

San José



Like it or loathe it, Chepe, as the capital is affectionately known by Ticos (Costa Ricans), is the beating heart of Costa Rica. Somewhat unjustly, it receives a bad rap among visitors to this part of the world. True, the rapid transformation from prewar agrarian coffee town to late-20th-century urban sprawl was somewhat unkind to the city – its architecture, especially. But it certainly isn't the offensive monstrosity some would have you believe.

San José's charm is in the raw hustle and bustle of its downtown streets. Here, vendors selling everything from handbags to hacky sacks try to out-holler the tooting horns and spluttering bus engines that provide the harmony to the city's soundtrack. The central markets are beehives of energy, where old women shuffle around squeezing mangos and inspecting fish gills. There's diversity, too: Nicaraguans, Colombians, Panamanians and others from around the continent have flocked to the city's relative prosperity, making it Central America's most cosmopolitan capital. Yet it's small enough to be covered on foot, and from every part of the city you can see the towering verdant hills around it.

San José's reputation may suffer most as a result of its surrounds: visitors come to Costa Rica for the sloth-filled rain forests, crocodile-infested backwaters and gnarly surf breaks – none of which are found in the unavoidable capital. But in a country that's somewhat culturally diluted by vast amounts of tourism, there's nowhere better to truly get in touch with the guts-and-gravel of Costa Rican culture. You'll find that most Ticos agree: to truly love Costa Rica, you must first learn to love its capital.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Oglng shiny precious objects at the **Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo** (p84) and the **Museo de Jade** (p85)
- Taking in the historic **Barrio Amón** (p86) or kicking a ball around the extensive greens of **La Sabana** (p86)
- Partying all night long in **Centro Comercial El Pueblo** (p104) and on **Calle de la Amargura** (p116)
- Sipping cocktails in **Escazú** (p122), a well-to-do San José 'burb



■ POPULATION: CITY 350,000, GREATER METRO AREA OVER 1.5 MILLION ■ AREA: 2366 SQ KM

HISTORY

The future capital of Costa Rica was established in 1737 as Villanueva de la Boca del Monte del Valle de Abra (New Village of the Mountain's Mouth in the Open Valley), though the name was later changed to a more manageable San José in honor of Joseph, the town's patron saint. Interestingly enough, the founding of San José was the result of an edict from the Catholic Church, which decreed that the populace must settle near a place of worship (attendance was down, times were bad and churches were cheap to build).

For much of the colonial period, San José played second fiddle to the bigger and relatively more established Cartago. Following the surprise announcement in 1821 that Spain had abandoned its colonial holdings in Central America, Cartago and San José signed a series of empty-worded accords while secretly preparing for battle. On April 5, 1823, San José defeated Cartago at the Battle of Ochomongo, and subsequently declared itself capital. (This fierce rivalry is still evident on the football field when San José's and Cartago's teams clash.)

Although San José generously offered to rotate capital status, bitterness ensued, and on September 26, 1835, Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela joined forces in an attempt to sack the city. In a siege that became known as La Guerra de la Liga (the War of the Leagues), San José defeated its attackers and retained its status as the capital.

Recent years have been marked by a massive urban migration as Ticos (and increasingly Nicaraguans, see boxed text Nica vs Tico, p229) move to the capital in search of increased economic opportunities. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the creation of shantytowns on the outskirts of the capital, and crime is increasingly becoming a way of life for many poverty-stricken inhabitants. Ticos are quick to point fingers at the Nicaraguans (as well as the Panamanians and Colombians) for causing the degradation of their capital, and although the extreme poverty these groups are forced to live in is part of the problem, the total picture is much more complex.

ORIENTATION

The city is in the heart of a wide and fertile valley called the Meseta Central (Central Valley). San José's center is arranged in a grid

with avenidas running east to west and calles running north to south. Avenida Central is the nucleus of the city center and is a pedestrian mall between Calles 6 and 9. It becomes Paseo Colón to the west of Calle 14.

Street addresses are given by the nearest street intersection. Thus, the address of the tourist office is Calle 5 between Avenidas Central and 2. Note that the map used in this book shows the streets and avenues. However, most locals do not use street addresses and instead use landmarks to guide them. Learn how to decipher Tico directions by reading the boxed text What's That Address?, p537.

The center has several districts, or *barrios*, which are all loosely defined. The central area is home to innumerable businesses, shops, bus stops and cultural sights. Perhaps the most interesting district to visitors is Barrio Amón, northeast of Avenida 5 and Calle 1, with its concentration of landmark mansions, largely converted into hotels and fine-dining establishments. Just west of the city center is La Sabana, named after the park, and just north of it is the elegant suburb of Rohrmoser. Further west again is the affluent outer suburb of Escazú. Southeast of the downtown area are the lively student areas of Los Yoses and San Pedro.

Look for maps at Lehmann's (below), Librería Universal (below) or the tourist center (p82).

INFORMATION

Bookstores

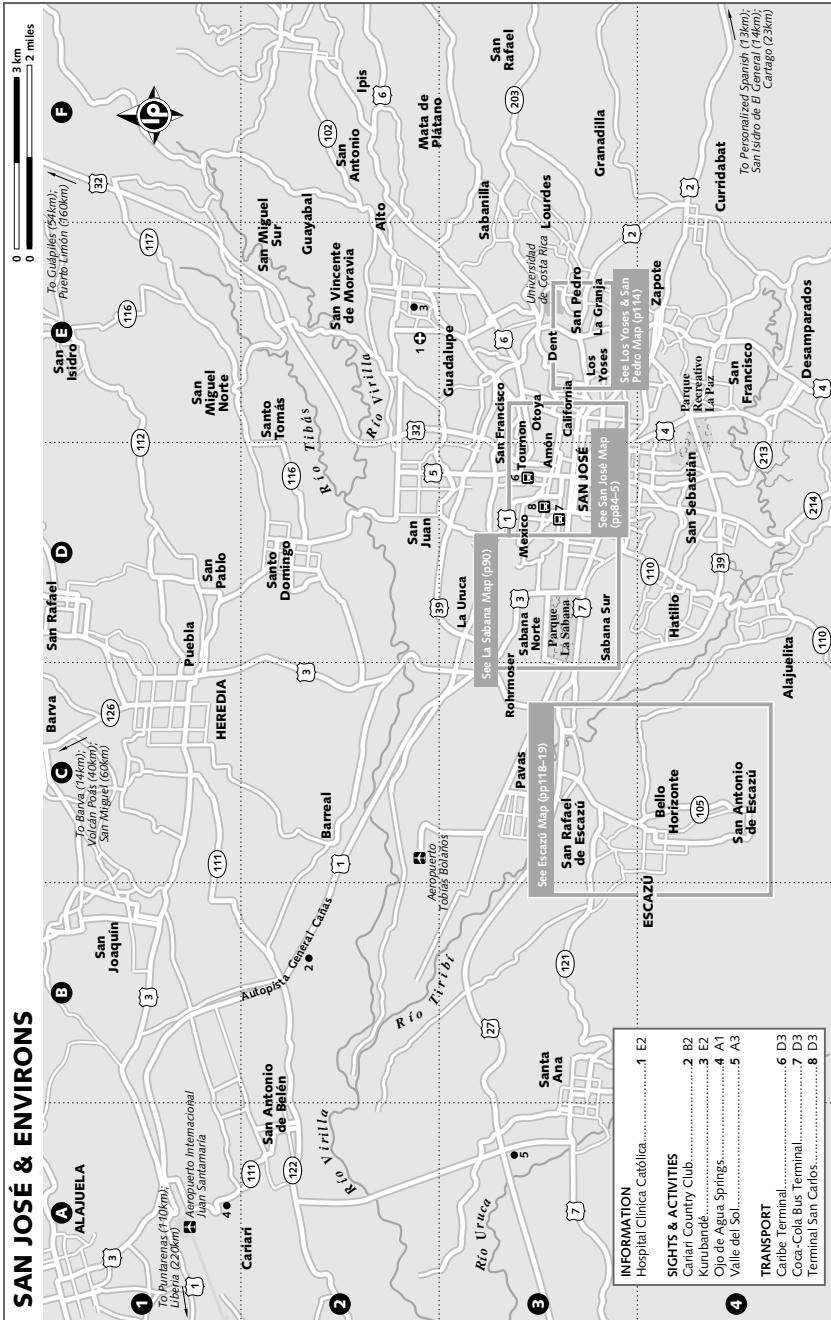
English-language magazines, newspapers and books are also available in the gift shops of the international airport and several of the top-end hotels. The following bookstores are among the most noteworthy:

7th Street Books (Map p88; ☎ 2256 8251; Calle 7 btwn Avs Central & 1; ☎ 9am-6pm) An attractive shop with new and used books in English and other languages as well as magazines and newspapers.

Lehmann's (Map p88; ☎ 2223 1212; Av Central btwn Calles 1 & 3) It has some books, magazines and newspapers in English, and a selection of topographical and other Costa Rican maps in the upstairs map department.

Librería Francesa (Map p88; ☎ 2223 7979; Av 1 btwn Calles 5 & 7) Spanish books and magazines are available here, and there is also a selection of French, German and English titles.

Librería Universal (Map p88; ☎ 2222 2222; Av Central btwn Calles Central & 1) Situated on the 2nd floor of



GETTING INTO TOWN

Taxis to downtown San José from Juan Santamaría international airport will cost between US\$20 and US\$25 depending on traffic. When leaving the airport terminal, look for the official **Taxi Aeropuerto stand** (☎ 2221 6865; www.taxiaeropuerto.com) as you exit the baggage-claim area, and pay the flat rate of US\$20 in advance. The official airport taxis are orange. The ride generally lasts about 20 minutes, but may take over an hour during rush hour.

The cheapest option, however, is the red Tuasa bus (US\$0.75, up to 45 minutes), which runs between Alajuela and San José, and passes the airport every few minutes from 5am to 11pm. The stop is on the far side of the parking lot outside the terminal (it's a short walk, even with luggage). Some taxi drivers will tell you there are no buses; don't believe them. The **Interbus** (☎ 2283 5573; www.interbusonline.com) is a good deal and it runs an airport shuttle service that costs US\$5 per person. Reservations can be made online.

International and domestic buses all arrive at one of the many bus terminals sprinkled around the west and south of downtown San José. The downtown area is perfectly walkable provided you aren't hauling a lot of luggage. If arriving at night, take a taxi to your hotel as most bus terminals are in seedy areas; a taxi to any part of downtown costs US\$1 to US\$2.

Be aware that many taxi drivers in San José (and other parts of Costa Rica) are commissioned by hotels to bring them customers. In the capital, the hotel scene is so competitive that drivers will say just about anything to steer you to the places they represent. They'll tell you the establishment you've chosen is a notorious drug den, it's closed down, or that, sadly, it's overbooked. (Many owners will tell you wild stories about the horrible condition of the rooms at the competition down the street.) Do not believe everything you hear. Tell drivers firmly where it is you would like to go, and if you're still being met with resistance, get out of the taxi and try another.

the Universal department store, the shop has road and topographical maps, a few books in English and a small café inside.

Libro Azul (Map p88; Av 10 btwn Calles Central & 1; ☎ 8:30am-12:30pm & 1:30-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) A tiny, well-known shop offering secondhand books, mostly in Spanish and some in English.
Mora Books (Map p88; ☎ 2255 4136, 8383 8385; Omni Center, Av 1 btwn Calles 3 & 5) Highly recommended secondhand bookstore has books mainly in English; guidebooks and comic books are a specialty.

Emergency

Emergencies (☎ 911) Ambulance, fire and police.

Fire (☎ 118)

Police (☎ 117)

Red Cross (☎ 128)

Traffic Police (☎ 2222 9330)

Internet Access

Checking email is easy in San José, where cybercafés are more plentiful than fruit peddlers. Rates are generally US\$1 to US\$2 per hour, though these days most hotels (even budget hostels) provide free internet access to guests.

1@10 Café Internet (Map p88; ☎ 2258 4561; www.1en10.com; per hr US\$1; Calle 3 btwn Avs 5 & 7) Also serves as the gay and lesbian information center.

CyberCafé searchcostarica.com (Map p88; ☎ 2233 3310; Las Arcadas, Av 2 btwn Calles 1 & 3; per hr US\$0.75; ☎ 7am-11pm) Houses a book exchange and a pizza bar.

Laundry

A do-it-yourself laundry service is hard to find in San José. Most lavanderías offer only dry-cleaning services. Many hotels and hostels offer a laundry service, but beware of top-end places that charge by the piece because this gets pricey.

Medical Services

For details of a hospital in Escazú, see p117. Note that both the BÍblica and Católica have pharmacies.

Clínica Bíblica (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2257 5252; www.clinicabiblica.com; Av 14 btwn Calles Central & 1) The top private clinic in the downtown area. Doctors speak English, French and German, and an emergency room is open 24 hours. Be prepared to pay for medical attention, though costs are generally much lower than in the USA or Europe.

Hospital Clínica Católica (Map p80; ☎ 2246 3000; www.clinicacatolica.com; Guadalupe) A private clinic located north of downtown.

Hospital San Juan de Dios (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2257 6282; crn Paseo Colón & Calle 14) The free public hospital is centrally located, but waits are long.

Money

Any bank will change foreign currency into colones, but US dollars are by far the most accepted currency for exchange, with euros following a distant second. Upmarket hotels have exchange windows for their guests, but commissions can be steep so check before changing large sums.

Credit cards are widely accepted in San José, though Visa tends to be preferred over MasterCard and American Express. (For more information on money issues in Costa Rica, see p535.)

Banco de Costa Rica (Map p88; ☎ 2221 8143; www.bancobcr.com; Av 1 btwn Calles 7 & 9; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri)

Banco de San José (Map p88; ☎ 2295 9595; www.bancosanjose.fi.cr; Av 2 btwn Calles Central & 1; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Has ATMs on the Plus and Cirrus systems.

Banco Nacional de Costa Rica Exchange House (Map p88; cnr Av Central & Calle 4; ☎ 10:30am-6pm) A good find in the event of a Sunday cash-exchange emergency since it's open seven days; expect long lines.

Compañía Financiera de Londres (Map p88; ☎ 2222 8155; cnr Calle Central & Av Central, 3rd fl; ☎ 8:15am-4pm Mon-Fri) No commission on cash transactions and accepts US and Canadian dollars, euros and yen. Will also change traveler's checks.

Credomatic (Map p88; ☎ 2295 9000; Banco de San José, Calle Central btwn Aves 3 & 5) Gives cash advances on Visa and MasterCard.

Scotiabank (Map p88; ☎ 2287 8700; www.scotiabank.com; Av 1 btwn Calles 2 & 4; ☎ 8:15am-5pm Mon-Fri) Good service, and ATMs on the Cirrus system dispense US dollars, too.

Post

Correo Central (Central Post Office; Map p88; ☎ 2223 9766; www.correos.go.cr; Calle 2 btwn Aves 1 & 3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7:30am-noon Sat) The most efficient place to send and receive mail in Costa Rica. It also offers express and overnight services. A small stamp museum is upstairs on the 2nd floor, and there's also a pleasant café.

Telephone

Local and international calls can be made from most public phones, which are all over town – several dozen are on the west side of Parque Central and around Plaza de la Cultura. Many hotels also have public phones in their lobbies. Chip and Colibrí cards are sold at souvenir shops, newsstands and Más X Menos supermarkets. Telephone directories are usually available in hotels.

For general information on phone services, see p536.

Tourist Information

Canatur (☎ 2234 6222; www.costarica.tourism.co.cr; Juan Santamaría international airport; ☎ 8am-10pm) The Costa Rican National Chamber of Tourism provides information on member services from a small stand next to the international baggage claim.

Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT; ☎ 2223 1733, ext 277; www.visitcostarica.com; ☎ 9am-5pm with flexible lunch Mon-Fri); Correo Central (Map p88; Calle 2 btwn Aves 1 & 3); Plaza de la Cultura (Map p88; Calle 5 btwn Av Central & 2) The government tourism office is good for a copy of the master bus schedule and handy free maps of San José and Costa Rica.

Travel Agencies

The following are long-standing and reputable agencies. For a list of tour companies, see p93.

OTEC (Map p88; ☎ 2256 0633; www.turismojovent.com; Calle 3 btwn Aves 1 & 3) Specializes in youth travel; can also issue student discount cards.

TAM Travel Corporation (Map p88 ☎ 2256 0203; www.tamtravel.com; Calle 1 btwn Aves Central & 1) Airline ticketing, local travel and more.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Street crime has been a major problem for tourists visiting San José over the last few years, and has been one of the principal reasons people have left the city with an unfavorable opinion. However, after years of hot air coming from the government buildings about what should be done to protect the much-targeted tourists, something is being done. In 2007 reported crime against tourists (most of which is petty theft) was down 36% in San José. This is largely due to the creation of the Tourist Police at the beginning of that year. However, precautions are still necessary, as the problem of street theft, such as pickpocketing, still exists. Fortunately, violent crime is still low compared to US and European cities. Like in any other city, use common sense. Always carry your money and your passport in an inside pocket or a money belt and never ever leave money, passports or important documents in the outer pocket of your backpack – you could regret it later. Also, it's a good idea to keep daypacks in front of you rather than on your back, where they can be unzipped and pilfered.

WORD ON THE STREET

Rafael Ferrera has been a taxi driver in San Jose for 12 years. He's lived in the city all his life.

What are your comments on crime and tourism? Tourists should be cautious in San José. In this city you can see a foreigner from a mile away. They stick out with their pale skin and lost look on their face. I don't understand why they need to carry so much stuff with them all the time: rucksack, money-belt, camera, sunglasses... It's no wonder they get robbed so often. The thieves must think they have too much stuff to carry and want to help them out!

Taxi drivers and tourists have lots of problems in San José. Everyone knows this. But it works both ways. Just as some taxi drivers are dishonest, some tourists are paranoid. They can be very rude and always accuse us of trying to cheat them.

I think tourists can get victimized in San José because of their attitude. A lot of tourists treat every local like a crook, so the locals in turn aren't very nice to them. They need to relax more, be more Tico. And embrace the *pura vida*, rather than be so uptight.

Unfortunately, muggings still occur in San José. If you're ever held at knifepoint or gunpoint, do not resist or fight back. Take your wallet out of your pocket slowly and calmly, and either hand it to your assailant or place it on the ground and step back. Do not try to be a hero!

The best way to prevent problems is to first find out from your hotel or other travelers about the area you're going to and, if possible, go with a friend. As a general rule, avoid wearing expensive jewelry or flashy watches in the city, and always walk confidently. If you are barhopping at night, always travel by taxi.

If you have been the victim of a crime, it is advised that you file a report in person at the **Organismo de Investigación Judicial** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) in the Supreme Court of Justice building.

The neighborhoods reviewed in this book are generally safe during the day, though you should be especially careful around the Coca-Cola bus terminal and the red-light district south of Parque Central, particularly at night. The following neighborhoods are reportedly dodgy during the day and unsafe at night: Leon XIII, 15 de Septiembre, Cuba, Cristo Rey, Sagrada Familia, México, Bajo Piuses, Los Cuadros, Torremolinos, Desamparados and Pavas. Be advised that like in most major cities, adjacent neighborhoods can vary greatly in terms of safety. If you are going to spend time in an area of the city that you are not familiar with, always inquire locally before setting out.

It is not recommended that you drive in San José, and there is very little reason to as

most car-rental agencies are located near the airport, outside of the city. However, if you have business in the city, never leave your car parked on the street – use guarded lots. And don't leave anything inside your car – even in a guarded lot. Most importantly, take care not to be swallowed up by the pit-size gutters and potholes.

Like anywhere else in the world, women traveling alone should take extra precautions. In the past, some women have complained of being harassed by taxi drivers at night – avoid taking unlicensed taxis. Also, it is not safe to walk around alone at night. (Further information for women travelers is available on p539.)

Men should beware of friendly prostitutes as they are known for their abilities to take more than their customers bargained for – namely their wallets. Also, AIDS is on the rise in Central America, and although the Costa Rican government is tolerant of prostitution, it's certainly not regulated (this isn't Amsterdam).

Finally, noise and smog are unavoidable components of the San José experience, and most central hotels are victim to a considerable amount of street noise, no matter how nice they are.

SIGHTS

The downtown area is fairly small and is best visited on foot as the streets are congested with heavy traffic and parking is difficult. Pedestrian walkways are located on Avenida Central between Plaza de la Cultura and Calle 8, and on Blvd Ricardo Jimenez south of the Parque Nacional.

