dye-see-says
17	<i>diecisiete</i>	dye-see-sye-te
18	<i>dieciocho</i>	dye-see-o-cho
19	<i>diecinueve</i>	dye-see-nwe-ve
20	<i>veinte</i>	vayn-te
21	<i>veintiuno</i>	vayn-tee-oo-no
30	<i>treinta</i>	trayn-ta
31	<i>treinta y uno</i>	trayn-ta ee oo-no
40	<i>cuarenta</i>	kwa-ren-ta
50	<i>cinquenta</i>	seen-kwen-ta
60	<i>sesenta</i>	se-sen-ta
70	<i>setenta</i>	se-ten-ta
80	<i>ochenta</i>	o-chen-ta
90	<i>noventa</i>	no-ven-ta
100	<i>cien</i>	syen
101	<i>ciento uno</i>	syen-to oo-no
200	<i>doscientos</i>	do-syen-tos
1000	<i>mil</i>	meel
5000	<i>cinco mil</i>	seen-ko meel

## PAPERWORK

**birth certificate** *certificado de nacimiento*

**border (frontier)** *la frontera*

**car-owner's title** *título de propiedad*

**car registration** *registro*

**customs** *aduanas*

**driver's license** *licencia de manejar*

**identification** *identificación*

**immigration** *migración*

**insurance** *seguro*

**passport** *pasaporte*

**temporary vehicle** *permiso de importación*

**import permit** *temporal de vehículo*

**tourist card** *tarjeta de turista*

**visa** *visado*

## SHOPPING & SERVICES

**I'd like to buy ...**

*Quisiera comprar ...* kee-sye-ra kom-prar ...

**I'm just looking.** *Sólo estoy mirando.* so-lo es-toy mee-ran-do

**May I look at it?**

*¿Puedo verlo/a?* pwe-do ver-lo/a

**How much is it?**

*¿Cuánto cuesta?* kwan-to kwes-ta

**That's too expensive for me.**

*Es demasiado caro* es de-ma-sya-do ka-ro

*para mí.* pa-ra mee

**Could you lower the price?**

*¿Podría bajar un poco* po-dree-a ba-khar oon po-ko

*el precio?* el pre-syo

**I don't like it.**

*No me gusta.* no me goos-ta

**I'll take it.**

*Lo llevo.* lo ye-vo

**Do you accept ...?** ¿Aceptan ...? a-sep-tan ...

**American dollars credit cards** dólares americanos tarjetas de crédito  
do-la-res a-me-ree-ka-nos tar-khe-tas de kre-dee-to  
**traveler's checks** cheques de viajero  
vya-khe-ro

**less more large small** menos más grande pequeño/a (m/f)  
me-nos mas gran-de pe-ke-nyo/a

**I'm looking for the ... ATM** Estoy buscando ... un cajero automático  
es-toy boos-kan-do... oon ka-khe-ro ow-to-ma-tee-ko

**bank bookstore exchange house** un banco la librería una casa de cambio  
la-tee-ko la lee-bre-ree-a oo-na ka-sa de kam-byo  
**general store laundry market pharmacy/chemist** la tienda la lavandería el mercado la farmacia  
la tyen-da la la-van-de-ree-a el mer-ka-do la far-ma-sya

**post office supermarket** el correo el supermercado  
el ko-re-o el soo-per-mer-ka-do

**tourist office** la oficina de turismo la o-fee-see-na de too-rees-mo

**What time does it open/close?**

¿A qué hora abre/cierra?  
a ke o-ra a-bre/sye-ra

**I want to change some money/traveler's checks.**

*Quisiera cambiar dinero/cheques de viajero.*  
kee-sye-ra kam-byar dee-ne-ro/che-kes de vya-khe-ro

**What is the exchange rate?**

¿Cuál es el tipo de cambio?  
kwal es el tee-po de kam-byo

**I want to call ...**

*Quisiera llamar a ...*  
kee-sye-ra lya-mar a ...