SAN JOSÉ

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5	Biblioteca Nacional.....	5	G3
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9	Museo de los Niños y Galería Nacional.....	9	E1
10	Museo Nacional de Costa Rica.....	10	G4
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16	Cinco Hormigas Rojas.....	16	G2
17	Costa Rica Backpackers.....	17	H4
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19	Hotel Amon Plaza.....	19	F2
20	Hotel Aranjuez.....	20	H2
21	Hotel Dunn Inn.....	21	F2
22	Hotel Posada del Museo.....	22	G4
23	Joluva Guesthouse.....	23	F2
24	Kap's Place.....	24	H2
25	Kap's Place.....	25	H2
26	Raya Vida Villa.....	26	H2
27	Rincón de San José.....	27	G3
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33	Café Saudade.....	32	G4
34	El Cuartel de la Boca del Monte.....	33	H4
35	Kafé Ko.....	34	H4
36	La Cocina de Leña.....	35	G1
37	Nuestra Tierra.....	36	G4
38	Soda de Don Raúl.....	37	G5

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TO LA URUCA (1km); Interamericana (2km); Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría (17km); Alajuela (18km)

TO GREEN HOUSE HOTEL (600m); Terminal Saca (500m); Terminal Museo (750m); Huirach's (700m); Zapote (3km)

TO MORAVIA (6km)

TO INTERAMERICANA (3km)

TO ACADEMIA DE BAILES LATINOS (200m); Los Yoses (600m); San Pedro (1km)

TO TEATRO CARPA (150m)

TO LA SABANA (1km); Rohrmoser (2km); Escalón (4km)

See Central San José Map (p88)

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TRANSPORT

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53	Trans Nica Bus to Managua, Nicaragua.....	53	B2

The sights here are listed in counterclockwise fashion around the city, beginning with the contemporary art museum just east of Parque España.

Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo
Commonly referred to as MADC, this museum (Contemporary Art & Design Museum; Map pp84-5; ☎ 2257

7202; www.madc.ac.cr; Av 3 btwn Calles 13 & 15; admission US\$1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) is housed in the historic National Liquor Factory building, which dates to 1856. MADC primarily shows the contemporary work of Costa Rican and Central American artists, though rotating exhibitions are frequently on display here as well.

Museo de Jade

San José's most famous museum (Map p88; ☎ 2287 6034; Edificio INS, Av 7 btwn Calles 9 & 11, 11th fl; adult/child 10 & under US\$2/free; ☎ 8:30am-3:30pm Mon-Fri) is on the 1st floor of the Instituto Nacional de Seguros (National Insurance Institute). The museum houses the world's largest collection of American jade (say it with us - ha-

day), and is usually packed with tour groups. But the craftsmanship of each gemstone on display is exquisite, and the various archaeological exhibits of ceramics and stonework are helpful in gaining an insight to Costa Rica's pre-Columbian cultures (especially if you've already been to or you're going to Guayabo).

Barrio Amón

This pleasant **neighborhood** (Map pp84–5) is one of the few remaining colonial districts in the city, and home to many of the city's few surviving *café* *talero* (coffee baron) mansions, which were constructed during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Recently, many of these buildings have been converted into hotels, restaurants and offices, which makes this district perfect for a leisurely stroll. Barrio Amón, which is one of the safest areas in the city, is becoming increasingly popular with tourists, and there are currently talks of creating a pedestrian walkway and restoring many of the historic buildings. This isn't likely to happen for several years, though the crumbling mansions are presently not without a certain charm.

If you're wandering around Barrio Amón, the **Galería Andromeda** (Map p88; ☎ 2223 3529; andromeda@amnet.co.cr; cnr Calle 9 & Av 9) is a free local art space behind the Museo de Jade. It's worth a peek to see works by emerging local artists.

Zoológico Nacional Simón Bolívar

It seems kind of absurd to have a **zoo** (Map pp84–5; ☎ 2233 6701; Av 11 btwn Calles 7 & 9; admission US\$2; ☎ 8am–3:30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4:30pm Sat & Sun) in one of the most biologically rich countries in the world, but what do we know – we just write travel guides. Readers have complained in the past of filthy cages and cramped living spaces, though a recent increase in funds has drastically improved living conditions for the animals.

Spirogyra Jardín de Mariposas

This small **butterfly garden** (Map pp84–5; ☎ 2222 2937; parcar@racsa.co.cr; adult/child/student US\$6/3/5; ☎ 8am–4pm) houses over 30 species of butterflies and five species of hummingbirds in attractive enclosures. Visit during the morning to see the butterflies fluttering in top form. There is a small café that is open during the high season. The garden, 150m east and 150m south of Centro Comercial El Pueblo, can be reached on foot (about a 20- to 30-minute walk from downtown), by taxi, or by bus to El Pueblo, where there is a sign.

Museo de los Niños & Galería Nacional

The unique **Museo de los Niños** (Children's Museum; Map pp84–5; ☎ 2258 4929; www.museocr.com; Calle 4, north of Av 9; admission US\$2; ☎ 8am–4:30pm Tue–Fri, 9:30am–5pm Sat & Sun) is in an old penitentiary built in

1909, and is known locally as 'La Peni.' While there are plenty of displays for the kids on science, music and geography, grown-ups will be captivated by the **Galería Nacional** (admission free), which displays modern art in old, abandoned prison cells.

Museo Postal, Telegráfico y Filatélico de Costa Rica

Go postal at the **Museo Postal** (Postal Museum; Map p88; ☎ 2223 6918; Correo Central; Calle 2 btwn Avs 1 & 3; admission free; ☎ 9am–2pm Mon–Fri), with its semi-interesting exhibit of Costa Rican stamps. It's a good way to kill time while your friends are waiting to mail some letters home.

Mercados (Markets)

Perhaps the best introduction to Latin American culture is a quick stroll through the **Mercado Central** (Map p88; Avs Central & 1 btwn Calles 6 & 8; ☎ 6am–6pm Mon–Sat). Although tame compared to the markets of countries like Perú or Guatemala (you can't find pig's heart by the kilo here – we looked), the market is nevertheless crowded and bustling, and you can buy anything from produce and fresh sausage to organic coffee beans and the obligatory *pura vida* souvenir T-shirt. In addition, some of the cheapest fresh meals in town are served here. One block away is the similar **Mercado Borbón** (Map p88; cnr Av 3 & Calle 8), which is also jam-packed with vendors.

Parque Metropolitano La Sabana

This spacious **park** (Map p90) at the west end of the Paseo Colón was once the site of the country's main airport. After an impressive landscape project, it's now the most popular retreat from the grit and the grime of the city. La Sabana is also home to two museums, a lagoon, a fountain and a variety of sports facilities, including the Estadio Nacional (National Stadium), where international and Division-1 soccer matches are played. During the day, it's a great place for a stroll, a quiet picnic or a relaxed jog.

At the west end of Paseo Colón (or the eastern entrance to the park) is the **Museo de Arte Costarricense** (Map p90; ☎ 2222 7155; www.musarco.go.cr; Parque La Sabana; admission US\$1, free Sun; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun), which houses a permanent collection of Costa Rican art from the 19th and 20th centuries. The museum itself is an attractive Spanish colonial-style building that served as San José's airport until 1955, and it's next

to an impressive open-air sculpture garden. Regular rotating exhibits feature works by Tico artists past and present.

Near the southwest corner of the park is the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales La Salle** (Map p90; ☎ 2232 1306; admission US\$2; ☎ 7:30am–4pm), which has an extensive collection of dusty and dated stuffed animals and butterflies. The exhibit has definitely seen better days, and although some of the animals look like they're about to fall apart, you'd be hard pressed to find a more bizarre display of taxidermy. There are also a number of exhibits on paleontology and Pre-Columbian archaeology. It's in the old Colegio La Salle (high school).

Parque Central

The city's central **park** (Map p88; Avs 2 & 4 btwn Calles Central & 2) is home to a dome-roofed bandstand that was donated to the city by former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza. It's a bit of a controversial piece actually, though josefinos voted several years ago to keep it because, well, what else were they going to do with it?

To the east of the square is the modern, though classically inspired, **Catedral Metropolitana** (Map p88; Avs 2 & 4 btwn Calles Central & 1), which is among the city's more popular cathedrals for Sunday Mass.

On the north side of the park is **Teatro Melico Salazar** (Map p88; Av 2 btwn Calle Central & 2), which was built to serve as the poor man's alternative to the Teatro Nacional. However, it was the site of the 2002 presidential inauguration, and regularly hosts a variety of fine arts engagements and musical performances (p106).

Plaza de la Cultura

Though it's not particularly striking, virtually every Tico refers to this **plaza** (Map p88; Avs Central & 2 btwn Calles 3 & 5) as the geographic heart of Costa Rica. Coincidentally, it's also the safest place in the city as the entire plaza is the ceiling of the **Museo de Oro Precolombino**, and is considered private property (this gives security guards the right to shoo away 'unsavory' characters). It's also home to the Teatro Nacional, and there is great birding here – feral pigeons are commonly sighted.

The plaza is also home to the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (p82), which has travel information and maps.

MUSEO DE ORO PRECOLOMBINO Y NUMISMÁTICA

Beneath the Plaza de la Cultura is this three-in-one **museum** (Map p88; ☎ 2243 4202; www.museosdelbancocentral.org; basement, Plaza de la Cultura; admission US\$5; ☎ 10am–4:30pm Tue–Sun). It's owned by the Banco Central, and its architecture brings to mind all the warmth and comfort of a bank vault. The museum is a favorite of tourists as the glittering collection of pre-Columbian gold is well presented, though smaller than similar collections in Mexico and Peru. A small exhibit details the history of Costa Rican currency and another room has a temporary display space for local art.

TEATRO NACIONAL

The **Teatro Nacional** (Map p88; ☎ 2221 1329; Calles 3 & 5 btwn Avs Central & 2; admission US\$3; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12:30pm & 1:30–5:30pm Sat) is considered San José's most impressive public building. Built in 1897, the building features a columned neoclassical facade and is flanked by statues of Beethoven and Calderón de la Barca, a 17th-century Spanish dramatist. The lavish lobby and auditorium are lined with paintings depicting various facets of 19th-century life. The most famous is *Alegoría al café y el banano*, an idyllic canvas showing coffee and banana harvests. The painting was produced in Italy and shipped to Costa Rica for installation in the theater, and the image was reproduced on the five-colón note (now out of circulation), which you can find in some souvenir shops. However, it is clear that the painter never witnessed a banana harvest because of the way he portrayed a central man awkwardly grasping a bunch. (In case you're wondering, actual banana workers hoist the stem onto their shoulders.)

For information on performances, see p106.

There is also an excellent café (p103) here. Belonging to the national theatre is the very worthwhile **Galería García Monge** (Map p88; cnr Av 2 & Calle 5; admission free), which is located across the street and has rotating exhibitions by contemporary artists.

Museo Para la Paz

The **Museo Para la Paz** (Map p88; ☎ 2223 4664; cnr Av 2 & Calle 13; admission free; ☎ 8am–noon & 1:30pm–4:30pm Mon–Fri) is operated by the Arias Foundation and catalogs the past efforts of President Oscar Arias, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate,



INFORMATION		Gran Hotel Costa Rica.....	32	D3	El Túnel de Tiempo Disco.....	62	E2	
1@10 Café Internet.....	1	D1	Gran Hotel Doña Inés.....	33	F3	Gran Hotel Costa Rica.....	(see 32)	
7th Street Books.....	2	E2	Hotel Pangea.....	34	E1	La Avispa.....	63	D4
Banco de Costa Rica.....	3	E2	Hotel Colonial.....	35	F3	Los Cucharones.....	64	D3
Banco de San José.....	4	D3	Hotel Don Carlos.....	36	F1	Omni.....	(see 15)	
Banco Nacional de Costa Rica			Hotel Kekoldi.....	37	F1	Teatro La Máscara.....	65	F3
Exchange House.....	5	C2	Hotel Musoc.....	38	A1	Teatro Melico Salazar.....	66	C3
Compañía Financiera de			Hotel Santo Tomás.....	39	E1	Teatro Nacional.....	67	D3
Londres.....	6	D2	Penisión de la Cuesta.....	40	F2	Teatro Sala Vargas Calvo.....	68	D3
Correo Central.....	7	C2	Teatro Melico Salazar.....	(see 66)				
Credomatic.....	8	D1						
CyberCafé searchcostarica.com.....	9	D3	EATING					
ICT (Tourist Office).....	10	E2	Balcón de Europa.....	41	F2	Galería Namu.....	69	E1
ICT (Tourist Office).....	(see 7)		Café del Teatro Nacional.....	(see 67)		La Casona.....	70	D2
Lehmann's.....	11	D2	Café Parisienne.....	(see 32)		Mercado Artesanal.....	71	F3
Liberería Francesa.....	12	E2	Chelle's.....	42	E3	Mercado Central.....	(see 25)	
Libería Universal.....	13	D2	Churrería Manolo's.....	43	C2	Sol Maya.....	72	A2
Libro Azul.....	14	D4	Churrería Manolo's.....	44	F3			
Mora Books.....	15	D2	Dos Gringos.....	45	E2	TRANSPORT		
OTEC.....	16	D2	Helados de Sorbotela.....	46	B2	Alajuela, Volcán Poás &		
Scotiabank.....	17	C2	La Esquina de Buenos Aires.....	47	F3	International Airport Bus.....	73	A2
TAM Travel Corporation.....	18	D2	Mercado Central.....	(see 25)		Buses to Cartago &		
			News Café.....	48	E2	Turrialba.....	74	F4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			Pastelería Merayo.....	49	A2	Buses to David, Panama.....	75	A1
Casa Amarilla.....	19	F1	Poseidon.....	50	B2	Buses to Escazú.....	76	A3
Catedral Metropolitana.....	20	D3	Restaurant Shakti.....	51	F4	Buses to Guadalupe.....	77	D2
Edificio Metálico.....	21	E1	Restaurante Don Wang.....	(see 52)		Buses to Moravia.....	78	E1
Galería Andrómeda.....	22	F1	Restaurante Tin-Jo.....	52	F4	Buses to Panama City and		
Galería García Monge.....	23	E3	Soda Castro.....	53	C4	Chinguinola/Bocas del Toro.....	79	A1
Mercado Borbón.....	24	B1	Vishnu.....	54	D2	Buses to Santo Domingo.....	80	D1
Mercado Central.....	25	B2	Vishnu.....	55	D4	Buses to Volcán Irazú.....	81	D3
Museo de Jade.....	26	F1	DRINKING			Coca-Cola Bus Terminal.....	82	A1
Museo de Oro Precolombino y			Bar Chavelona.....	56	B4	COPA.....	83	D1
Numismática.....	(see 10)		Chelle's.....	(see 42)		Cubana de Aviación.....	84	D2
Museo Para la Paz.....	27	F3	Dos Gringos.....	(see 45)		Escazú & Santa Ana Bus.....	85	A1
Museo Postal.....	(see 7)		Nashville South Bar.....	57	E2	Gas Station.....	86	A2
Parque España.....	28	F1	ENTERTAINMENT			Nicaragua Buses (Transportes		
Teatro Nacional.....	(see 67)		Auroa Holiday Inn.....	58	E1	Deldu/Sirca Express).....	87	A1
Templo de Música.....	29	E2	Bochinche.....	59	F4	Playa Nicoya, Nosara, Samara,		
			Casino Club Colonial.....	60	F2	Santa Cruz, Tamarindo &		
			Casa Ridgway.....	31	F4	San Vito Bus (Alfaro).....	88	A1
						Tica Bus (International).....	89	E3
						Tico Train.....	90	E3
						Tuasa Bus to Alajuela.....	91	B2

to bring peace to Central America. It also exhibits the work of other laureates, including the Dalai Lama, Jimmy Carter and Lech Walesa. There is also an interesting exhibition on the 2nd floor designed to reconstruct the history of Central America and the Arias Plan for Peace.

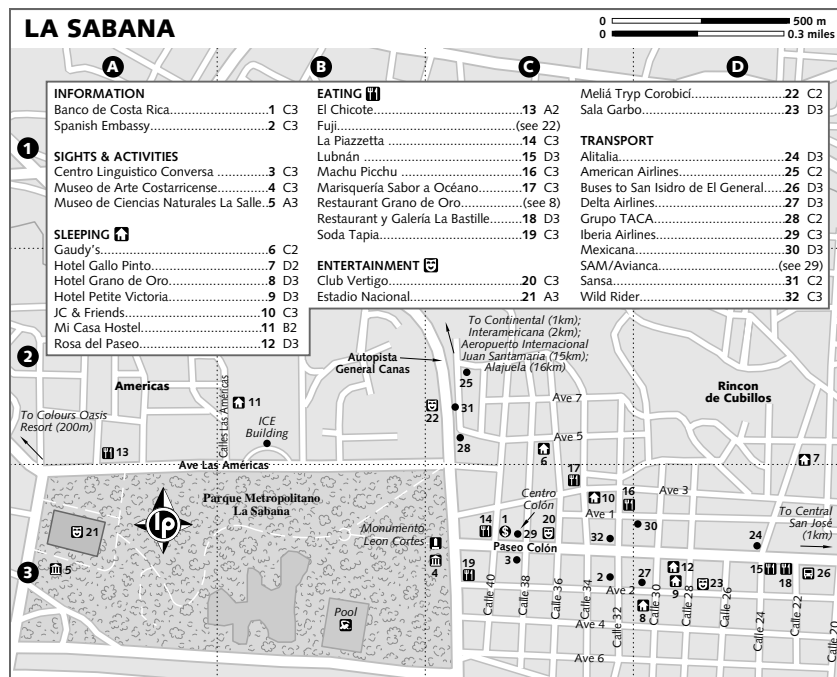
Museo Nacional de Costa Rica

The Museo Nacional (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2257 1433; Calle 17 btwn Aves Central & 2; adult/student US\$4/2; 🕒 8:30am-4:30pm Tue-Sun) is located inside the Bellavista (Good View) Fortress, which served as the old army headquarters and saw fierce fighting (hence the pockmarks) in both the 1931 army mutiny and the 1948 civil war. Ironically, Bellavista was also the site where Costa Rican President José Figueres announced in 1949 that he was abolishing the country's military.

Museo Nacional de Costa Rica is the ideal place for getting a quick survey of Costa Rican history. You will find a wide range of pre-Columbian artifacts from ongoing digs at archeological sites, such as Guayabo, as well as numerous colonial objects and plenty of religious art. The natural-history wing has flora and fauna specimens, minerals and fossils.

Museo de Formas, Espacios y Sonidos

This interactive museum (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 9462; Av 3 btwn Calles 17 & 23; admission US\$1; 🕒 9:30am-3pm Mon-Fri) in the old San José Atlantic train station is geared to small kids or people who want to act like them: you can clamber on an antique locomotive and traipse through old rail cars. There are also several small exhibits dedicated to the senses of sound, touch and sight.



A strange sight is the bust outside the museum of Tomás Guardia, who has the curious distinction of constructing the first railroad, and of being one of the only dictators in Costa Rican history.

Eastern Parks & Plazas

Numerous other green areas dot downtown San José, providing a small respite from the steel and concrete of the capital. Note that these parks are not safe after dark, and most of them become centers of prostitution during the twilight hours.

One of the nicest parks in San José is the shady, cobblestone-lined **Parque Nacional** (Map pp84-5; Avs 1 & 3 btwn Calles 15 & 19). In the center of the park is the dramatic **Monumento Nacional**, which depicts the Central American nations (with Costa Rica in the lead, of course) driving out the American filibuster William Walker.

Important buildings surrounding the park include the **Biblioteca Nacional** (National Library) to the north, the Cenac complex, which houses the modern art museum (p84), to the northwest and the **Asamblea Legislativa** (Legislative Assembly) to the south. In the Assembly's

gardens is a statue of national hero Juan Santamaría, who's best known for kicking a certain pesky gringo out of Costa Rica.

South of the Asamblea Legislativa is the stark **Plaza de la Democracia** (Map p88; Avs Central & 2 btwn Calles 13 & 15), which was constructed by President Oscar Arias in 1989 to commemorate 100 years of Costa Rican democracy. The plaza is architecturally unremarkable, though it does provide decent views of the mountains surrounding San José (especially at sunset). On its western flank, is an open-air crafts market with a good selection of gifts (see p107).

Parque España (Map p88; Avs 3 & 7 btwn Calles 9 & 11) is surrounded by heavy traffic, but manages to become a riot of birdsong every day at sunset when the local birds come here to roost. The park is bordered by the black-glass INS building to the north, which serves as the home of the Museo de Jade (p85). A block to the west is the **Edificio Metálico** (Map p88; cnr Av 7 & Calle 9), an interesting two-story yellow-and-blue metal building that was designed in France and prefabricated in Belgium. During the 1890s, the entire structure was shipped piece by piece to San José. Today, it functions as an elite school.

To the northeast of Parque España is the **Casa Amarilla** (Map p88; Av 7 btwn Calles 11 & 13), an elegant colonial house that is home to the ministry of foreign affairs (and is closed to the public). The glorious ceiba tree in front of the building was planted by John F Kennedy during his 1963 visit to Costa Rica.

To the southwest, you'll come across the slightly run-down **Parque Morazán** (Map p88; Avs 3 & 5 btwn Calles 5 & 9), which happens to be the most notorious prostitution center in the country. Tragically (or perhaps fittingly), the concrete gazebo in the center of park – commonly referred to as the **Templo de Música** (Music Temple) – is regarded by many as the symbol of San José. The park is named after General Francisco Morazán, who failed to unite the newly independent Central American countries under one flag in the 1830s.

ACTIVITIES

Parque Metropolitano La Sabana (Map p90) has a variety of sporting facilities, including tennis courts, volleyball, basketball and baseball areas, jogging paths and soccer pitches. Pick-up soccer games can be had on most days, though you'd better be good (Ticos can already sink a drop shot by age seven).

There is also an Olympic-size **swimming pool** (admission US\$3; ☹ noon-2pm), though most Ticos prefer the excursion to the Ojo de Agua springs (in San Antonio de Belén, see p129), where you can swim all day.

Tennis, gym facilities and a swimming pool are also available at the **Costa Rica Tennis Club**

(☎ 2232 1266) on the south side of La Sabana for US\$10 per person per day. There are 11 indoor and outdoor courts, three pools, a sauna and gym facilities.

You can sign up with a local gym for about US\$20 to US\$40 a month. Look under 'Gimnasios' in the *Yellow Pages* directory. Or go a couple of rounds with the locals at the **Thaiboxing Center** (Map p114; ☎ 2225 7386) or **Atemi Ryu Martial Arts Center** (Map p114; ☎ 2524 0781) in San Pedro.

Golfers can lose their golf balls (and their patience) at either the **Cariari Country Club** (Map p80; ☎ 2293 3211; cariari@racsa.co.cr), the **Costa Rica Country Club** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 9333, 2208 5000) or **Valle del Sol** (Map p80; ☎ 2282 9222, ext 218/219).

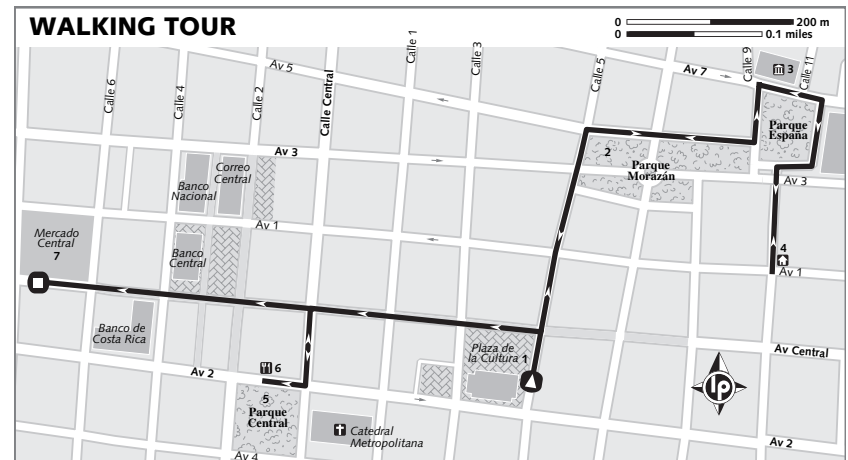
Adrenaline junkies can sign up for the daily bungee jumps at the nearby Río Colorado Bridge in Grecia with **Tropical Bungee** (☎ 2248 2212, 8383 9724; www.bungee.co.cr; 1st/2nd jump US\$60/30). Transportation from San José is included.

WALKING TOUR

San José may not have colonial promenades and towering skyscrapers, but it sure oozes character (in a slightly seedy, film noir sort of way). This walking tour is recommended

WALK FACTS

Start Plaza de la Cultura
Finish Mercado Central
Distance 2km
Duration 30 minutes



for anyone who wants to learn about all the things that the tourist information center *won't* tell you.

Starting in the **Plaza de la Cultura** (1; p87), cross the street and head north for two blocks until you reach the **Parque Morazón** (2; p91). Sure, it's attractive enough during the day, but if you came here at night (which you shouldn't), you'd soon realize that the park also serves as an office for San José's sex workers (p100).

Before leaving the park, look toward the towering steel and glass building to the northeast. Most tourists know this building as the **Museo de Jade** (3; p85), but the 10 stories underneath the museum are home to the Instituto Nacional Seguros (National Insurance Institute), which is the government-owned insurance monopoly. Why should I care, you ask? Well, in case you were wondering why car rental is so expensive in Costa Rica, look no further. Curse silently under your breath. Now turn around.

The reasonably attractive pink building you're now staring at is the **Key Largo** (4), which is mentioned here solely because some regard a visit to this club as a part of the country's wildlife experience. Ageing anglers and their slinky young Latina escorts are the most commonly sighted species. Attached to this fine establishment is the **Hotel Del Rey**, a top-end hotel that's popular with ageing anglers and their suspiciously absent wives.

Are you having fun yet? If so, let's backtrack to the Plaza de la Cultura and then walk west along the pedestrian boulevard for three blocks. When you get to the intersection, turn left and walk south for two blocks where you'll find the **Parque Central** (5; p87). Aside from the unlikely tribute to General Samozá, the famous Nicaraguan humanitarian whose charitable work was supported by the US government, take a moment to look at the **Food Mall** (6) on the north side of the plaza. Although this shrine of fast-food consumerism is packed on weekends with Tico families, it was once the Palace Theater, a famous art house and performance space – if you can find a more perfect symbol of globalization, let us know!

Backtrack one more time to the boulevard, and continue to head west for three more blocks where you'll see the **Mercado Central** (7; p107), the number-one place in San José for getting robbed. Every day, doe-eyed tour-

ists armed with Nikon cameras and heavily armored wallets are vanquished by mere 'snatch-and-run' guerilla warfare. But you were smart enough to leave all your valuables at home, so jump headfirst into the consumer chaos and see if you get a good bargain on a Costa Rica snowglobe. Happy shopping!

COURSES

Dancing

If you want to improve your moves on the dance floor, then check out one of the many classes offered in the San José area. These are geared at Ticos, not tourists, but travelers who speak Spanish are welcome. You can learn all types of Latin dancing – salsa, cha-cha, merengue, bolero, tango. Classes cost around US\$20 for two hours of group lessons per week. Travelers can also find dance classes by inquiring at many language schools (see opposite).

Academia de Bailes Latinos (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2233 8938; Av Central btwn Calles 25 & 27) Next to Pizza Hut in Barrio Escalante.

Kurubandé (Map p80; ☎ 2234 0682; Guadalupe)

Malecón (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 3214; Av 2 btwn Calles 17 & 19)

Merecumbé (Map p114; ☎ 2228 6253; Escazú)

SAN JOSÉ FOR CHILDREN

Most children will probably want to get out of San José as fast as possible – if you think the city is a little rough around the edges, imagine how they feel. But if you're spending a day – or two or three – in San José, there are a number of activities to keep the tykes busy and/or exhausted.

The **Museo de los Niños** (p86) and the **Museo de Formas, Espacios y Sonidos** (p89) are a hit with young children who just can't keep their hands off the exhibits. Interactive is what they're all about.

Both **Teatro Eugene O'Neill** (p116) and **Teatro Fanal** (p106) have children's theater groups. If your child is learning Spanish, this experience might make a vivid lesson.

Young nature lovers will enjoy getting up close and personal with butterflies at the **Spirogyra Jardín de Mariposas** (p86) or checking out the exotic animals at the **Zoológico Nacional Simón Bolívar** (p86).

Teens might dig checking each other out at the **Plaza de la Cultura** (p87), which has a number of nearby fast-food outlets and ice-cream shops. In the suburbs, **Mall San Pedro**

TALK LIKE A TICO

There are fine Spanish-language schools in the San José area. The schools listed have been operating since at least 1998 and/or they have received reader recommendations. Most of the reviewed language schools also organize volunteer placements, which is a great way to learn Spanish while giving back to those who need it most.

Unless otherwise noted, prices are given for five four-hour days of instruction, with/without a week's homestay with a local family. All prices include breakfast and dinner. Note that program fees are usually less if you study for an extended period of time.

Amerispan Unlimited (☎ in the USA & Canada 800-879 6640; www.amerispan.com; courses with/without homestay US\$570/430) Offers a variety of educational travel programs, including language programs, volunteer/internship placements, academic study abroad and specialized programs, such as Salud, a medical Spanish program.

Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano (Costa Rican–North American Cultural Center; Map p114; ☎ 2207 7500; www.cccnrc.com; Calle 37 & Calle de los Negritos) This large school has Spanish courses, but because it operates mainly as an English school for locals, you'll be in the company of many Ticos. Monthlong programs start at \$250.

Costa Rican Language Academy (Map p114; ☎ 2280 1685, in the USA 866-230 6361; www.learn-spanish.com; courses with/without homestay US\$411/286) This organization also offers cooking classes and Latin dance lessons, and can provide you with enrollment information for a variety of volunteer programs. From the Subaru dealership, go 300m north and 50m west.

Institute for Central American Development Studies (Icads; ☎ 2225 0508; www.icadscr.com) This school offers monthlong programs (with/without homestay US\$2100/1700) that are combined with lectures and activities focused on environmental and regional sociopolitical issues. It can also help place you in one of a variety of local volunteer positions depending on your interests. It's off the main road to Curridabat, about 1km from the center of town.

Instituto Británico (Map p114; ☎ 2225 0256; www.institutobritanico.co.cr; Los Yoses; courses with/without homestay US\$305/180) This institute offers a high level of Spanish-language education that's also suited for teacher training and corporate instruction. Find it 75m south of the Subaru dealership.

Personalized Spanish (Map p80; ☎ 2278 3254; www.personalizedspanish.com; Tres Ríos; courses with/without homestay US\$383/488) This institute comes highly recommended by readers and is located in a beautiful suburb of the capital.

(p116) and **Multiplaza Escazú** (p123) are good for young consumers craving mall action.

To wear them out with a day of outdoor activities, there are always the swimming pools at the **Costa Rica Tennis Club** (p91), which are open to the public. For more extensive water-based activities, head northwest of San José for **Ojo de Agua** (p129).

If you're planning on spending more than a week in the city with your lovable offspring, most Spanish schools (above) offer special custom-made lessons for young *chicos y chicas* (boys and girls).

QUIRKY SAN JOSÉ

Every Sunday, the **Tico Train** (adult/child US\$2/1) picks up riders from the eastern side of the Plaza de la Cultura (p87) and takes them on a 45-minute joyride through the city. The train itself looks like it was stolen from a county carnival somewhere in Iowa, though the cumbia (traditional provincial ballads) music

emanating from the train is about as Costa Rican as it gets. The Tico Train was started by the city council in an effort to inject more life and personality into the city center, and is intended to recall the days when josefinos traveled through their capital on trains. Even if you're not nostalgic for the good old days, the train ride itself is a total riot, especially when the driver overtakes cars while ringing an oversized bell.

TOURS

The city is easily navigable by independent travelers, and walking tours aren't necessary if you have a little time on your hands. If you have just a few hours and don't want to miss the key sights, Swiss Travel Service offers a recommended three-hour tour that covers the San José basics.

Calypso Tours (☎ 2256 2727; www.calypsotours.com) Does tours to the islands near Bahía Gigante by bus and 70ft motorized catamaran.

GET INVOLVED – VOLUNTEERING IN SAN JOSÉ

Volunteering can be a great way to experience and understand parts of the city that not even locals know about. There's no doubt that some people desperately need help, but be wary of the fact that many volunteers leave with the sinking feeling they've helped their egos more than the people they were supposed to be there for. Be realistic and well informed when choosing a charity. Some respected volunteer organizations include the following:

Amerispan (📍 in the USA & Canada 215-751 1100; www.amerispan.com) Has a broad range of volunteering options in San José and the rest of the country. Programs in the capital include youth work, health care, English teaching and stray-animal care.

Geo Visions (📍 in the USA & Canada 603-363 4187; www.geovisions.org) Operates placements in a San José child day-care center.

Sustainable Horizon (📍 in the USA & Canada 718-578 4020; www.sustainablehorizon.com) Arranges a wide variety of volunteering trips, from ecotourism holidays to orphanage placements.

United Planet (📍 in the USA & Canada 603-363 4187; www.geovisions.org) Runs a program in which volunteers help the elderly in San José's eastern suburbs. It also offers volunteer orphanage placements.

Volunteer Abroad (📍 in the USA & Canada 888-649 3788; www.volunteerabroad.ca) Places volunteers in the Hospital Nacional de Niños, to help with day-to-day running of the country's primary children's hospital.

World Language Study (📍 in the UK 0870 8610 423; www.worldlanguagestudy.com) Sends volunteers to teach English in schools, kindergartens and foster homes.

Costa Rica Art Tour (📍 2288 0896, 8359 5571; www.costaricaarttour.com; tours US\$95) If you're an art lover, this reader-recommended day tour goes to five different studios in the city, some of which are in artists' houses. Routes through the city change daily, so no two tours are ever the same. The tour focuses on painting, sculpting, printmaking, ceramics, jewelry-making and mixed media, and there are plenty of opportunities to purchase original art direct from artists. Lunch and hotel pick-up is included in the price. Group, senior and student discounts are available.

Lava Tours (📍 2281 2458; www.lava-tours.com) Organizes a number of tours, including reader-recommended mountain-biking tours around the Central Valley.

Swiss Travel Service (Map pp84-5; 📞 2221 0944) Longtime, reputable travel agency for tours all over Costa Rica. Find it 250m west of Centro Comercial El Pueblo; there is a branch office at the Radisson Europa.

Tiquicia Travel (📍 2256 9682; www.tiquiciatravel.com; Condominios Pie Montel, La Uruca) A small agency focusing on tours to gay and gay-friendly locales around Costa Rica.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festival de Arte Every even year, San José becomes host to the biennial citywide arts showcase that features theater, music, dance and film. It's held for two weeks in March. Keep an eye out for information in the daily newspapers.

Día de San José On March 19, San José marks the day for its patron saint with Masses in some churches. The day used to be a holiday, but modernization has quickly done away with that.

Festival de las Carretas (Oxcart Festival) Takes place every November, and is a celebration of the country's

agricultural heritage. The highlight is a parade of oxcarts down Paseo Colón.

Festival de Luz (Festival of Light) A month after Paseo Colón's oxcart parade is the Christmas parade, marked by an absurd amount of plastic 'snow.'

Las Fiestas de Zapote If you're in the San José area between Christmas and New Year's Eve, you absolutely have to visit this weeklong holiday celebration of all things Costa Rican (namely rodeos, cowboys, carnival rides, fried food and a whole lot of drinking). The celebration, which annually draws in tens of thousands of Ticos, takes place in the suburb of Zapote, just southeast of the city.

SLEEPING

Accommodations in San José run the gamut from grim little boxes to sumptuous world-class luxury. The cheapest hotels in the city are near the Coca-Cola bus terminal. However, this neighborhood is growing increasingly dangerous for travelers, and unless you're a die-hard fan of grunge, bustle and crime, it's recommended that you stay elsewhere.

If you want to spend the night in San José proper, the two nicest areas to stay are in Barrio Amón and La Sabana. Midrange and top-end accommodations tend to cluster in these well-to-do neighborhoods, though they are also home to the city's top budget hostels. There are also a number of good choices in central San José.

If you're looking for a quieter, more relaxed stay, consider spending the night in the city's wealthiest suburbs, namely Los Yoses and San

Pedro, and Escazú. Both neighborhoods are a few kilometers from downtown and can be easily reached by public bus or taxi.

If you're either flying in to or out of Costa Rica, it's actually more convenient to stay in Alajuela, as the city (contrary to what taxi drivers will tell you) is actually closer than San José is to the airport.

There are also several options for lodging in the suburb of Cariari, which is easy for getting to the airport (though a bit hard on the wallet).

Reservations are recommended during the high season (December through April) and the two weeks around Christmas and Semana Santa (the week before Easter Sunday). For more general information on hotels in Costa Rica, see p521. High-season prices are listed throughout.

Before reserving with a credit card, see p523 for advice.

Barrio Amón & Surrounds

BUDGET

Tranquilo Backpackers (Map pp84-5; 📞 2223 3189, 2222 2493, 8355 5103; www.tranquilobackpackers.com; Calle 7 btwn Avs 9 & 11; dm US\$10, d US\$28, all incl breakfast; 📍) Located in an old mansion in Barrio Amón, Tranquilo is one of the top reader-recommended hostels in the city, and it radiates mellow vibes and relaxing times. Big common rooms are decorated with hanging Japanese lanterns, bright murals, ample hammocks and enough mounted guitars to satisfy all your impromptu needs. There are also whimsically decorated mosaic-tile shared showers and communal kitchens, as well as free luggage storage, internet access and the famous (and universally loved) pancake breakfast. Airport transfer can be arranged.

Costa Rica Backpackers (Map pp84-5; 📞 2221 6191; www.costaricabackpackers.com; Av 6 btwn Calles 21 & 23; dm/d US\$12/26; 📍 📍 📍) Located near the Supreme Court building, this extremely popular hostel is in a sprawling complex that's centered on a beautiful free-form pool surrounded by hammock-strung gardens. Chill-out music completes the laidback ambience, though you can always take things up a notch in the attached bar-restaurant, which also doubles on certain evenings as a movie theater. Rooms and shared bathrooms are well decorated with tropical-themed murals, and there are two communal kitchens and a TV lounge, as well as free luggage storage and internet access.

For a few extra bucks, the new guesthouse wing of the hostel across the road has slightly more comfortable doubles in more serene surrounds – ideal for couples looking for some peace from the party. Private parking is provided and airport transfer can be arranged.

Hotel Aranjuez (Map pp84-5; 📞 2256 1825; www.hotelaranjuez.com; Calle 19 btwn Avs 11 & 13; s with/without bathroom US\$30/23, d with/without bathroom US\$40/26, all incl breakfast; 📍 📍) This rambling wooden hotel consists of several nicely maintained vintage homes strung together with connecting gardens and a lush backyard containing a mango tree. Spotless rooms vary in size and price, and the hosts serve a sumptuous daily breakfast buffet in the garden courtyard.

our pick **Hostel Pangea** (Map p88; 📞 2221 1992; www.hostelpangea.com; Av 7 btwn Calles 3 & 3bis; dm US\$10, d with/without bathroom US\$32/28; 📍 📍 📍) Put simply, this is the number one hangout for backpackers in San José. Travelers swap stories round the pool by day and live it up in the bar upstairs by night. While this is very much a party hostel, the owners haven't lost sight of the fact that most guests are in San José on their way to some other part of the country. So nearly all practicalities can be taken care of by way of free internet (and wi-fi), free calls to North America, free luggage storage, onward travel booking service and airport pick-up (US\$16).

MIDRANGE

All of the hotels listed have private hot-water showers and cable TV unless otherwise stated, and they can arrange tours throughout the country.

our pick **Kap's Place** (Map pp84-5; 📞 2221 1169; www.kapsplace.com; Calle 19 btwn Avs 11 & 13, Av 11 btwn Calle 19 & 21; s US\$20-45, d US\$30-55, tr US\$40-65, apt from US\$80; 📍 📍) The owner of this delightful guesthouse, Karla Arias, has individually decorated each of the 24 homey rooms in wonderfully bright colors, creating a unique, arty feel. Indian sarongs and quilted duvets are laid across the beds. Communal areas include a yucca plant-filled courtyard with hammocks strung across the perimeters and a well-stocked kitchen. Also, there's free internet, and Spanish, English and French are all spoken.

Cinco Hormigas Rojas (Map pp84-5; 📞 2257 8581, 2255 3412; www.cincohormigasrojas.com; Calle 15 btwn Avs 9 & 11; r US\$30-58; 📍) This highly recommended traveler's refuge and artistic retreat is run

by the multilingual and insanely talented Mayra, a Tica artist and naturalist who's nurtured the grounds of her small guesthouse for over 10 years. Today, 'Five Red Ants' is a micro-ecosystem that's teeming with tropical birds, and indeed it's easy to forget that you're staying in San José. The guesthouse itself has three rooms of varying sizes and amenities (if you need TV in your life, this is not the place for you), each of which is uniquely themed and displays her incredible artwork. Mayra's specialty is covering household objects in *papier-mâché*, and then sculpting and painting them into intricate designs – their originality and beauty is impossible to describe. Art is available for purchase, and every traveler leaves after breakfast with a small gift in hand.