**airmail letter registered (mail) stamps** correo aéreo carta certificado timbres  
ko-re-o a-e-re-o kar-ta ser-tee-fee-ka-do teem-bres

**TIME & DATES**

**What time is it? It's one o'clock. It's ten o'clock. Half past two.** ¿Qué hora es? Es la una. Son las diez. Dos y media.  
ke o-ra es es la oo-na son las dyes dos ee me-dya

**midnight noon now today tonight tomorrow yesterday** medianoche mediodía ahora hoy esta noche mañana ayer  
me-dya-no-che me-dyo-dee-a a-o-ra oy es-ta no-che ma-ny-a-na a-yer

**Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday** lunes martes miércoles jueves viernes sábado domingo  
loo-nes mar-tes myer-ko-les khwe-ves vyer-nes sa-ba-do do-meen-go

**January February March April May June July August September October November December** enero febrero marzo abril mayo junio julio agosto septiembre octubre noviembre diciembre  
e-ne-ro fe-bre-ro mar-so a-breel ma-yo khoo-nyo khoo-lyo a-gos-to sep-tyem-bre ok-too-bre no-vyem-bre dee-syem-bre

**TRANSPORT**

**Public Transport**  
**What time does ... leave/arrive? the bus the ferry the minibus the plane the train** ¿A qué hora ... sale/llega? el bus/autobús el barco el colectivo/la buseta/el microbus el avión el tren  
a ke o-ra ... sa-le/ye-ga el bus/ow-to-boos el bar-ko el ko-lek-tee-vo/la boo-se-ta/el mee-kro-boos el a-vyon el tren

**the airport the bus station the bus stop the train station** el aeropuerto la estación de autobuses la parada de autobuses la estación de ferrocarril  
el a-e-ro-pwer-to la es-ta-syon de ow-to-boo-ses la pa-ra-da de ow-to-boo-ses la es-ta-syon de fe-ro-ka-reel

**the luggage locker the ticket office** la consigna para el equipaje la boletería/ticketería  
la kon-see-nya para el e-kee-pa-khe la bo-le-te-ree-ya/tee-ke-te-ree-ya

**A ticket to ..., please.**

*Un boleto a ..., por favor.*  
oon bo-le-to a ... por fa-vor

**What's the fare to ...?**

¿Cuánto cuesta hasta ...?  
kwan-to kwes-ta a-sta ...

**student's 1st class 2nd class one-way round trip taxi** de estudiante primera clase segunda clase de ida de ida y vuelta taxi  
de es-too-dyan-te pree-me-ra kla-se se-goon-da kla-se de ee-da de ee-da e vvel-ta tak-see

**Private Transport**

**I'd like to hire a ... 4WD car motorcycle** Quisiera alquilar ... un todo terreno un auto/carro una motocicleta  
kee-sye-ra al-kee-lar ... oon to-do te-re-no oon ow-to/ka-ro oo-na mo-to-see-kle-ta oo-na bee-see-kle-ta  
**bicycle** una bicicleta

**pick-up (truck) truck hitchhike** camioneta camión pedir un aventón  
ka-myo-ne-ta ka-myon pe-deer oon a-ven-ton

**Where's a petrol station?**

¿Dónde hay una gasolinera/bomba?  
don-de ai oon-na ga-so-lee-ne-ra/bom-ba

**How much is a litre of gasoline?**

¿Cuánto cuesta el litro de gasolina?  
kwan-to kwes-ta el lee-tro de ga-so-lee-na

**Please fill it up.**

*Lleno, por favor.*  
ye-no por fa-vor

**I'd like (2000 colones) worth.**

*Quiero (dos mil colones) en gasolina.*  
kye-ro (dos meel ko-lo-nes) en ga-so-lee-na

**diesel gas (petrol) leaded (regular) unleaded oil tire puncture** diesel gasolina gasolina con plomo gasolina sin plomo aceite llanta agujero  
dee-sel ga-so-lee-na ga-so-lee-na kon plo-mo ga-so-lee-na seen plo-mo a-say-te yan-ta a-goo-khe-ro

**ROAD SIGNS**

Though Costa Rica mostly uses the familiar international road signs, you should be prepared to encounter these other signs as well:

<b>Acceso</b>	Entrance
<b>Acceso Permanente</b>	24-Hour Access
<b>Acceso Prohibido</b>	No Entry
<b>Prohibido el Paso</b>	
<b>Ceda el Paso</b>	Give Way
<b>Construcción de Carreteras</b>	Roadworks
<b>Curva Peligrosa</b>	Dangerous Curve
<b>Derrumbes</b>	Landslides
<b>Despacio</b>	Slow
<b>Desvío/Desviación</b>	Detour
<b>Mantenga Su Derecha</b>	Keep to the Right
<b>No Adelantar</b>	No Passing
<b>No Hay Paso</b>	Road Closed
<b>No Pase</b>	No Overtaking
<b>Pare/Stop</b>	Stop
<b>Peligro</b>	Danger
<b>Prohibido Estacionar</b>	No Parking
<b>Puente Angosto</b>	Narrow Bridge
<b>Salida (de Autopista)</b>	Exit (Freeway)
<b>Una Via</b>	One Way

**Is this the road to ...?**

¿Por aquí se va a ...?  
por a-kee se va a ...