Casa Hilda (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2221 0037; childa@racsa.co.cr; Av 11 btwn Calles 3 & 3bis; s/d incl breakfast US\$26/36) The Quesadas will make you feel like you're returning home at this peaceful, peach-colored inn in Barrio Amón. Rooms are very simple, but the entire property glows with domestic warmth – this is an excellent choice if you want to spend some time with a real Costa Rican family. Check out the natural spring in the center of the house that has been bubbling potable water for 90 years (even during the dry season).

Hotel Dunn Inn (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 3232, 2222 3426; www.hoteldunninn.com; cnr Calle 5 & Av 11; s standard/deluxe US\$49/59, d standard/deluxe US\$59/69, ste US\$80; 📶 📺) This pale-yellow, rambling brick-and-wood mansion was constructed in 1929 and has fully restored rooms with modern fixtures named after different words in Costa's Rica's indigenous languages (plaques in the rooms explain the words' derivations and usage). There is also a restaurant and a small bar, which stays open late. Visa is accepted.

Joluva Guesthouse (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 7961; www.joluva.com; Calle 3bis btwn Avs 9 & 11; s/d US\$30/50; 📶) This quaint gay-operated guesthouse in Barrio Amón has seven small but well-appointed rooms (check out the massage heads on the showers) that are scattered around a number of cozy public areas. The management speaks English and can provide information on the Costa Rican gay scene.

Hotel Posada del Museo (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2258 1027; www.hotelposadadelmuseo.com; s/d/ste from US\$48/55/65) This posada (country-style inn) is diagonal from the Museo Nacional, on a pedestrian street in a beautiful district of

the capital. The building dates from 1928 and has a dramatic entrance, complete with a Juliet balcony overlooking the foyer. French doors line the entrances to each of the rooms, which are named after Costa Rican birds and flowers and furnished with period pieces. The Argentinean managers are multilingual (English, Spanish, French and Italian) and are committed to offering guests personalized service. The attached café is perfect for people-watching or for simply enjoying the ambience of this tranquil neighborhood.

Casa Morazan (Map p88; ☎ 2257 4187; www.casamorazan.com; cnr Calle 7 & Av 9; s/d incl breakfast US\$55/65) This Art Deco mansion in Barrio Amón was built in the 1930s as the residence of John Keith, the cousin of Minor Keith, the famous banana baron who helped construct the Atlantic railroad. The house is fully furnished in period antiques, and rooms are well appointed, with bathtubs, bidets and regal beds.

Hotel Kekoldi (Map p88; ☎ 2248 0804; www.kekoldi.com; Av 9 btwn Calles 5 & 7; s/d/tr incl breakfast from US\$57/69/79) The Kekoldi is in a fabulously light and airy Art Deco building in Barrio Amón that has spotless, freshly painted pastel rooms with sky-blue tiled bathrooms. There are fresh flowers in virtually every corner of the hotel, and tranquil murals of beach landscapes adorn the common areas. This hotel is gay-friendly and popular with younger travelers, and English, German and Italian are spoken. Credit cards are accepted.

Rincón de San José (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2221 9702; www.hotelrincondesanjose.com; Av 9 btwn Calles 13 & 15; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast US\$56/70/86/110; 📶) This charming little hotel in a landmark colonial house in Barrio Amón is beautifully maintained and furnished with period pieces. Large rooms with polished-wood or ceramic-tile floors surround an attractive courtyard. Breakfast is served in a garden courtyard, and a small bar is open until 10pm. Credit cards accepted.

Hotel Don Carlos (Map p88; ☎ 2221 6707; www.doncarloshotel.com; Calle 9 btwn Avs 7 & 9; s/d/tr incl breakfast from US\$76/87/100; 📶 📺) This converted mansion in Barrio Amón has 33 unique rooms with colonial design schemes and huge, tiled bathrooms. The entire property is decked with artwork that ranges from Sarchí-style oxcarts to oil paintings of dead white *conquistadores* (conquerors). There is also

a pre-Columbian-themed sculpture garden, bar and restaurant, as well as a sundeck with tables, a small Jacuzzi and an excellent gift shop. Rates include a welcome cocktail.

TOP END

All of the following hotels accept credit cards.

Hotel Santo Tomás (Map p88; ☎ 2255 0448; www.hotelsantotomas.com; Av 7 btwn Calles 3 & 5; d incl breakfast from US\$93, extra person US\$15; 📶 📺) This early-20th-century French-colonial mansion is a Barrio Amón landmark, and once belonged to the Salazar family of *café*taleros. Twenty elegant rooms of varying sizes have polished wood floors, 4m-high ceilings and antique furnishings. There is a garden courtyard with a solar-heated swimming pool, a Jacuzzi and a small gym; English is spoken.

Raya Vida Villa (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 4168; www.rayavida.com; Calle 15, off Av 11; s/d incl breakfast US\$93/110; 📶) This secluded hilltop villa is an absolute treasure of a B&B. The bedrooms and dining and sitting areas reflect the owner's interest in art and antiques, and visitors can expect to spot original works by Dali and Toulouse-Lautrec (seriously, we're not kidding!). Rooms have been decorated to the highest possible level of luxury, straight down to the orthopedic mattresses, imported European linens and flawless bathrooms (one of which has a whirlpool tub). The house itself is an elegant colonial mansion with stained-glass windows, hardwood floors, a patio with fountain, a fireplace and a small garden. Owner Michael Long can help with reservations at other B&Bs, and can arrange for airport pick-up if you call in advance. For the taxi driver: the hotel is 100m north of Hospital Calderón Guardia on Calle 17, then 50m west on Avenida 11, then another 50m north.

Hotel Amon Plaza (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2523 4600; www.hotelamonplaza.com; Av 11; d standard/superior incl breakfast from US\$150/185; 📶 📺) This bustling downtown hotel has all the amenities: you never need to leave the building. The ground-floor casino exudes the mandatory whooping and hollering, while those looking for a workout can sweat it out in the hotel gym. Rooms are bright and airy, but a little characterless for the price. The ground-floor restaurant serves reasonable international fare with street-side views of the historic neighborhood.

HOMESTAYS

Bell's Home Hospitality (☎ 2225 4752; www.homestay.thebells.org; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$30/45/50) This recommended agency is run by Vernon Bell, a Kansan who has lived in Costa Rica for more than 30 years, and his Tica wife, Marcela. The couple can arrange homestays in over 70 local homes, each of which has been personally inspected to maintain high standards of cleanliness and wholesomeness. All are close to public transportation and readers have sent only positive comments about these places. Note that there is a US\$5 surcharge for one-night-only stays and for private bathrooms. The Bells can also arrange airport transfers (US\$15), car rental and tours.

La Sabana & Surrounds

This section covers hotels in the neighborhoods of La Sabana, La Uruca, La Pitahaya and Rohrmoser.

BUDGET

Gaudy's (Map p90; ☎ 2258 2937; www.backpacker.co.cr; Av 5 btwn Calles 36 & 38; dm US\$10, d with bathroom US\$23-28; 📶) Located in a residential area east of Parque La Sabana is this homey hostel, which has been popular among shoestring travelers for years. The Colombian owners operate one of the cheapest hostels in the city, and although the design scheme is fairly basic, the service is professional and the house is well maintained. There's a communal kitchen, hot showers, a TV lounge, a hammock-strung outdoor patio and free internet. Find it 200m north and 150m east of the Banco de Costa Rica.

JC & Friends (Map p90; ☎ 8374 8246; www.jcfrinds hostel.com; cnr Calle 34 & Av 3; camping per person US\$7, dm US\$9, r per person US\$12, all incl breakfast; 📶) This recommended hostel is owned and managed by Juan Carlos (he's JC, and you're the friends), a Costa Rican-born, Spanish-raised and American-educated all-round great guy whose personal attention makes this intimate place a winner. There's a pool table, bar, TV room and outdoor hammock lounge (complete with artificial 'sand'). And here's the best part – the Tuasa airport bus conveniently stops directly in front of the hostel.

Mi Casa Hostel (Map p90; ☎ 2231 4700; www.micasahostel.com; dm/r incl breakfast from US\$8/25; 📶) This beautiful old mansion with polished

wooden floors and antique furnishings has a variety of dormitories and private rooms to choose from – the nicer ones have tiled hot-water bathrooms and balconies overlooking the attractive neighborhood of La Sabana. Communal areas are well furnished, and the kitchen and hot showers are clean and comfortable. There's also free internet. It's 50m west and 150m north of the ICE Building.

MIDRANGE

All hotels have private hot showers unless otherwise stated.

Hotel Petite Victoria (Map p90; ☎ 2225 8488; victoria@amnet.com; cnr Calle 28 & Av 2; s/d incl breakfast US\$25/30) This English Victorian-style house is decorated with period chandeliers and furnishings, and still retains its original colonial tiling. Unfortunately, rooms and bathrooms are a little worn, though it's still a comfortable place to spend the night.

Rosa del Paseo (Map p90; ☎ 2257 3258; www.rosadelpaseo.com; Paseo Colón btwn Calles 28 & 30; s/d/ste from US\$76/88/93; (P) (Q)) This 'Caribbean Victorian-style' mansion was built in 1897 by the Monteleagre family, who were one of the first coffee exporters in Costa Rica. Today, the mansion has been converted into a highly recommended guesthouse, with much of the historic ambience intact. The original tiled floors and polished wood ceilings are preserved, and period pieces, including oil paintings and sculptures, are scattered throughout the hotel. There is also a stunning garden of heliconias and bougainvilleas, where a tropical breakfast is served each morning. Although it's hard to find the San José of yesteryear, this is one place where it's easy to imagine yourself in another epoch.

TOP END

All of the following hotels accept credit cards.

Colours Oasis Resort (☎ 2296 1880, in the USA 877-932 6652; www.colours.net; Blvd Rohrmoser, cnr of 'El Triangulo'; d/ste from US\$93/140; (P) (Q)) This self-proclaimed 'full-service gay resort' is in the quiet and elegant Rohrmoser district, and is affiliated with 'Colours Destinations International,' a collection of gay-friendly hotels throughout the world. Rooms in this sprawling Spanish-colonial complex have romantic paddle fans, modern furnishings and impeccable bathrooms. Facilities at the resort include a TV

lounge, bar-restaurant, pool, sundeck and Jacuzzi. Call ahead for directions.

Our pick Hotel Grano de Oro (Map p90; ☎ 2255 3322; www.hotelgranodeoro.com; Calle 30 btwn Avs 2 & 4; s/d/ste from US\$117/122/185; (P) (X)) The final word in luxury in this town. This early-20th-century mansion is located on a quiet side street from Paseo Colón, and belongs to the group of 'Small Distinctive Hotels of Costa Rica.' The 'Tropical Victorian' conversion blends wrought iron and dark wood traditional touches with Costa Rican furnishings and artwork. Private bathrooms sparkle with blue-and-white Italian tiles and gleaming base fixtures. No two rooms are alike. There is also a top-notch restaurant that's highly recommended (p102).

Central San José

This is a drawback at some of the following places, though you are in the center of everything (for better or worse).

BUDGET

All showers are hot unless otherwise stated.

Casa Ridgway (Map p88; ☎ 2233 6168; www.amigosparalapaz.org; casaridgway@yahoo.es; cnr Calle 15 & Av 6bis; dm/s/d US\$10/12/24; (X)) This welcoming guesthouse, on a quiet side street near the Supreme Court building, is run by the adjacent Friends' Peace Center, which promotes peace, social justice and collaboration between peoples. Rooms are immaculate, there are shared showers, the communal kitchen is spotless and the atmosphere is, well, peaceful. A lending library offers an extensive collection of books on Central American politics and society. This isn't the place for party people – there's no smoking, alcohol or drugs allowed and quiet hours are from 10pm to 6am.

Pensión de la Cuesta (Map p88; ☎ 2256 7946; www.pensiondelacuesta.com; Av 1 btwn Calles 11 & 15; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$18/28/38) Situated on a little hill behind the Asamblea Legislativa is this 1920s wooden house, which looks like it was designed and decorated by Barbie and Ken. Nine small but appealing rooms with private bathrooms share a homey TV lounge that's perfect for relaxing with the owners and guests.

Green House Hostel (Map p88; 2258 0102; www.greenhousehostel.altervista.org; Calle 11 btwn Avs 16 & 18; dm/s/d/tr US\$14/28/38/49) This very attractive hostel that recently came under the HI banner is brim-

ming with personality – the entire building is adorned with hanging plants, historic photographs and interesting antiques. The rooms themselves are a bit more modest, though the huge perk here is that they all have private bathroom (even the dorms). Unfortunately, it's a bit pricey compared with other hostels in the city, and it's inconveniently located in Plaza Viquez, which isn't exactly the nicest of neighborhoods.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Gran Hotel Doña Inés (Map p88; ☎ 2222 7443, 2222 7553; www.donaines.com; Calle 11 btwn Avs 2 & 6; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$45/60/60) This Italian-owned hotel is located in an old colonial home, which has a handful of quaint rooms decorated with period furniture. Rooms are set back from the street so they're fairly quiet, and they surround a small but pleasant courtyard. The staff speaks English, Spanish and Italian, and can help with travel arrangements. Credit cards are accepted.

Hotel Colonial (Map p88; ☎ 2223 0109; www.hotelcolonialcr.com; cnr Calle 11 btwn Avs 2 & 6; s/d/ste US\$55/67/102; (Q)) This 60-year-old Spanish-colonial mansion with distinct Moorish influences has latticed ironwork, expansive woodwork and an arched, poolside promenade. Classically accented rooms have modern furnishings, and those on the higher floors have sweeping views of the city and outlying mountains.

Gran Hotel Costa Rica (Map p88; ☎ 2221 4000; www.grandhotelcostarica.com; Calle 3 btwn Avs Central & 2; d/ste incl breakfast from US\$94/160) The city's first prominent hotel was constructed in 1930 and is today recognized as a national landmark. Frequent renovations have kept the rooms modern and comfortable, though there are still subtle architectural reminders of the hotel's history, including exposed beams, molded ceilings and the dramatic entrance hall. The 24-hour alfresco Café Parisienne (p104) is one of the most popular tourist cafés in the city. There are also two restaurants, a bar and a 24-hour casino. Credit cards accepted.

Coca-Cola Bus Terminal Area

It is not recommended that you stay in this area – crime is on the increase, and travelers are easy targets, particularly at night. However, if you're just looking to crash near the station for a night, the following hotels are better than most.

BUDGET

Hotel Musoc (Map p88; ☎ 2222 9437; Calle 16 btwn Avs 1 & 3; s/d US\$9/15, s/d/tr with bathroom US\$12/16/18) This large building close to the Coca-Cola terminal is nicer inside than it would appear on the outside. The linoleum-tiled rooms are simple and clean, and showers are hot, but noise can be a problem with all the buses passing below. The staff speaks some English and credit cards are accepted.

Hotel Gallo Pinto (Map p90; ☎ 2257 3632; Calle 24 btwn Avs 3 & 5; dm US\$12, d incl breakfast US\$25) If you must stay near the Coca-Cola terminal, then this is your best bet. A family-run hostel with brightly decorated wood-floored private rooms and stone-floored dorms. Communal spaces are basic but functional, while the bathrooms with hot showers are clean. Tours and car rental can be arranged at the front desk.

By the Airport

The residential district of Cariari is located in the nether region between San José and Alajuela. It's a convenient base if you're either coming from or going to the international airport (assuming you have some dough to spare). There's no shortage of expensive hotels in this section of the city, though the following spots are particularly recommended. All of the listed hotels are easily reached by taxi. Note that these hotels are not mapped.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Cariari Bed & Breakfast (☎ 2239 2585; www.cariaribb.com; Av de la Marina; d incl breakfast US\$76-90; (P) (Q)) This charming B&B is run by a friendly North American named Laurie, and is a welcome respite from the area's absurdly priced hotels. Three suites of varying sizes and amenities (one room shares a bathroom, one has a private shower and the other a bathtub) are available for guests, though there are plenty of common areas in this stunning Spanish-colonial home, including a tropical garden, a TV lounge and a roof deck.

Hotel Herradura (☎ 2293 0033; www.hotelherradura.com; s/d/ste from US\$155/170/250; (P) (Q) (X)) This golf resort and conference center also has privileges at the neighboring country club. Modern rooms have plush carpets and all the trimmings, though it's the amenities that you're paying for – we're talking three pools, including one with waterfalls and a swim-up bar, five Jacuzzis, a casino, a sauna, a concierge service, three restaurants and two bars.

THE CHILD SEX TRADE

Although the majority of travelers to Central America are searching for sandy beaches, tropical breezes and a Latin vibe, an increasing number of sex tourists who prey on children are also finding their way to Costa Rica.

Prostitution is legal in Costa Rica for women and men 18 years or older. Nevertheless, child prostitution is a highly visible and growing problem in the country. It is impossible to know exactly how many minors work as prostitutes in Costa Rica, but the government, police sources, and representatives of Unicef and the Human Rights Watch acknowledge that child prostitution is on the rise. The National Institute for Children (PANI) estimates that as many as 3000 children in metropolitan San José are involved in prostitution and the former executive president of Costa Rica's National Child Trust acknowledged in 2004 that there had been an accelerated increase in child prostitution in the country.

Experts have suggested many reasons for this rise in the sexual exploitation of children. First, traditional sex tourism destinations, such as Thailand and the Philippines, have in recent years enacted stricter laws and strong public awareness campaigns, which have blunted the sex industry in both countries. Second, the growth of tourism in Costa Rica has attracted a greater number of European and North American sex tourists, especially considering that adult prostitution is completely legal. Third, increased demand for child prostitutes is partly due to the mistaken belief that younger men and women are less likely to have HIV or AIDS. Fourth, the advent of the internet has made it easier for sex tourists to learn about the availability of underage sex in various destinations.

Children are often pushed into prostitution when poor families lose the ability to support themselves. Studies also show that child prostitutes are often victims of sexual and physical abuse at home, and are driven to prostitution as a means of survival. It has also been shown that drug abuse is correlated with child prostitution, and that minors often sell sex as a means of feeding their addiction.

Fortunately, there are signs that the Costa Rican government is starting to crackdown on offenders. First of all, there are stiff penalties for anyone convicted of buying sex from a minor, including hefty fines and lengthy prison sentences. At present, there are signs and leaflets in both of Costa Rica's international airports that alert arriving travelers to the penalties for having sex with a minor. Similar billboards can also be seen on major highways and at tourist sites throughout the country.

In addition, the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT) recently began a highly visible campaign to discourage tourists from engaging in the sex trade. It has also adopted a code of conduct to help discourage domestic workers from helping foreigners find prostitutes. For example, taxi drivers, waiters and hotel staff are often eager to help guests find prostitutes since they can usually earn a hefty commission. In an effort to combat this practice, some businesses are investing in 're-education' classes for their staff, though unfortunately, it's easy to remain skeptical of the effectiveness of this program.

There are a number of organizations fighting the sexual exploitation of children in Costa Rica, which you can contact to find out more or to report any incidents you encounter. See boxed text Preventing Child Sex Tourism in Costa Rica, p534.

Meliá Cariari Hotel (☎ 2239 0022; d/sle from US\$165/275; P ♿ ♿ ♿) This luxurious hotel has a presidential suite that isn't presidential in name only: numerous foreign leaders from around the world frequently stay here during their trips to Costa Rica. If you're not a visiting dignitary, however, there are 221 spacious, carpeted rooms and suites to choose from, all of which have air-con, cable TV and a private balcony. In addition,

guests receive privileges at the neighboring Cariari Country Club.

EATING

Costa Ricans are fond of the proverb: '*Pansa llena, corazón contento*,' or 'When the stomach is full, the heart is happy.' Unsurprisingly, food is the glue that holds Costa Rican families together, and *josefinos* are no different. Cosmopolitan San José has an impressive

number and variety of restaurants, and it's easy to find something to satisfy most tastes and budgets.

Note that approximate prices for meals are given as a guide throughout this book, though generally anything with shrimp, lobster or crab will be more expensive. Many of the better restaurants in San José get very busy (especially on evenings and weekends), so it's best to make a reservation.

Eateries in the suburbs of Escazú and Los Yoses and San Pedro are listed later in this chapter.

Supermarkets are spread throughout the city, and several are marked on each neighborhood map.

Barrio Amón & Surrounds

BUDGET

Soda de Don Raúl (Map pp84-5; Calle 15 btwn Avs 6bis & 8; dishes US\$2-4) This basic *soda* (small and informal lunch counter) has hearty *gallo pinto* (stir-fry of rice and beans) and abundant lunch specials (US\$2.50) that attract a steady stream of suited Ticos from the nearby courts.

El Cuartel de la Boca del Monte (Map pp84-5; Av 1 btwn Calles 21 & 23; dishes US\$3-6; ☎ 11:30am-2pm & 6-10pm) This popular nightclub doubles as greasy spoon during the day. Sure, the exposed-brick walls and worn-wooden floors aren't exactly the most pleasant of surroundings, but the typical fare here is cheap, filling and perfect for filling the gut before a long night of drinking.

MIDRANGE

Café de la Posada (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2258 1027; Calle 17 btwn Avs 2 & 4; dishes US\$3-6; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) This Argentinean-run café, which fronts a pedestrian walkway in a quiet and scenic district of the city, is one of the few spots in San José where you can dine alfresco. The specialties here are superbly brewed coffees and authentic Argentinean-style *empanadas* (corn turnover usually filled with ground meat), though the US\$5 'plate of the day' is always a good choice. The café also displays rotating exhibitions of local and international art.

Café Saudade (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2233 2534; Calle 17 btwn Avs 2 & 4; dishes US\$4-12; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Mon-Thu, 11am-5pm Fri & Sat) This hidden gem of a place has an eclectic menu of tempting international foods, including sushi, hummus, crepes and salads, as well as your standard café offerings. It also serves as an exhibition hall for local

artists and photographers (the tables are actually display cases). Dance and yoga classes are occasionally held in the upstairs room.

La Cocina de Leña (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 3704, 2255 1360; Centro Comercial El Pueblo; dishes US\$5-9; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) One of the best-known restaurants in town, 'The Wood Stove' has the endearing tradition of printing its menu on brown paper bags. Typical dishes include corn soup with pork, black-bean soup, tamales, *gallo pinto* with meat and eggs, stuffed peppers, and oxtail served with yucca and fried plantain. It also serves local desserts and alcoholic concoctions, including *guaro*, which is the highly recommended local firewater. There's live marimba music on some nights.

Café Mundo (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 6190; cnr Av 9 & Calle 15; dishes US\$5-10; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 5pm-12:30am Sat) A good spot if you've had enough of rice and beans and crave some European fare with a half-decent glass of Beaujolais. The restaurant is housed in a beautiful old mansion, and has a relaxing outdoor terrace that overlooks a lush garden and a bubbling fountain. This is the perfect spot for an afternoon *café* (cup of coffee), though it's the Western menu of pastas, meats and salads that brings the crowds.

Kafé Ko (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2258 7453; cnr Av Central & Calle 21; dishes US\$5-10; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 5pm-1am Sat) This hip, candlelit 'kafé' serves simple but gourmet Western-style sandwiches, quiches and salads, and during the evening it evolves into a popular nightspot. There's occasional live music during the week, though things really get going on weekends in the evening when live DJs come here to spin.

TOP END

Ourpick Bakea (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2248 0303; cnr Av 11 & Calle 7; dishes US\$7-18; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Fri, 7pm-midnight Sat) The trendiest restaurant in the capital is in a beautiful converted vintage home, which has numerous intimate dining rooms, a softly lit patio and a small art gallery. The menu consists of nouveau international dishes – from risotto to steak *frites* to seafood – all of it world class. Don't miss the delectable *desgustación* dessert sampler. Credit cards accepted.

Café Moro (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 3116; cnr Calle 3 & Av 13; mains US\$9-15; ☎ 11:30am-9:30pm Mon-Fri, to 10:30pm Sat) This Middle Eastern-inspired restaurant is on the ground floor of a 75-year-old

Moorish-style mansion, elaborately decorated with Arabic murals and darkly painted walls. The menu features traditional regional dishes such as kabobs, falafel, couscous and dolmades, as well as a variety of pastas, meats and fish. The coffee here is strong and potent, blending well with the honey-drenched pastries.

La Sabana & Surrounds

BUDGET

Marisquería Sabor a Océano (Map p90; ☎ 2255 0994; cnr Av 3 & Calle 34; casados US\$2-6; ☎ 11am-10pm) The ‘Taste of the Ocean’ has a great variety of seafood dishes, including *ceviche* (local dish of uncooked but well-marinated seafood), octopus, squid, fish fillets and fish fries, none of which will break your budget.

Soda Tapia (Map p90; cnr Av 2 & Calle 42; casados US\$3-4; ☎ 6am-midnight) This unpretentious spot is a local favorite – you can’t go wrong with any of its featured casados, though it’s worth saving some room for the sinful sundaes.

MIDRANGE

Lubnán (Map p90; ☎ 2257 6071; Paseo Colón btwn Calles 22 & 24; dishes US\$5-10; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-11pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) The beauty of San José is being able to find diverse places such as Lubnán, an excellent Lebanese eatery that serves Middle Eastern specialties, including shish kabobs, falafel, and lamb stews.

our pick Machu Picchu (Map p90; ☎ 2222 7384; Calle 32 btwn Av 1 & 3; mains US\$6-13; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-10pm Mon-Sat) This highly recommended Peruvian outpost is one of the most popular restaurants in the city – and with good reason. The *ceviche* is the best in town, while the overflowing seafood platters are an absolute must. If you’ve never been to Peru, this is a great place to try the country’s famous national cocktail, the *pisco sour*.

TOP END

El Chicote (Map p90; ☎ 2232 0936; mains US\$8-13; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm Sat & Sun) Protein fiends can go wild at this venerable steakhouse, which grills beefy sirloins in the middle of the restaurant and then serves them up with black beans and fried banana slices, along with a baked potato. A small pavement patio has seating, and the large interior is filled with flowers. El Chicote is near the northwest corner of the park.

La Piazzetta (Map p90; ☎ 2222 7896; cnr F Colón & Calle 40; dishes US\$8-18; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 6:30-11pm Mon-Fri,

6-11pm Sat) Some of the best Italian fare in the city is served to guests on a silver platter (literally). The house specialties include homemade pastas, creamy risottos, and tender cuts of veal and beef. There is an extensive list of imported wines, and several luscious desserts to choose from.

Fuji (Map p90; ☎ 2232 8122, ext 191; Calle 42, mains US\$10-30; ☎ noon-3pm & 6:30-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Arguably the top Japanese restaurant in town is located in the Hotel Meliá Tryp Corobicí, 200m north of Parque La Sabana. The restaurant serves skillfully prepared sushi and traditional Japanese dishes, including *teppanyaki* and *bento*. Credit cards accepted.

Restaurant y Galería La Bastille (Map p90; ☎ 2255 4994; cnr Paseo Colón & Calle 22; dishes US\$12-16; ☎ 11:30am-2pm & 6:30pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 6pm-midnight Sat) This cheerfully elegant bistro is one of San José’s longest-standing French restaurants. Dishes emphasizing local meats and thick sauces are simply impeccable. The restaurant also serves as a colorful art gallery, and displays rotating exhibitions that highlight local artists.

Restaurant Grano de Oro (Map p90; ☎ 2255 3322; Calle 30 btwn Avs 2 & 4; dinner mains US\$20; ☎ 6am-10pm) Foremost among small hotel-restaurants in San José is Grano de Oro, which is applauded for its historic dining area and superb international cuisine. Dishes include inventive items, such as chicken basted in coconut milk with grilled pineapple, or Chilean sea bass in orange herb sauce with macadamia nuts. The restaurant is popular, so reservations are highly recommended – even for weeknights. Guests can have their meals delivered to their rooms at no additional charge. Credit cards accepted.

Central San José & Coca-Cola Bus Terminal Area

BUDGET

Pastelería Merayo (Map p88; Calle 16 btwn Paseo Colón & Av 1; pastries US\$1-2) This busy pastry shop has a wide variety of cavity-inducing goodies. The coffee is strong and it’s a sweet way to pass the time if you’re waiting for a bus at the Coca-Cola.

Soda Castro (Map p88; Av 10 btwn Calles 2 & 4; dishes US\$2-5) The area outside is frightful, but inside it’s so delightful. So it’s not in the best neighborhood, but if you happen to be coming through here, Castro is a good place to feed a sweet tooth. The vast hall is an old-fashioned Tico family spot (there’s a sign pro-

hibiting public displays of affection) where you can get heaping ice-cream sundaes and banana splits.

Huarache’s (Map pp84-5; Av 22 btwn Calles 5 & 7; dishes US\$2-5; ☎ 11am-11pm) This bustling Mexican restaurant makes up for all the bland meals you’ve had in Costa Rica. Here you’ll find fresh honest-to-goodness tacos, quesadillas, guacamole, tortilla soup and hot sauces that’ll make you think you’ve died and gone to Mexico.

Vishnu (Map p88; dishes US\$3-5; Av 1 Av 1 btwn Calles 1 & 3; Calle Central Calle Central btwn Avs 6 & 8) Veggies go nuts at this famous San José chain, which is known for its bouche fare and affordable prices. A US\$3 lunch special buys you soup, brown rice, veggies, a fruit drink and dessert. But it’s worth coming back for dinner as well – its veggie burger and fruit-drink combo is so good it’ll make your carnivorous friends jealous.

Churrería Manolo’s (Map p88; churros US\$0.50, meals US\$3-5; ☎ 24hr; Downtown West Av Central btwn Calles Central & 2; Branch 2 Av Central btwn Calles 9 & 11) This San José institution is famous for its cream-filled churros (doughnut tubes), which draws in crowds of hungry jefosinos in search of a quick sugar rush day or night. Here’s a tip – the churros are the freshest around 5pm when hungry office workers beeline here straight from the office. If you’re looking for something a little more filling, the Downtown West location serves killer casados, and the 2nd-floor balcony is great for spying on passers-by on the pedestrian mall below.

Chelle’s (Map p88; cnr Av Central & Calle 9; dishes US\$3-6; ☎ 24hr) This unpretentious spot is centrally located and serves local dishes – none of which are very exciting. Regardless, some Ticos say you haven’t really experienced San José until you’ve had a wee-hours breakfast here after a night of drinking. (And there’s even a bar in case you want to keep on going.)

Restaurant Shakti (Map p88; ☎ 2222 4475; cnr Av 8 & Calle 13; dishes US\$4-6; ☎ 7am-7pm) This vegetarian restaurant is a more sophisticated version of Vishnu. The highlights of the menu are the fresh-baked breads, veggie burgers, macrobiotic produce and local root vegetables. And in case your travel companions retch at the thought of eating wholesome food, the friendly staff will even cook up a chicken for your unenlightened friends.

our pick Nuestra Tierra (Map pp84-5; cnr Av 2 & Calle 15; casados \$4-6; ☎ 24hr) A glaring bull’s head greets

you in this ranch-style restaurant, where the theme is Costa Rican *campesino*- (peasant or farmer) style spit and sawdust. Cheery waiters whisk around heaving wooden platters spilling casados to hordes of hungry tourists and Tico families, who especially pack the place out on weekends. Portions are large, the food is good and the prices are low.

Restaurante Don Wang (Map p88; Calle 11 btwn Avs 6 & 8; dishes US\$4-10; ☎ 8am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon, 8am-11pm Tue-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) If you travel for long enough in Costa Rica, you’ll be surprised to learn what passes for Chinese food in this country. At the Don Wang, you’re getting the real deal, especially if you come in the morning for its Cantonese dim sum.

One of the cheapest places for a good lunch is at the **Mercado Central** (Map p88; Av Central btwn Calles 6 & 8), where you’ll find a variety of restaurants and *sodas* serving casados, tamales, seafood and everything in between. One of the best spots is **our pick Poseidon** (Map p88; dishes US\$2-5), where the owner gets the best market fish every day to put on the menu. The seafood stew is one of the best dishes in town. After, stop for dessert at **Helados de Sorbotela** (Map p88; ice cream US\$0.75), a real local favorite that serves up custard ice cream to the sweaty shoppers that shuffle around the market.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Restaurante Tin-Jo (Map p88; ☎ 2221 7605; Calle 11 btwn Avs 6 & 8; ☎ 11:30am-3pm & 5:30-10pm Mon-Thu, 11:30am-3pm & 5:30-11pm Fri & Sat, 11:30am-10pm Sun; dishes US\$6-13) Certainly the best Asian food in San José; the interiors of this establishment are a riot of pan-Asian design. The menu serves a wide range of Asian fare from Indian to Indonesian (and pretty much everything in between). However, it does suffer slightly from being a jack-of-all-trades, master of none.

La Esquina de Buenos Aires (Map p88; Crn Calle 11 & Av 4; dishes US\$5-20; ☎ 11:30am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Fri, 12-11pm Sat & Sun) Arguably the best place for a steak and glass of red in town; its tiled floors and dark-wood tables could have you believe you were in a San Telmo eatery. The Italian dishes are as good as you’ll get in this part of the world, as well.

Café del Teatro Nacional (Map p88; Plaza de la Cultura; dishes US\$6-8; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12:30pm & 1:30-5:30pm Sat) The most beautiful café in the city is, unsurprisingly, located in the most beautiful building in the city. The coffees and small sandwiches are good enough, though the real

TOP SPOTS TO EAT & DRINK FOR UNDER US\$5

Eat and drink like a true on-the-go josefino, for only a few bucks:

- Slurp down a bowl of delicious seafood stew at **Poseidon** (p103).
- Get your sugar rush from the deliciously sweet and crispy doughnuts at **Churrería Manolo's** (p103).
- The thick, rich custard ice cream at **Helados de Sorbotela** (p103) is the stuff of legend for regulars to the Mercado Central.
- After a heavy night out, head straight for **Chelle's** (p103), which is where the party set shovel plates of *gallo pinto* (rice and beans) down to line their *guaro-* (local firewater) weary stomachs.

reason you're here is to soak up the ambience of the building's stunning frescoes.

Dos Gringos (Map p88; cnr Av 1 & Calle 7; dishes US\$5-11; ☎ 11pm-2am) This bar and restaurant is run by two gringos, namely a Bostonian and a Floridian, and has a good mix of American dishes. During the evening, this is a popular spot for middle-age tourists, who dance to classic rock while sipping a cocktail or two.

Café Parisienne (Map p88; Plaza de la Cultura; dishes US\$6-10; ☎ 24hr) Part of the Gran Hotel Costa Rica, this European-style café is the perfect place for people-watching, and you can't beat the views of the Teatro Nacional. The meals are definitely overpriced and fairly ordinary, though the waitstaff will leave you alone if you just order a coffee.

News Café (Map p88; cnr Av Central & Calle 7; dishes US\$6-10; ☎ 6am-10pm) On the ground floor of Hotel Presidente is the most popular café in the city for gringo expats. The main draw is the daily selection of foreign newspapers and the free wi-fi. The attached restaurant serves a variety of American-style sandwiches, salads and recommended steaks.

Balcón de Europa (Map p88; ☎ 2221 4841; Calle 9 btwn Avs Central & 1; dishes US\$6-12; ☎ 11:30am-10pm Sun-Fri) One of San José's most popular eateries, this restaurant was established in 1909 and claims to be one of the oldest in Costa Rica. The menu is heavily influenced by European culinary traditions and has a good selection of pastas, antipasto and salads, though there are plenty

of authentic Tico specialties, too, including *palmitos* (hearts of palms).

DRINKING

Whatever your poison may be (ours is a double shot of *guaro* garnished with lime), San José has plenty of options to keep you well lubricated. And there's something for everybody – from hole-in-the-wall dives to trendy lounges to gringolandia.

For listings of nightclubs and gay bars, see opposite.

For bars that also have live music, whether regular or occasional, see p106.

For more drinking options, see Los Yoses & San Pedro (p116) and Escazú (p122).

Be advised that San José is not exactly the safest city to go bar-hopping – be smart, and travel by taxi at night.

Barrio Amón & Surrounds

Centro Comercial El Pueblo (Map pp84-5; ☎) The recommended 'El Pueblo' is a shopping mall-type complex that's jam-packed with hip bars and clubs, including four that have live music. There is even a 24-hour ATH (A Toda Hora) ATM on the Cirrus network by the parking lot. The complex usually gets going at about 9pm and shuts down by 3am. Stringent security keeps trouble outside, so this is definitely one place in Chepe where you can kick back a few and let loose (just be careful when you leave as things do get rough outside). Bring your ID. The Peruvian-style Bar Picantería Inty Raymy has potent pisco sours, which always help start the night out right.

¿Por que no? (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2233 6622; ☎ from 5:30pm) Across the street and about 100m west of Centro Comercial El Pueblo, this is connected to Hotel Villa Tournón. Although the hotel primarily caters to business travelers, its bar is a local favorite, especially on Friday nights, when there's live music.

Luna Roja Café (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 2432; Calle 3 btwn Avs 9 & 11) Young, hip and trendy josefinos (leave the khakis at home and wear something black) fill this place. It has a ladies' night every Monday and even has the occasional Goth night. It charges for admission (US\$2.50) most nights, though Wednesday is free.

Central San José

Nashville South Bar (Map p88; Calle 5 btwn Avs 1 & 3) A honky-tonk-style bar serves burgers, chili dogs and other fixin's to a bar full of tired-

looking gringos. Still, it's a good place if you're looking to meet other gringo travelers, or if you need some time to ease into this whole 'being in a foreign country' thing. Another popular nightspot for the linguistically challenged is nearby Dos Gringos (opposite).

Chelle's (Map p88; ☎ 2221 1369; cnr Av Central & Calle 9; ☎ 24hr) If you're boozing the night away with Ticos, sooner or later they'll bring you to this 24/7 downtown landmark. In case you're feeling a little woozy, it also serves meals.

Bar Chavelona (Map p88; Av 10 btwn Calles 10 & 12; ☎ 24hr) This historic 77-year-old bar is in a somewhat deserted neighborhood south of downtown (in other words, take a taxi). The service is good, the atmosphere pleasant, and the locale is frequented by radio and theater workers, giving the place an old-world bohemian feel.

ENTERTAINMENT

Pick up *La Nación* on Thursday for a listing (in Spanish) of the coming week's nightlife and cultural events. The *Tico Times* 'Weekend' section (in English) has a calendar of theater, music, museums and events. A handy publication is the *Guía de Ciudad*, published by *El Financiero*, a free city guide featuring the latest events. It is usually available at the tourist office and at better hotels. Visit www.entretrenimiento.co.cr for more up-to-date movies, bar and club listings in the San José area.

Nightclubs

Josefinos love to drink almost as much as they love to dance. Whether it's salsa, meringue, hip-hop or reggaetón, Chepe's clubs are always a hot place to be.

Clubs with live music and full-on dance floors will usually charge an admission of US\$2 to US\$5 depending on the night and the caliber of artist. Don't forget to bring your ID.

See also Los Yoses & San Pedro (p112) for more options in the university district.

In case you missed our first warning, here it is again – be smart, and travel by taxi at night. Most clubs open at around 10pm but don't get going until well after midnight. For the most raucous joints, closing time is at 6am.

BARRIO AMÓN & SURROUNDS

Centro Comercial El Pueblo (Map pp84-5; ☎) The top nightspot in San José is a thick density of human activity on weekends. Smaller clubs come and go so follow the crowds

to see what's in, though there are a few established standards:

Cocoloco (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 8782) The place to be at the moment. Two dance floors are filled with a young and sexy crowd that grinds and gyrates to reggaetón beats.

Ebony 56 (Map pp84-5) This sprawling disco has no shortage of dance space, so if you don't like what's playing, move to the next room.

La Plaza (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2233 5516) This is one of the classier clubs in El Pueblo (although it's actually outside it), so dress to impress, bust out the Spanish and chat up a few josefinos.

Next door to the Luna Roja, you'll find **Café Loft** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2221 2302; ☎ 7pm-2am), which has DJs spinning house, ambient and other types of soft electronica on a nightly basis. There's a dress code, so be spiffy or you're not getting in. Nearby Kafé Ko (p101) is also a hot spot for live modern music.

LA SABANA

Club Vertigo (Map p90; Paseo Colón btwn Calles 36 & 38) The city's premier ravers' club brings in big-name house DJs from around the world. Downstairs is an 850-person-capacity sweat-box of a dance floor, while upstairs people chill out on soft red sofas. The trick is to talk your way into the VIP room and hang out with the capital's bold and beautiful.

CENTRAL SAN JOSÉ

Ticos describe the downtown scene as being downscale (even dodgy), though there are two recommended places if you're looking for some local flavor.

El Túnel de Tiempo Disco (Map p88; Av Central btwn Calles 7 & 9) Starts pumping the techno late at night and keeps it going 'til the break of dawn.