**(How long) Can I park here?**

¿(Por cuánto tiempo) Puedo estacionar aquí?  
(por kwan-to tyem-po) pwe-do ess-ta-syo-nar a-kee

**Where do I pay?**

¿Dónde se paga?  
don-de se pa-ga

**I need a mechanic/tow truck.**

*Necesito un mecánico/remolque.*  
ne-se-see-to oon me-ka-nee-ko/re-mol-ke

**Is there a garage near here?**

¿Hay un garaje cerca de aquí?  
ai oon ga-ra-khe ser-ka de a-kee

**The car has broken down in ...**

*El carro se ha averiado en ...*  
el ka-ro se a a-ve-rya-do en ...

**The motorbike won't start.**

*La moto no arranca.*  
la mo-to no a-ran-ka

**I have a flat tire.**

*Tengo una llanta desinflada.*  
ten-go oo-na yan-ta des-eeen-fla-da

**I've run out of petrol.**

*Me quedé sin gasolina.*  
me ke-de seen ga-so-lee-na

**I've had an accident.**

*Tuve un accidente.*  
too-ve oon ak-see-den-te

**TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN****I need ...***Necesito ...**ne-se-see-to ...***Do you have ...?***¿Hay ...?**ái ...***a car baby seat***un asiento de seguridad para bebés**oon a-syen-to de se-goo-ree-da pa-ra be-bes***a child-minding service***oon club para niños**oon kloob pa-ra nee-nyos***a children's menu***un menú infantil**oon me-noo een-fan-teel***a crèche***una guardería**oo-na gwar-de-ree-a***(disposable) diapers/nappies***pañales (de usar y tirar)**pa-nya-les (de oo-sar ee tee-rar)***an (English-speaking) babysitter***una niñera (que habla inglesa)**oo-na nee-nye-ra (ke a-bla een-gle-sa)***formula (milk)***leche en polvo**le-che en pol-vo***a highchair***una silla para bebé**oo-na see-ya pa-ra be-be***a potty***una bacínica**oo-na ba-see-nee-ka***a stroller***una carreola**oona ka-re-o-la***Do you mind if I breast-feed here?***¿Le molesta que dé el pecho aquí?**le mo-les-ta ke de el pe-cho a-kee***Are children allowed?***¿Se admiten niños?**se ad-mee-ten nee-nyos*

Also available from Lonely Planet:  
*Costa Rican Spanish Phrasebook*

# Glossary

See p58 for useful words and phrases dealing with food and dining. See the Language chapter (p557) for other useful words and phrases.

**adiós** – means goodbye universally, but used in rural Costa Rica as a greeting  
**alquiler de automóviles** – car rental  
**apartado** – post-office box  
**artesanía** – handicrafts  
**ATH** – *a toda hora* (open all hours); used to denote automatic teller machines  
**automóvil** – car  
**avenida** – avenue  
**avión** – airplane

**bahía** – bay  
**barrio** – district or neighborhood  
**biblioteca** – library  
**bocas** – small savory dishes served in bars  
**bomba** – short, funny verse; also means gas station; also means bomb  
**bosque** – forest  
**bosque nuboso** – cloud forest  
**buena nota** – excellent/OK; literally ‘good note’

**caballo** – horse  
**cabaña** – cabin; see also *cabina*  
**cabina** – cabin; see also *cabaña*  
**cajero automático** – ATM  
**calle** – street  
**cama/cama matrimonial** – bed/double bed  
**campesino** – peasant, farmer or person who works in agriculture  
**carretas** – colorfully painted wooden oxcarts, now a form of folk art  
**carretera** – road  
**casado** – set meal; also means married  
**casita** – cottage or apartment  
**catedral** – cathedral  
**caverna** – cave; see also *cueva*  
**cerro** – mountain or hill  
**cerveza** – beer  
**ceviche** – local dish of raw, marinated seafood  
**Chepe** – affectionate nickname for José; also used when referring to San José  
**cine** – cinema  
**ciudad** – city  
**cocina** – kitchen or cooking