Complejo Salsa 54 y Zaididas (Map p88; Calle 3 btwn Avs 1 & 3) Another good place to shake it, this vast 2nd-floor club is all Latin, all the time. Be prepared to cut some serious rug here – the local dancers here are expert *salseros*.

Cinemas

Many cinemas show recent Hollywood films with Spanish subtitles and the English soundtrack. Occasionally, films are dubbed over in Spanish (*hablado en español*) rather than subtitled; ask before buying a ticket. Movie tickets cost about US\$3, and generally Wednesdays are two-for-one. Check the latest listings in *La Nación*, the *Tico Times* or on www.entretrenimiento.co.cr.

Larger and more modern multiplexes are located in the suburbs of San Pedro and Escazú. But in town, try the following:

Cine Magaly (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 0085; Calle 23 btwn Avs Central & 1)

Omni (Map p88; ☎ 2221 7903; Calle 3 btwn Avs Central & 1)

Sala Garbo (Map p90; ☎ 2222 1034; cnr Av 2 & Calle 28)

Gay & Lesbian Venues

As a cosmopolitan city, San José is home to a thriving gay and lesbian scene, though it's best to remember that there is still bigotry and intolerance here toward homosexuals. For more information, see p532.

Admission is charged on weekends and special nights, with prices fluctuating between US\$2 and US\$5. Clubs may close on some nights and may have women- or men-only nights. To get the latest, log on to **Gay Costa Rica** (www.gaycostarica.com) for up-to-the-minute club info in English and Spanish, or drop by the 1@10 Café Internet (p81), which serves as the gay and lesbian information center.

CENTRAL SAN JOSÉ

The gay scene tends toward the periphery, so expect to find the best clubs in some of the worst areas. As always, travel by taxi at night, and if possible, bring a friend.

Bochinche (Map p88; ☎ 2221 0500; Calle 11 btwn Avs 10 & 12) An upscale gay bar that is popular among young professionals out for a night of drinking and flirting.

Deja Vú (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 3758; Calle 2 btwn Avs 14 & 16) This massive dance club is one of the most popular spots in the city. The club hosts a men's open-bar night on Wednesday and has go-go boys on Saturday.

La Avispa (Map p88; ☎ 2223 5343; Calle 1 btwn Avs 8 & 10) A long-standing gay establishment that has been in operation for over 25 years. La Avispa has a bar, pool tables and a boisterous dance floor that's been recommended by readers. It is most popular with gay men, though it does host a lesbian night once a month.

Los Cucharones (Map p88; ☎ 2233 5797; Av 6 btwn Calles Central & 1) This raucous place is frequented by young, working-class men for its over-the-top (and recommended) drag shows.

Live Music

Los Balcones (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 3704; Centro Comercial El Pueblo; P) A small bar specializing in live

socially conscious Latin American folk music known as *nueva trova*. There are regular acoustic musicians and no admission cost.

Bar Tango Che Molinari (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2226 6904; Centro Comercial El Pueblo; P) An intimate Argentinean bar featuring live tango for a small admission fee.

Tarrico (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2222 1003; Centro Comercial El Pueblo; P) This is a popular watering hole where hard-drinking josefinos crowd the big bar and foosball table. There is frequent live music.

Theater

There is a wide variety of theatrical options in San José, provided you speak Spanish – though there are a few options in English. Local newspapers, including the *Tico Times*, list current shows. The Teatro Nacional is the city's most important theater. Most other theaters are not very large, performances are popular and ticket prices are quite reasonable. This adds up to sold-out performances, so get tickets as early as possible. Theaters rarely have performances on Monday.

Auditorio Nacional (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2249 1208; www.museocr.com; Museo de los Niños, Calle 4, north of Av 9) A grand stage for concerts, dance theater and plays – and even the site of the Miss Costa Rica pageant.

Little Theater Group (LTG; ☎ 2289 3910) This English-language theater group has been around since the 1950s and presents several plays a year; call to find out when and where the works will be shown.

Teatro Carpa (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2234 2866; Av 1 btwn Calles 29 & 33) Known for alternative and outdoor theater, as well as performances by the Little Theater Group.

Teatro Fanal (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2257 5524; Cenac Complex; Av 3 btwn Calles 11 & 15) Adjacent to the contemporary art museum, it puts on a variety of works, including children's theater – all in Spanish.

Teatro La Máscara (Map p88; ☎ 2222 4574; Calle 13 btwn Avs 2 & 6) Dance performances as well as alternative theater.

Teatro Melico Salazar (Map p88; ☎ 2233 5434; Av 2 btwn Calles Central & 2) The restored 1920s theater named after one of Costa Rica's most notable coffee barons has a variety of performances, including music and dance, as well as drama.

Teatro Nacional (Map p88; ☎ 2221 5341; Av 2 btwn Calles 3 & 5) Stages plays, dance, opera, symphony, Latin American music and other major cultural events. The season runs from March to November, although less frequent performances occur during other months. Tickets start as low as US\$4. The National Symphony Orchestra (Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional) also plays here.

INDIGENOUS ART

If you want a quick education about indigenous culture in Costa Rica, **Galería Namu** (Map p88; ☎ 2256 3412; www.galerianamu.com; Av 7 btwn Calles 5 & 7; ☎ 9:30am-6:30pm Mon-Sat, 9:30am-1:30pm Sun) is a good place to start. Selected as an official site for the annual Costa Rican Arts Festival in San José, the gallery has done an admirable job of bringing together artwork and crafts from Costa Rica's small but diverse population of indigenous tribes.

Owner Aisling French regularly visits artists in remote villages around the country and can provide background information on the various traditions represented in the artwork and crafts. Boruca ceremonial masks, Guaymí dolls and dresses, Bribri dugout canoes, Chorotega ceramics, Huetar carvings and mats, and Guatuso blankets are all among the works that can be found at the gallery.

There is also some work by contemporary urban artists, including art produced by Central American street children through a nonprofit program.

English is spoken. In the rainy season it is closed on Sunday, and shop hours may vary.

Teatro Sala Vargas Calvo (Map p88; ☎ 2222 1875; Av 2 btwn Calles 3 & 5) Known for theater-in-the-round performances.

Casinos

Gamblers will find casinos in several of the larger and more expensive hotels. Most casinos are fairly casual, but in the nicer hotels it is advisable to clean up as there may be a dress code. Be advised that casinos are often frequented by high-class prostitutes, so be suspicious if suddenly you're the most desirable person in the room.

Auroa Holiday Inn (Map p88; ☎ 2222 2424; 17th fl, cnr Calle 5 & Av 5)

Casino Club Colonial (Map p88; ☎ 2258 2807; Av 1 btwn Calles 9 & 11; ☎ 24hr)

Gran Hotel Costa Rica (Map p88; ☎ 2221 4000; Calle 3 btwn Avs Central & 2)

Meliá Tryp Corobicí (Map p90; ☎ 2232 8122; Calle 42; ☎ 6pm-2am) It's 200m north of Parque La Sabana.

Sports

International and national *fútbol* (soccer) games are played in **Estadio Nacional** (Map p90; ☎ 2257 6844) in Parque La Sabana. Call ahead for game schedules. For more information on this national passion, turn to p48.

For information on opportunities for sport around the city, see p91.

Bullfighting is also a popular Tico sport. Events are mainly held during national holidays and are the focal point of large fiestas. The largest event is held in Zapote (a southern suburb) over the Christmas period, and members of the public are encouraged to participate in the action.

SHOPPING

Whether you're looking for indigenous handicrafts or a plastic howler monkey, San José has no shortage of shops, running the gamut from artsy boutiques to shameless tourist traps. For the most part, however, the capital offers a good selection of handicraft shopping, and stores are generally cheaper here than in tourist towns. With the exception of markets, haggling is not tolerated in stores and shops – this isn't Thailand. For general information on shopping in Costa Rica, turn to p536.

Mercado Central (Map p88; Avs Central & 1 btwn Calles 6 & 8) Assuming you've dressed down and stuck a wad of extra cash in your sock, the Central Market is the best place in the city for, well, pretty much anything you'd want. If you want to do the whole tourist thing, this is the cheapest place to buy a hammock (Hecho en Nicaragua) or a 'pura vida' T-Shirt (Made in China). For something decidedly more Costa Rican, export-quality coffee beans (we like whole-bean organic shade-grown dark roast) can be had at a fraction of the price you'll pay in tourist shops.

Mercado Artesanal (Craft Market; Map p88; Plaza de la Democracia; Avs Central & 2 btwn Calles 13 & 15) One of the best shopping experiences in the city is here, where you can browse close to 100 open-air stalls that sell everything from handcrafted jewelry and elaborate woodwork to Cuban cigars and Guatemalan sarongs.

La Casona (Map p88; Calle Central btwn Avs Central & 1; ☎ Mon-Sat) Welcome to the number one tourist trap in Chepe! Sure, shopping in this multilevel complex is the cultural equivalent of buying art at Wal-Mart, but it's cheap and

the selection is surprisingly good. This is the best place to buy all your tacky souvenirs, be they banana-leaf paper journals or tree-frog stickers. Shop around as there are some quality crafts to be had here.

La Buchaca (Map pp84-5; ☎ 2223 6773, 2253 8790; Centro Comercial El Pueblo; ☎ 4-8pm Mon-Sat) A tiny oasis in El Pueblo that carries well-made jewelry, ceramics and sculptures – all of Costa Rican origin. Of particular interest are the beautifully executed modern paintings featuring pre-Columbian motifs from around Central America.

Sol Maya (Map p88; ☎ 2221 0864; Calle 16 btwn Av Central 1; ☎ Sun-Fri) If you're looking to kill some time before getting on the bus, it's worth visiting this small shop near the Coca-Cola bus terminal. The simple but quaint store carries an impressive selection of Guatemalan textiles, and the prices are about as cheap as you'll find anywhere.

If you're in San José, it is absolutely worth the trip to go visit Biesanz Woodworks in Escazú (p123). And if you have the time and the inclination, you can also find wide selections of well-priced items in the suburb of Moravia, about 8km northeast of downtown, or by taking a day trip to the village of Sarchí, where Costa Rica's colorful oxcarts and finest woodwork are produced.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

San José is the country's transportation hub, and it's likely that you'll pass through the capital a number of times throughout your travels (whether you'd like to or not). Unfortunately, the transport system is rather bewildering to the first-time visitor, especially considering that most people get around the country by bus, yet there is no central bus terminal. Instead, there are dozens of bus stops, terminals and even an old Coca-Cola bottling plant that are scattered around the city, all serving different destinations. Efforts have been made to consolidate bus services, and the use of the Coca-Cola, San Carlo, Caribe and Musoc terminals have definitely helped the situation.

Air

There are two airports serving San José. For information on getting to them, turn to p111. If you're leaving the country, be advised that there is a departure tax of US\$26.

Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría (Map p80; ☎ 2437 2626) handles international traffic from its sparkling new terminal and Sansa domestic flights from the diminutive blue building to the right of the main terminal. The airport is located near Alajuela. **Sansa** (Map p90; ☎ 2221 9414; www.flysansa.com; cnr Av 5 & Calle 42, La Sabana) also has an office in town.

Aeropuerto Tobías Bolaños (Map p80; ☎ 2232 2820; Pavas) is for domestic flights on Sansa and **NatureAir** (☎ 2220 3054; www.natureair.com). Any travel agent can book and confirm flights on both Sansa and NatureAir, although you can also make a reservation online. At the time of writing, both airlines were beginning to expand their services to other destinations in Central America.

INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES

International carriers that have offices in San José are listed here. Airlines serving Costa Rica directly are marked with an asterisk; they also have desks at the airport.

Air France (☎ 2280 0069; Curridabat) Go 100m east and 10m north from Pops.

Alitalia (Map p90; ☎ 2295 6820; cnr Calle 24 & Paseo Colón)

American Airlines* (Map p90; ☎ 2257 1266; Av 5bis btwn Calles 40 & 42, La Sabana)

Continental* (Map p90; ☎ 2296 4911; La Uruca) Next to Hotel Barceló.

COPA* (Map p88; ☎ 2222 6640; cnr Calle 1 & Av 5)

Cubana de Aviación* (Map p88; ☎ 2221 7625, 2221 5881; 5th fl, Edificio Lux, cnr Av Central & Calle 1)

Delta* (Map p90; ☎ 2256 7909, press 5 for reservations; Paseo Colón) Located 100m east and 50m south of Toyota.

Grupo TACA* (Map p90; ☎ 2296 0909; cnr Calle 42 & Av 5) Located across from Datsun dealership.

Iberia* (Map p90; ☎ 2257 8266; 2nd fl, Centro Colón)

KLM* (☎ 2220 4111; Sabana Sur)

LTU (☎ 2234 9292; Barrio Dent)

Mexicana* (Map p90; ☎ 2295 6969; 3rd fl, Torre Mercedes Benz, Paseo Colón)

SAM/Avianca* (Map p90; ☎ 2233 3066; Centro Colón)

United Airlines* (☎ 2220 4844; Sabana Sur)

CHARTER AIRCRAFT

Sansa and NatureAir both offer charter flights out of San José, as do a number of aerotaxi companies. Most charters are small (three- to five-passenger) aircraft and can fly to any of the many airstrips around Costa Rica. Each listing following includes the San José airport that the company operates from.

Aero Bell (☎ 2290 0000; aerobell@racsa.co.cr; Tobías Bolaños)

Aviones Taxi Aéreo SA (☎ 2441 1626; Juan Santamaría)

Helicópteros Turísticos Tropical (☎ 2220 3940; Tobías Bolaños)

Pitts Aviation (☎ 2296 3600; Tobías Bolaños)

Viajes Especial Aéreos SA (Veasa; ☎ 2232 1010, 2232 8043; Tobías Bolaños)

Bus

The **Coca-Cola bus terminal** (Map p88; Coca-Cola; Av 1 btwn Calles 16 & 18) is a well-known landmark in San José, and an infinite number of buses leave from a four-block radius around it. Several other terminals serve specific regions. Just northeast of the Coca-Cola, the **Terminal San Carlos** (Map pp84-5; cnr Av 9 & Calle 12) serves northern destinations, such as Monteverde, La Fortuna and Sarapiquí. The **Gran Terminal del Caribe** (Caribe terminal; Map pp84-5; Calle Central, north of Av 13) serves the Caribbean coast. At the south end of town, **Terminal Musoc** (Av 22 btwn Calles Central & 1) caters for San Isidro.

Many of the bus companies have no more than a bus stop (in this case pay the driver directly); some have a tiny office with a window on the street; some operate from a terminal.

Be aware that bus schedules change regularly. Pick up the useful but not always correct master bus schedule at the ICT office (p82) or look for the helpful *Hop on the Bus*, an up-to-date brochure published by Exintur – the brochure has locations of bus terminals and covers major destinations.

At the time of writing, fuel prices were fluctuating throughout the Americas, and it's likely that the bus prices in this book will change slightly after publication.

Buses are crowded on Friday evening and Saturday morning, even more so during Christmas and Easter.

Thefts are common around the Coca-Cola terminal, so stay alert – especially at night. Theft is an increasing problem on intercity buses, so keep all valuables in your carry-on bag, and don't let it out of your sight.

An excellent way of avoiding the hassle of public buses is to book your onward travel through **A Safe Passage** (☎ 2441 7837, 8365 9678; www.costaricabustickets.com), which can purchase tickets in advance for a small fee. It also arranges airport transfers, and indeed it's possible to land in San José and then be shuttled right to your departing intercity bus.

INTERNATIONAL BUSES FROM SAN JOSÉ

Take a copy of your passport when buying tickets to international destinations. For more on border crossings, see boxed text Border Crossings, p542.

Changuinola/Bocas del Toro, Panama Panaline (Map p88; cnr Calle 16 & Av 3) US\$15, eight hours, departs at 10am.

David, Panama Tracopa (Map p88; Calle 14 btwn Avs 3 & 5) US\$18, nine hours, departs 7:30am.

Guatemala City Tica Bus (Map p88; cnr Calle 9 & Av 4) US\$45, 60 hours, departs 6am and 7:30am.

Managua, Nicaragua Nica Bus (Map p88; Gran Terminal del Caribe) US\$14, nine hours, departs at 6am, 7am and 9am; Tica Bus (Map pp84-5; cnr Calle 9 & Av 4) US\$14, nine hours, departs 6am & 7:30am; Trans Nica (Map pp84-5; Calle 22 btwn Avs 3 & 5) US\$14, nine hours, departs 4:30am, 5:30am and 9am; Transportes Deldu/Sirca Express (Map p88; Calle 16 btwn Avs 3 & 5) US\$14, nine hours, departs 4:30am.

Panama City Panaline (Map p88; cnr Calle 16 & Av 3) US\$42, 15 hours, departs 1pm; Tica Bus (Map p88; cnr Calle 9 & Av 4) US\$25, 15 hours, departs 10pm.

San Salvador, El Salvador Tica Bus (Map p88; cnr Calle 9 & Av 4) US\$42, 48 hours, departs 6am and 7:30am.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras Tica Bus (Map p88; cnr Calle 9 & Av 4) US\$32, 48 hours, departs 6am and 7:30am.

DOMESTIC BUSES FROM SAN JOSÉ

For destinations within Costa Rica, consult the following.

To the Central Valley

Alajuela Tuasa (Map p88; Av 2 btwn Calles 12 & 14) US\$0.75, 40 minutes, departs every 10 minutes from 4:20am to 11pm, every 30 minutes after 11pm.

Cartago (Map p88; Calle 13 btwn Avs 6 & 8) US\$0.50, 40 minutes.

Grecia (Map pp84-5; Av 5 btwn Calles 18 & 20) US\$0.50, one hour, departs every 30 minutes from 5:35am to 10:10pm.

Heredia (Map pp84-5; Calle 1 btwn Avs 7 & 9) US\$0.75, 20 minutes, departs every 10 minutes from 5am to 11pm.

Sarchí (Map pp84-5; Av 5 btwn Calles 18 & 20) US\$2, 1½ hours, departs every 30 minutes from 5am to 10pm.

Turrialba (Map p88; Calle 13 btwn Avs 6 & 8) US\$2, two hours, departs hourly from 5:15am to 10pm.

Volcán Irazú (Map p88; Av 2 btwn Calles 1 & 3) US\$4.50, two hours, departs 8am.

Volcán Poás Tuasa (Map p88; Av 2 btwn Calles 12 & 14) US\$4, five hours, departs 8am.

To Northwestern Costa Rica

Cañas Tralapa (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Avs 1 & 3) US\$3, 3¼ hours, departs 8:30am, 9:20am, 12:20pm, 1:40pm, 4:45pm and 6:15pm.

Ciudad Quesada (San Carlos) Autotransportes San Carlos (Map pp84-5; San Carlos terminal) US\$2.50, 2½ hours, departs hourly 5am to 6pm.

La Fortuna (Map pp84-5; San Carlos terminal) US\$4, four hours, departs 6:15am, 8:30am and 11:30am.

Liberia (Map pp84-5; Calle 24 btwn Aves 5 & 7) US\$5, four hours, departs hourly from 6am to 6pm.

Monteverde/Santa Elena (Map pp84-5; Calle 12 btwn Aves 7 & 9) US\$4.50, 4½ hours, departs 6:30am and 2:30pm. (This bus fills up very quickly – book ahead.)

Peñas Blancas, the Nicaragua Border Crossing

Transportes Deldú (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$7, six hours, departs 4:30am, 5am, 7am, 7:45am, 10:30am.

Tilarán Autotransportes Tilarán (Map pp84-5; Calle 20 & Av 3) US\$4, four hours, departs 7:30am, 9:30am, 12:45pm, 3:45pm and 6:30pm.

To Península de Nicoya

Nicoya Empresas Alfaro (Map pp84-5; Av 5 btwn Calle 14 & 16) US\$5.25 to US\$6, five hours, departs 6am, 6:30am, 8am, 10am, 10:30am, 12:30am, 1:30pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm and 5:20pm.

Playa Bejuco Empresas Arza (Map pp84-5; Calle 12 btwn Aves 7 & 9) US\$5.75, 5½ hours, 6am and 3:30pm.

Playa del Coco Pullmitan (Map pp84-5; Calle 24 btwn Aves 5 & 7) US\$5.25, five hours, departs 8am, 2pm and 4pm.

Playa Flamingo, via Brasilito Tralapa (Map pp84-5; Calle 20 btwn Aves 1 & 3) US\$6.50, six hours, departs 8am, 10:30am, 11am and 3pm.

Playa Junquillal Tralapa (Map pp84-5; Av 7 btwn Calles 20 & 22) US\$8, six hours, departs 2pm.

Playa Nosara Empresas Alfaro (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$5, six hours, departs 6am.

Playa Sámara Empresas Alfaro (Map pp84-5; Calle 16 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$5, five hours, departs 12:30pm and 6pm.

Playa Panamá & Playa Hermosa Tralapa (Map pp84-5; Av 7 btwn Calles 20 & 22) US\$5, five hours, departs 3:25pm.

Playa Tamarindo Empresas Alfaro (Map pp84-5; Calle 16 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$5, five hours, departs 11am and 3:30pm.

Santa Cruz, via Tempisque bridge (Map pp84-5; Av 5 btwn Calles 14 & 16) US\$5.50, departs 6:30am, 1:30pm and 3pm.

To the Central Pacific Coast

Dominical Transportes Morales (Map pp84-5; Coca-Cola) US\$4.50, seven hours, departs 5:30am and 3pm.

Jacó Transportes Jacó (Map pp84-5; Coca-Cola) US\$2.50, three hours, departs 7:30am, 10:30am, 1pm, 3:30pm and 6:30pm.

Puntarenas Empresarios Unidos (Map pp84-5; cnr Av 12 & Calle 16) US\$2.50, 2½ hours, many buses from 4am, 6am and 7pm.

Quepos/Manuel Antonio Transportes Morales (Map pp84-5; Coca-Cola) US\$4, four hours, departs 5am, 8am, 11am, 2:30pm and 4:30pm.

Uvita, via Dominical Transportes Morales (Map pp84-5; Coca-Cola) US\$6, six hours, departs 6am and 3pm.

To Southern Costa Rica & Península de Osa

Ciudad Neily Tracopa (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$9, eight hours, departs 5am, 10am, 1pm, 4:30pm and 6pm.

Golfito Tracopa (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$8.50, eight hours, departs 7am and 3pm.

Palmar Norte Tracopa (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$5, five hours, departs 5am, 7am, 8:30am, 10am, 1pm, 2:30pm and 6pm.

Paso Canoas, the Panama Border Crossing Tracopa (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 3 & 5) US\$9, six hours, departs 8:30am, 10:30am, 2:30pm, 7:30pm and 9pm.

Puerto Jiménez Blanco Lobo (Map pp84-5; Calle 14 btwn Aves 9 & 11) US\$6.50, eight hours, departs 6am and 12pm.

San Isidro del General Tracopa (Map p88; Av 4 btwn Calles 14 & 16) US\$3.75, three hours, departs hourly from 5am to 6pm; Transportes Musoc (Map p90; cnr Calle Central & Av 22) US\$3.25, three hours, departs hourly from 5:30am to 5:30pm.

San Vito Empresa Alfaro (Map pp84-5; Calle 16 btwn Av 3 & 5) US\$7.50, seven hours, departs 5:45am, 8:15am, 11:30am and 2:45pm.

Santa María de Dota Transportes Los Santos (Map pp84-5; Av 16 btwn Calles 19 & 21) US\$2, 2½ hours, departs 7:15am, 9am, 11:30am, 12:30pm, 3pm, 5pm and 7:30pm.

To the Caribbean Coast

All of the following buses depart from the Caribe terminal (Map pp84-5):

Cahuita (Autotransportes Mepe) US\$6.50, four hours, departs 6am, 10am, 12pm, 2pm and 4pm.

Cariari, for transfer to Tortuguero (Empresarios Guapileños) US\$2.50, 2¼ hours, departs 6:30am, 9am, 10:30am, 1pm, 3pm, 4:30pm, 6pm and 7pm.

Guápiles (Empresarios Guapileños) US\$1.75, 1½ hours, departs hourly from 5:30am to 10pm.

Puerto Limón (Autotransportes Caribeños) US\$3.50, three hours, departs every 30 minutes from 5am to 7pm.

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca (Autotransportes Mepe) US\$7.50, 4½ hours, departs 6am, 10am, 12pm, 2pm and 4pm.

Siquirres (Líneas Nuevo Atlántico) US\$2, 1½ hours, departs 6:30am, 8am, 9:30am and 6pm.

Sixaola, the Panama Border Crossing (Autotransportes Mepe) US\$9.50, six hours, departs 6am, 10am, 12pm, 2pm and 4pm.

To the Northern Lowlands

Ciudad Quesada (San Carlos) See p109.

Los Chiles, the Nicaragua Border Crossing (Map pp84-5; San Carlos terminal) US\$3.75, five hours, departs 5:30am and 3:30pm.

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí Autotransportes Sarapiquí (Map pp84-5; Caribe terminal) US\$2.50, two hours, departs 6am, 7:30am, 10am, 11:30am, 1:30pm, 2:30pm, 3:30pm, 4:30pm and 6pm.

Rara Avis (Map pp84-5; San Carlos terminal) US\$4.50, four hours, departs 6:30am.

Upala Transportes de Upala (Map pp84-5; San Carlos terminal) US\$6, five hours, departs 3:45pm.

TOURIST BUSES

Grayline's Fantasy Bus (☎ 2220 2126; www.graylinecostarica.com) and **Interbus** (☎ 2283 5573; www.interbusonline.com) shuttle passengers from all over the San José area to a rather long and growing list of popular tourist destinations around Costa Rica. They are more expensive than the standard bus service, but they will get you there faster. Turn to p547 for more information.

GETTING AROUND

Downtown San José is extremely congested – narrow streets, heavy traffic and a complicated one-way system often mean that it is quicker to walk than to take the bus. The same applies to driving: if you rent a car, don't drive downtown – it's a nightmare! If you're in a hurry to get somewhere that is more than 1km away, take a taxi.

To/From the Airports

TO AEROPUERTO INTERNACIONAL JUAN SANTAMARÍA

You can reserve a pick-up with **Taxi Aeropuerto** (☎ 2221 6865; www.taxiaeropuerto.com), which charges a flat rate of US\$12 from most parts of San José. You can also take a street taxi, but the rates may vary wildly. It should cost roughly US\$12 to US\$15, but this will depend largely on traffic. A cheaper option is the red **Tuasa bus** (Map p88; cnr Calle 10 & Av 2; fare US\$0.60) bound for Alajuela. Be sure to tell the driver that you are getting off at the airport when you board (*Voy al aeropuerto, por favor*). **Interbus** (☎ 2283 5573; www.interbusonline.com) runs an airport shuttle service that will pick you up at your hotel for US\$5 – good value.

TO AEROPUERTO TOBIÁS BOLAÑOS

Buses to Tobías Bolaños depart every 30 minutes from Avenida 1, 150m west of the Coca-

Cola bus terminal. A taxi to the airport from downtown costs about US\$3.

Bus

Local buses are useful to get you into the suburbs and surrounding villages, or to the airport. They leave regularly from particular bus stops downtown – though all of them will pick up passengers on the way. Most buses run between 5am and 10pm and cost US\$0.25 to US\$0.75.

Buses from Parque La Sabana head into town on Paseo Colón, then go over to Avenida 2 at the San Juan de Dios hospital. They then go three different ways through town before eventually heading back to La Sabana. Buses are marked Sabana–Estadio, Sabana–Cementario or Cementario–Estadio. These buses are a good bet for a cheap city tour. Buses going east to Los Yoses and San Pedro go back and forth along Avenida 2 and then switch over to Avenida Central at Calle 29. (These buses are easily identifiable because many of them have a big sign that says 'Mall San Pedro' on the front window.) These buses start at the corner of Avenida 2 and Calle 7, near Restaurante El Pollo Campesino.

Buses to the following outlying suburbs and towns begin from bus stops at the indicated blocks. Some places have more than one stop – only the main ones are listed here. If you need buses to other suburbs, inquire at the tourist office (p82).

Escazú Avenida 6 (Map p88; Av 6 btwn Calles 12 & 14); Calle 16 (Map p88; Calle 16 btwn Aves 1 & 3)

Guadalupe (Map p88; Av 3 btwn Calles Central & 1)

Moravia (Map p88; Av 3 btwn Calles 3 & 5)

Pavas (Map pp84-5; cnr Av 1 & Calle 18)

Santa Ana (Map pp84-5; Calle 16 btwn Aves 1 & 3)

Santo Domingo (Map p88; Av 5 btwn Calles Central & 2)

Car

It is not advisable to rent a car just to drive around San José. The traffic is heavy, the streets narrow and the meter-deep curb-side gutters make parking a nerve-wracking experience. In addition, car break-ins are frequent and leaving a car – even in a guarded lot – might result in a smashed window and stolen belongings. (Never ever leave anything in a rental car.) Hire one of the plentiful taxis – available at all hours – instead.

If you are renting a car to travel throughout Costa Rica, you will not be short of choices: there are more than 50 car-rental agencies in

and around San José, and the travel desks at travel agencies and upmarket hotels can all arrange rentals of various types of vehicles. *Naturally Costa Rica*, a magazine published by the ICT and Canatur (available at many hotels and the ICT office), has an extensive list of car-rental companies in the area. You can also check the local yellow pages (under Alquiler de Automóviles) for a complete listing. See p547 for general information on rental agencies.

Note that there is a surcharge of about US\$25 for renting cars from rental agencies at Juan Santamaría international airport. Save yourself the expense by renting in town.

Motorcycle

Given the narrow roads, deep gutters and homicidal bus drivers, riding a motorcycle in San José is recommended only for those who are not in complete need of their appendages. But for the foolhardy – and careful – road warrior, renting a bike is an option. Rental bikes are usually small (185cc to 350cc) and rates start at about US\$50 per day for a 350cc motorcycle and skyrocket from there. (Plan on paying over US\$200 a day for a Harley.) These are a couple of agencies worth trying in San José.

At **Wild Rider** (Map p90; ☎ 2258 4604; www.wild-rider.com; Hotel Ritmo del Caribe, cnr Paseo Colón & Calle 32) prices start at US\$350 per week for a Yamaha TT-R 250 or a Suzuki DR-350 (rates include insurance, taxes, maps and helmets). Wild Rider also has a handful of used 4WD cars that can be rented at significantly cheaper weekly rates than the big agencies. It can organize on- and off-road guided tours as well.

Harley Davidson Rentals (see p117) in Escazú rents Harleys.

Taxi

Red taxis can be hailed on the street day or night, or you can have your hotel call one for you. You can also hire taxis at any of the taxi stands at the Parque Nacional, Parque Central and near the Teatro Nacional. The most difficult time to flag down a taxi is when it's raining.

Mariás (meters) are supposedly used, but some drivers will pretend they are broken and try to charge you more – especially if you're a tourist who doesn't speak Spanish. (Not using a meter is illegal.) Make sure the *maría* is operating when you get in or ne-

gotiate the fare up front. Short rides downtown cost about US\$2. A taxi to Escazú from downtown will cost about US\$8, while a ride to Los Yoses or San Pedro will cost less than US\$4. There's a 20% surcharge after 10pm that may not appear on the *maría*.

You can hire a taxi and driver for half a day or longer if you want to do some touring around the area, but rates vary wildly depending on the destination and the condition of the roads. For a short trip on reasonably good roads, plan on spending at least US\$7.50 an hour for a sedan and significantly more for a 4WD sport utility vehicle or minivan. You can also negotiate a flat fee.

AROUND SAN JOSÉ

Like most sprawling metropolitan areas, San José is home to a number of suburbs, though boundary lines have blurred in recent years due to rapid development. Although a good number of suburbs are strictly off-limits, particularly on the outskirts of the capital where shantytowns are spreading, there are a few areas that offer an appealing alternative to staying in the city proper. An easy 2km walk east of downtown are Los Yoses and San Pedro, home to a number of embassies as well as the most prestigious university in the country, the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR). About 7km west of downtown is Escazú, which is the most elite residential area in the capital and the epicenter of a recent wave of Americanization.

Until the mid-20th century, these two suburbs were separate from San José, and were predominantly occupied by the privileged elite. Today Los Yoses, San Pedro and Escazú are contiguous with the city, though they still retain much of their historical airs. For the traveler, spending the night in these well-to-do destinations is recommended if you're looking for a safe and relaxing alternative to the urban grind.

LOS YOSÉS & SAN PEDRO

It shouldn't come as a surprise that this university district is brimming with the highest percentage of bars and clubs in the city. In the evenings, the under-30s crowd takes to the streets in force, and if you spend enough time partying on Calle La Amargura, you

may find yourself lingering in the capital for longer than you planned. If you're not the drinking type, this area is also home to some of the nicest malls and movie theaters in the capital (perfect if you're in need of a quick Western-culture fix). And you'd be hard-pressed to find a neighborhood with better restaurants than San Pedro and Los Yoses.

These suburbs are centered on a roundabout where Avenida Central meets the road to Zapote. To the west lies Los Yoses, with the Fuente de la Hispanidad (a large fountain) and the Mall San Pedro, both serving as area landmarks. To the east lies San Pedro, anchored by a small plaza and the Iglesia de San Pedro (San Pedro church). A few blocks north of Avenida Central is the tree-lined campus of the national university.

Orientation & Information

Most streets in Los Yoses and San Pedro are unnamed, and locals rely almost entirely on the landmark method to orient themselves. (See boxed text What's That Address?, p537 for more details.) Three major area landmarks are the old ICE building (*el antiguo ICE*) and the Spoon in Los Yoses, and the old Banco Popular building (*el antiguo Banco Popular*) in San Pedro.

The neighborhood abounds with internet cafés, so there's no problem logging on. Pick up a copy of the student weekly, *Semana Universitaria*, or a comprehensive source of local events.

Internet Café Costa Rica (Map p114; ☎ 2224 7295; per hr US\$0.60; ☎ 24hr) As good a place to log on as any, 75m west of the old Banco Popular.

Librería Internacional (Map p114; ☎ 2253 9553; Barrio Dent; ☎ 9:30am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) This has new books mostly in Spanish (but some in English), as well as travel and wildlife guides. It's 300m west of Taco Bell, behind Mall San Pedro.

Scotiabank (Map p114; ☎ 2280 0604; Av Central btwn Calles 5 & 7, San Pedro) Changes cash and has a 24-hour ATM on the Cirrus network.

Sights & Activities

The **Museo de Insectos** (Map p114; ☎ 2207 5318, 2207 5647; admission US\$1; ☎ 1-5pm Mon-Fri), also known as the Museo de Entomología, has a fine collection of insects curated by the Facultad de Agronomía at the Universidad de Costa Rica and housed (incongruously) in the basement of the music building (Facultad de Artes Musicales) on campus. It is claimed that this

GET OUTTA TOWN

Looking for something to do outside of San José? Here are a few suggestions:

- Shop for hardwood handicrafts and mini-oxcarts in **Sarchí** (p136).
- Learn everything you've ever wanted to know about coffee at the **Café Britt Finca** (p144).
- Shop for fine leather goods in the colonial town of **Moravia** (p148).
- Buy rare orchids for your friends and family at the **Lankester Gardens** (p152).
- Gaze into active craters (and fighting off the tourist hordes) at **Volcán Poás** (p139).

is the only insect museum of its size in Central America. The collection is certainly extensive and provides a good opportunity to view a vast assortment of exotic – and downright alarming – creepy crawlies. The museum is signposted from San Pedro church, or you can ask for directions. Ring the bell to gain admission if the door isn't open.

If you're interested in knocking down some pins, one block south of the North American-Costa Rican Cultural Center you'll find **Boliche Dent** (Map p114; ☎ 2234 2777; cnr Av Central & Calle 23, Los Yoses; bowling per hr US\$5). Just east of the rotunda in San Pedro, you can strap on the roller skates and hang out with what seems like every last teenager in San José at **Salón Los Patines** (Map p114; ☎ 2224 6821), the local roller rink.

If you're looking to pick a fight or two, check out the **Thaiboxing Center** (Map p114; ☎ 2225 7386) or **Atemi Ryu Martial Arts Center** (Map p114; ☎ 2524 0781).

Sleeping

Casa Agua Buena (Map p114 ☎ 2234 2411; www.agua buena.org/casabuena/index.html; Barrio Lourdes; r per week US\$60-80) East of San Pedro, this group house, which caters to long-term renters, is very popular among international students. Its two simple peach-color homes with rooms of various sizes sit side by side on a quiet dead-end street. Houses are equipped with a common kitchen, washing machine (use of the machine is included in the rates), a lounge with cable TV and phone. Some rooms share bathrooms,

LOS YOSÉS & SAN PEDRO

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while others have private ones – all with hot water. The house also runs the Agua Buena Human Rights Association, which is working to increase medical access for people living with HIV/AIDS. The Casa is gay-friendly.

Hostel Bekuo (Map p114; ☎ 2234 5486; www.hostelbekuo.com; dm/s/d/tr US\$12/20/30/36; (P) (Q)) This is easily one of the most beautiful hostels in the country – unsurprisingly, one of the founding Tica owners studied interior design. The common areas of the hostel are heavily influenced by Japanese minimalist design, and have low tables, beanbag chairs and hanging lanterns. The rooms themselves are naturalist themed, and adorned with stunning mounted photography. Shared facilities include a communal kitchen, hot-water bathrooms, a recreation

room with pool table and a TV lounge. Guests have free internet access (including wi-fi). It's 325m west of the Spoon.

Casa Yoses (Map p114; ☎ 2234 5486; www.casayoses.com; dm/s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$12/20/28/36; (P) (Q)) This hostel is a winner. Dorms and private rooms with shared hot-water bathrooms are located in a 19th-century mansion, but the real appeal is the beautiful, fenced-in garden with hammocks, sun chairs and tropical plants. Guests can also rest in the comfy TV lounge, play a few pick-up games of foosball or cook a meal in the kitchen (or with the outdoor BBQ). There's also free internet (including wi-fi). The three Tico owners speak English and French (and Tico), and are all-around cool guys. It's 250m west of the Spoon.

Hostal Toruma (Map p114; ☎ 2234 8186; www.hicr.org; Av Central btwn Calles 29 & 31; dm/s/d/tr US\$10/35/50/60; (P) (Q) (R)) The former HI hostel has recently gone under the same ownership as Hostel Pangea downtown (p95). The idea is that this is to be the more chilled and comfortable alternative to its hedonistic sibling. Toruma ticks all the boxes for your modern-day flash-packer: sun-trapped swimming pool, plasma screens and high-speed wi-fi are all features in this beautifully converted colonial home. The airy doubles are well worth busting the budget for, especially considering that they're nicer than almost anything else you'll find in the midrange options.

Hotel Milvia (Map p114; ☎ 2225 4543; www.hotelmilvia.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$69/80/88; (Q)) This stunning Caribbean-style plantation once served as the home of Ricardo Fernández Peralta, an artillery colonel who fought in Costa Rica's 1948 civil war. It was restored to its original grandeur by his grandson, and it now operates as a small and personal hotel. Each spacious room with private hot-water bathroom combines just the right touch of modern and antique. An upstairs terrace provides incredible views of the surrounding neighborhood. Credit cards accepted. For taxi drivers: it's 100m north and 200m east of Mercado San Pedro Muñoz y Nanne.

Hotel Don Fadrique (Map p114; ☎ 2225 8166, 2224 7583; www.hoteldonfadrique.com; cnr Calle 37 & Av 8; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$68/80/95; (P)) This family-run hotel is decorated with a private collection of contemporary Central American and Costa Rican art, including the permanent collection of painter Florencia Urbina. Its artsy and sophisticated ambience blends well with the fresh plants and flowers peppered throughout the hotel. Continental breakfast is served on the tropical, plant-filled patio. Credit cards accepted. Take the second entrance to Los Yoses, off Avenida Central.

Hotel Le Bergerac (Map p114; ☎ 2234 7850; www.bergerac.co.cr; Calle 35, Los Yoses; s US\$85-130, d US\$95-145, all incl breakfast; (P) (Q)) This boutique luxury hotel, 50m south of Avenida Central, is regarded as one of the most sophisticated places to stay in the capital. The French-colonial building is warm and inviting, though readers predominantly rave about the exceptional professionalism of the staff. Rooms of varying size are furnished with antiques and highlighted by attractive wooden accents and immaculate bathrooms. The hotel restaurant,

Restaurant L'île de France (☎ 2283 5812; mains US\$8-15; ☎ 6-10pm Mon-Sat), is one of the top spots in the city for French cuisine, and reservations are necessary, even if you're a hotel guest. Credit cards are accepted.

Eating

San Pedro and Los Yoses are home to some of the best restaurants in all of Costa Rica (and possibly Central America). There's no shortage of cheap student spots, but this is one area where it's worth spending.

La Canastita (Map p114; ☎ 2221 3816; cm Avs Central & 25; dishes US\$2-5; ☎ 11:30am-11pm) This strip-light-and-plastic-table sort of joint serves up delicious casados and blares out soccer to the animated punters.