**colectivo** – buses, minivans or cars operating as shared taxis  
**colibrí** – hummingbird  
**colina** – hill  
**colón** – Costa Rican unit of currency; plural colones  
**comida típica** – typical food  
**cordillera** – mountain range  
**correo** – mail service  
**Costarricense** – Costa Rican; see also *Tico*  
**cruce** – crossing  
**cruda** – often used to describe a hangover; literally ‘raw’  
**cueva** – cave; see also *caverna*  
**culebra** – snake; see also *serpiente*

**Dios** – God  
**directo** – direct; refers to long-distance bus with few stops

**edificio** – building  
**estación** – station, as in ranger station or bus station; also means season

**farmacia** – pharmacy  
**fauna silvestre** – wildlife  
**fiesta** – party or festival  
**finca** – farm or plantation  
**floresta** – forest  
**frontera** – border  
**fútbol** – football (soccer)

**gallo pinto** – rice and beans  
**garza** – cattle egret  
**gasolina** – gas or petrol  
**gracias** – thanks  
**gringo/a** – male/female US or European visitors; can be affectionate or insulting, depending on the tone used  
**guaro** – local firewater

**hacienda** – rural estate  
**hielo** – ice

**ICT** – Instituto Costarricense de Turismo; Costa Rica Tourism Board, which provides tourist information  
**iglesia** – church  
**indígena** – indigenous  
**Interamericana** – the Pan-American Hwy; the nearly continuous highway running from Alaska to Chile (it breaks at the Darién Gap between Panama and Colombia)  
**invierno** – winter; the rainy season in Costa Rica  
**isla** – island

**jardín** – garden  
**josefino** – resident of San José

**lago** – lake  
**lavandería** – laundry facility, usually offering dry-cleaning services  
**librería** – bookstore  
**llanuras** – tropical plains

**machismo** – an exaggerated sense of masculine pride  
**macho** – a virile figure, typically a man  
**marías** – local name for taxi meters  
**mercado** – market  
**Meseta Central** – Central Valley or central plateau  
**metizo** – person of mixed descent, usually Spanish and Indian  
**metate** – flat stone platform, used by Costa Rica’s pre-Columbian populations to grind corn  
**migración** – immigration  
**Minae** – Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía; Ministry of Environment and Energy, in charge of the national park system  
**mirador** – lookout point  
**mono** – monkey  
**mono tití** – squirrel monkey  
**motocicleta** – motorcycle  
**muelle** – dock  
**museo** – museum

**niño** – child  
**normal** – refers to long-distance bus with many stops

**ola(s)** – wave(s)  
**OTS** – Organization for Tropical Studies

**pájaro** – bird  
**palapa** – shelter with a thatched, palm-leaf roof and open sides  
**páramo** – habitat characterized by highland shrub and tussock grass  
**parque** – park

**parque central** – central town square or plaza  
**parque nacional** – national park  
**perezoso** – sloth  
**perico** – mealy parrot  
**playa** – beach  
**posada** – country-style inn or guesthouse  
**puente** – bridge  
**puerto** – port  
**pulpería** – corner grocery store  
**punta** – point  
**pura vida** – super; literally ‘pure life’

**quebrada** – stream  
**queso** – cheese

**rana** – frog or toad  
**rancho** – small house or house-like building  
**refugio nacional de vida silvestre** – national wildlife refuge  
**río** – river

**sabanero** – cowboy from Guanacaste  
**selva** – jungle  
**Semana Santa** – the Christian Holy Week that precedes Easter  
**sendero** – trail or path  
**serpiente** – snake; see also *culebra*  
**soda** – lunch counter or inexpensive eatery  
**supermercado** – supermarket

**Tico/a** – male/female Costa Rican; see also *Costarricense*  
**tienda** – store  
**tortuga** – turtle

**valle** – valley  
**verano** – summer; the dry season in Costa Rica  
**vino** – wine  
**volcán** – volcano

**zoológico** – zoo

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