Spoon (Map p114; ☎ 2253 1331; cnr Calle 43 & Av 10; dishes US\$2-8; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) The Los Yoses branch of this universally adored restaurant is so famous that directions are given in relation to it! The menu is extensive, but the big breakfasts are the local favorite (especially after a long night of clubbing).

Al Muluk (Map p114; Calle 3, north of Av Central; dishes US\$3-7) Although it has a great selection of traditional Lebanese and Middle Eastern dishes, you're here for the falafel, which is fresh, cheap and damn good.

Comida Para Sentir (Map p114; dishes US\$4-8) Vegetarians of the world unite – this jam-packed student haunt 150m north of the church serves up cruelty-free whole-grain sandwiches with all the veggie-rific fixings you can imagine.

Ponte Vecchio (Map p114; ☎ 2283 1810; mains US\$6-15; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 6-10:30pm Mon-Sat) This elegant Italian place vies for the 'best of' in the greater San José area and has been recognized as one of the top restaurants in Central America. Chef Antonio D'Alaimo, who once worked in New York City, makes all of his own fresh pastas and imports many of his ingredients directly from Italy. Credit cards accepted. It's 150m east of Fuente de Hispanidad and 10m north.

La Galería (Map p114; ☎ 2234 0850; Los Yoses; dishes US\$7-12; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 6:30-10:30pm Mon-Fri, 6:30-10:30pm Sat) This long-standing German-inspired eatery, 125m west of the old ICE building, is perennially listed by critics as one of the best restaurants in Central America. Its house specialties are the *schpätzle* and strudel, and they're good enough

to make any homesick German cry. Credit cards accepted.

Le Chandelier (Map p114; ☎ 2225 3980; Los Yoses; meals US\$10-25; 🕒 11:30am-2pm & 6:30-11pm Mon-Fri, 6:30-11pm Sat) This is the most famous French restaurant in San José. (It even has its own line of sauces that are sold in some of the more upscale supermarkets.) The food here is predictably top-notch, and whether you're sitting next to the cozy fireplace or outside on the patio, it's hard to find a more romantic spot. Go 100m west and 100m south of the old ICE building.

The **Automercado** (Map p114; Av Central btwn Calles 39 & 41, Los Yoses) and the **Más X Menos** (Map p114; Av Central, San Pedro) are large, modern supermarkets that offer plenty of options for self-caterers.

Drinking

Río Bar (Map p114; cnr Av Central & Calle 39, Los Yoses) Just west of the fountain, this popular bar has live bands on some nights and a pyrotechnic house drink called the *la cucaracha* (the cockroach). There are two-for-one drink specials on Monday night.

Centro Comercial Cocori (Map p114; south of Av Central, Los Yoses) The nightlife hub, further east and just south of Los Antojitos Cancún. Most of the places here get started after 9pm and run late (till the last customer leaves). Rock Bar Sand is the regular watering hole for local rockers, as is Mutis out front. Around the back, Reggae Bar Raíces draws in the Rasta crowd, while Taos Bar, next door, is slightly mellower, but still gets packed.

Calle La Amargura (Street of Sorrow; Map p114; San Pedro) This is what Calle 3 is known as, to the north of Avenida Central. However, it should be called Calle de la Cruda (Street of Hangovers) because it has perhaps the highest concentration of bars of any single street in town, many of which are packed with customers even during daylight hours. Terra U, Mosaikos, Caccio's and Tavarúa are raucous, beer-soaked places packed with a steady stream of rowdy young customers. A more relaxed (and slightly grown-up) place is La Villa, located in a distinctive wood house with a candlelit back patio. There is live music some weekends.

Mall San Pedro (Map p114; ☎ 2283 7516) This is northwest of Fuente de la Hispanidad and has two popular bars, especially among mall rats who aren't quite ready to go home when the sun goes down. Fuzion Bar alternates between

hip hop and reggae, while Touch Bar, as its name implies, is a flirtatious lounge that's great for meeting (and chatting up) people.

Entertainment

Cinemas are plentiful in the neighborhood. **Multicines San Pedro** (Map p114; ☎ 2283 5715/6; top level, Mall San Pedro; admission US\$4) has 10 screens showing the latest Hollywood flicks. Better yet, head to **Gine El Semáforo** (Map p114; ☎ 2253 9126; www.cinesel semaforo.com; admission US\$3; 🕒 11am-8pm), a hip little theater showing Spanish and Latin American movie classics every day. (It's Spanish only, so it's great if you want to come to practice.) It's beside the train tracks, east of Calle 3.

If live theater is your bag, there are a couple of choices in the area. **Teatro Eugene O'Neill** (Map p114; ☎ 2207 7554; www.cccnrcr.com; cnr Av Central & Calle 37, Los Yoses) has performances sponsored by the Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano (Costa Rican-North American Cultural Center). On the east side of the Universidad de Costa Rica campus is the **Teatro Bellas Artes** (☎ 2207 4327), which has a wide variety of programming, including works produced by the university's fine arts department.

Jazz Café (Map p114; ☎ 2253 8933; 🕒 6pm-2am) is the destination in San Pedro for live music, with a different band every night. Cover charges vary, depending on the prominence of the musical act, but usually fluctuate between US\$4 and US\$6 for local groups. It's 50m west of old Banco Popular.

For a full-blown dance party, hit **Planet Mall** (Map p114; ☎ 2280 4693; 🕒 8pm-2:30am Thu-Sat), one of San José's most expensive nightclubs. The enormous, warehouse-size disco has a couple of levels, several bars, and is situated on the 4th and 5th stories of Mall San Pedro, where you can admire the twinkling lights of San José from its oversize windows. Admission here can fluctuate depending on who is spinning or performing, but can easily creep up to US\$10 on any given night.

One of the hippest spots in the area is **El Retro-visor** (Map p114; Arte Plaza San Pedro; 🕒 6pm-2am), an Argentinean-owned retro café that's adorned with 1980s pop culture memorabilia. It's very popular among trendy UCR students.

Shopping

Both **Mall San Pedro** (Map p114; ☎ 2283 7516; northwest of Fuente de la Hispanidad) and the **Outlet Mall**

(Map p114; Av Central) offer ample opportunities for mall rats looking to shop till they drop. It's east of the road to Zapote.

Getting There & Away

From the Plaza de la Cultura in San José, take any bus marked 'Mall San Pedro.' A taxi ride from downtown will cost US\$1.50 to US\$2.

ESCAZÚ

Packed with gringo expats and moneyed Tico aristocrats, the affluent suburb of Escazú is spread out on a hillside overlooking San José and Heredia. The area is really comprised of the three adjoining neighborhoods of San Rafael de Escazú, Escazú Centro and San Antonio de Escazú, each of which has its own unique character and flair.

San Rafael, which is one part Costa Rica, two parts USA, is dotted with strip malls, car dealerships, nice homes, nicer cars and chain restaurants that print their menus largely in English. (The US ambassador lives in this area in a very secure-looking white-walled compound.) Escazú Centro thankfully retains a more unhurried Tico ambience, with its narrow streets and numerous shops and *sodas*. And the area around San Antonio remains almost entirely residential, though it does have a handful of hotels with spectacular views of the valley.

For the traveler, staying in Escazú is an excellent choice as it's well connected to downtown by public buses, it's brimming with some of the best restaurants in the city and there are some truly top-notch accommodations to choose from.

Information

Banco Nacional de Costa Rica (Map pp118-19; cnr Calle 2 & Av 2, Escazú Centro; 🕒 8:30am-3:45pm) On the main plaza, can change money and traveler's checks, and it even has a drive-thru window.

Banex (Map pp118-19; Centro Comercial Guachipelín, Carretera JF Kennedy, San Rafael) On the northwestern end of the Centro Comercial Guachipelín you'll find a 24-hour ATM.

Escazú Internet (Map pp118-19; ground fl, Centro Comercial Plaza Escazú, Escazú Centro; per hr US\$0.50; 🕒 8:30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun) Email access.

Hospital CIMA (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2208 1000; www.hospitalsanjose.net) Medical care – emergency or otherwise. This is 500m west of the Próspero Fernández toll booth in the area of Guachipelín, on the west side of Escazú, and is one of the most modern hospitals in

the greater San José metropolitan area. It is affiliated with Baylor University Medical Center in the USA and is recommended.

Librería Internacional (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2201 8320; Multiplaza Escazú; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun) A branch of the bookshop chain.

Scotiabank (Map pp118-19; Carretera JF Kennedy, San Rafael) Has a Cirrus ATM.

Activities

You can arrange motorcycle tours or rent bikes at **Harley Davidson Rentals** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 5552; www.mariaalexandra.com), which has an office inside the Apartotel María Alexandra. Riders have to be more than 25 years of age and have a valid motorcycle driving license. Rates start at US\$80 per bike per day and include helmet, goggles and unlimited mileage (insurance and tax not included). The agency can deliver bikes to other destinations at an extra charge.

Reputable **Swiss Travel Service** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2282 4898; www.swisstravelcr.com; Autopista Próspero Fernández, 300m west of Cruce de Piedeades de Santa Ana) offers tours all over Costa Rica.

Those who want to practice their golf swing can head to the **Costa Rica Country Club** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 9333, 2208 5000; www.costaricacountryclub.com), which has a nine-hole course. There are also tennis courts and a pool. In Santa Ana, west of Escazú, is **Valle del Sol** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2282 9222, ext 218/219; www.vallesol.com; green fees US\$7, golf carts US\$20), inside a community of the same name, which has a new 18-hole (7000yd, par 72) public course.

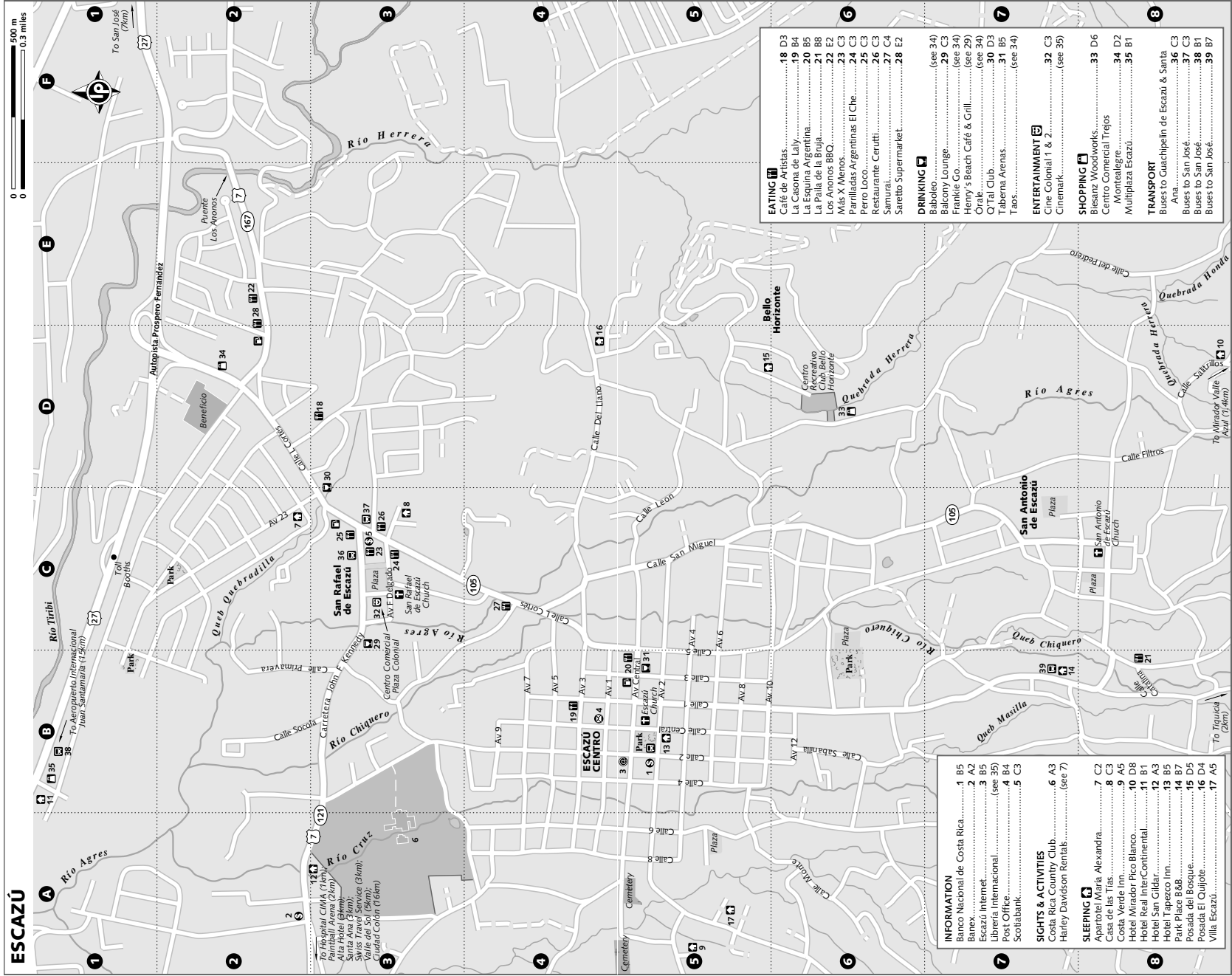
If you're looking for something more adrenalin-pumping in this slow-paced suburb, you can always play soldiers in the hills at the local paintballing outfit, **Paintball Arena** (☎ 2560 0400; www.paintball.co.cr, per person US\$10).

Festivals & Events

On the second Sunday of March, Escazú celebrates **Día del Boyero**, which is a celebration in honor of oxcart drivers. Dozens of *boyeros* from all over the country decorate the traditional, brightly painted carts and form a colorful (if slow) parade.

Sleeping

Escazú has a variety of accommodations – all in the midrange to top-end categories. Street addresses aren't given here – refer to the map or call the hotel for directions (which are invariably complicated). All of



EATING 🍴	Café de Artistas.....18 D3
	La Casona de Laly.....19 B4
	La Esquina Argentina.....20 B5
	La Paila de la Bruja.....21 B8
	Los Anonos BBO.....22 E2
	Más X Menos.....23 C3
	Parrilladas Argentinas El Che.....24 C3
	Perro Loco.....25 C3
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SLEEPING 🛏️	Apartotel María Alexandra.....7 C2
	Casa de las Tías.....8 C3
	Costa Verde Inn.....9 A5
	Hotel Mirador Pico Blanco.....10 D8
	Hotel Real InterContinental.....11 B1
	Hotel San Gildard.....12 A3
	Hotel Tapozco Inn.....13 B5
	Park Plaza Bob.....14 B7
	Posada el Bosque.....15 D5
	Posada El Quilque.....16 D4
	Villa Escazú.....17 A3

the accommodations listed can arrange for airport transportation.

Escazú is dotted with a fine selection of B&Bs that offer a homey alternative to chain hotels. They are listed first.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Tapezo Inn (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 1084; info@tapezo-inn.co.cr; Calle Central btwn Avs 2 & 4; s/d incl breakfast US\$45/55; (P) 🚽) Located near the Escazú church and on the town plaza, this is the best budget option in the entire area. The brightly painted yellow-and-blue hotel is managed by a friendly Tico family, and has clean and simple rooms with private hot showers and cable TV. The hotel is also conveniently situated – it's less than 100m from the San José bus stop and a short walk from the area's restaurants and cafés.

Park Place B&B (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 9200; s/d incl breakfast US\$55/60; (P)) Retired dentist Barry Needman runs this small and friendly place, situated in an attractive whitewashed alpine-style house. (There's no sign out the front, so look for the high eaves.) Four immaculate guest bedrooms share two bathrooms, kitchen privileges and a roomy lounge with cable TV. Every morning, Barry cooks a heaping, American-style breakfast for all his guests. Weekly and monthly rates are available.

Villa Escazú (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 7971; www.hotels.co.cr/vescazu.html; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$45/65/80; (P)) A Swiss chalet-type building, complete with a wraparound veranda, is surrounded by terraced gardens and fruit trees and is patrolled by a very friendly pooch named Feliz. Accommodation is in six quaint wood-paneled rooms that have local artwork, comfy couches and shared hot-water bathrooms. There is also a studio apartment with a small kitchen, cable TV and good-size tiled bathroom (US\$250 per week) – an excellent deal. English is spoken.

Hotel Mirador Pico Blanco (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 1908, 2289 6197; pblanco@costarica.net; s/d US\$48/68, ste US\$64/70, cottage US\$81; (P)) This countryside hotel is located high in the hills about 3km southeast of central Escazú, and has staggering views of the Central Valley from its balconied rooms. The 15 spacious units have painted stone walls, queen-size beds, cable TV and hot showers. There are also three cottages (which lack views) that sleep up to six and are rented on a monthly basis. There is a small restaurant (dishes US\$4 to US\$8)

that is a good spot for slowing down and appreciating the views. Credit cards accepted.

Costa Verde Inn (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 4080; www.costaverdeinn.com; s/d/tr US\$60/75/82, apt US\$70, all incl breakfast; (P) 🚽) The sister lodge of the famous Manuel Antonio hotel is an attractive, country-style home complete with some fairly impressive amenities, including a hot tub, lighted tennis court, pool, sundeck, BBQ area and fireplace. The rooms themselves are well decorated with modern furnishings and have a king-size bed, cable TV and private hot shower. Larger loft apartments have high ceilings, a balcony and a fully equipped kitchen. A Tico breakfast is served on an outdoor terrace. Weekly rates are available, and credit cards are accepted.

Posada del Bosque (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 1164; posada@amerisol.com; d incl breakfast US\$75; (P) 🚽) This Tico-run posada is surrounded by tropical gardens that are home to a swimming pool, BBQ pit, a tennis court and horse-riding trails. The eight-room inn has rustic-style rooms with private hot-water bathrooms, as well as plenty of communal areas for chatting with the friendly owners and other guests. There is also a cozy fireplace for those cool, San José nights.

TOP END

Casa de las Tías (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 5517; www.hotels.co.cr/casatias.html; Calle León; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$71/95/107; (P) 🚽) Located in a quiet area of San Rafael, rooms in this brightly painted yellow-and-turquoise Cape Cod-style house (complete with picket fence) are decorated with crafts from all over Latin America. The place is special, however, because of the welcoming owners, Xavier and Pilar, who provide personalized service to all of their guests. Breakfast is served in the lovely backyard, which even has an artificial stream.

Posada El Quijote (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 8401; www.quijote.co.cr; s/d/tr incl breakfast from US\$89/99/124; (P) 🚽 🍷) This hillside posada rates as one of the top B&Bs in the San José area. Standard rooms are simple yet homey, with wooden floors, throw rugs, plush bedding, cable TV and private hot-water bathrooms, while larger rooms have either a small patio or a private terrace. All guests are free to take a nip at the honor bar, and then relax on the outdoor patio while soaking up the sweeping views of the Central Valley.

DAY TRIPPER: ESCAZÚ TO CIUDAD COLÓN

Need a city break? There's an interesting day trip to be had if you have your own wheels. From Escazú, head 3km west to the town of **Santa Ana**, which is a local artisan center for traditional as well as contemporary pottery. Continuing west for another 5km, you'll reach the small village of **Piedades**, which is centered on a historic colonial church that's worth checking out for its beautiful stained-glass windows. Continuing west for another 8km, you'll reach the town of **Ciudad Colón**. Here, you'll find the **Julia & David White Artists' Colony** (☎ 2249 1414; www.forjuliaanddavid.org), which was established in 1998 as a refuge for writers, visual artists and composers, and regularly offers a number of workshops and classes.

Just 5km southwest of Ciudad Colón is the **Reserva Forestal el Rodeo**, a 350-hectare private reserve that protects the last stretch of primary forest in the Central Valley. The reserve is a part of the **Hacienda el Rodeo** (☎ 2249 1013; 🕒 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), which has a small restaurant, **Restaurante del Abuelo** (meals US\$4-8), which serves country fare on weekends. If you're looking to prolong your city escape, consider spending the night at **Albergue El Maraño** (☎ 2249 1271; www.cultourica.com/frameseteng.html; s/d/tr US\$35/49/77; (P)), located a few kilometers west of Santa Ana in the village of La Trinidad. This quaint 11-room country guesthouse is surrounded by a fruit orchard and has stunning views of the Central Valley that span as far as Volcán Poás.

Apartotel María Alexandra (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 1507; www.mariaalexandra.com; cnr Calle 3 & Av 23; d US\$105; (P) 🚽 🍷) This clean, quiet and centrally located apartment hotel in San Rafael de Escazú is a good option if you're looking for fully furnished accommodations. Though clean and well maintained, the apartments are completely ordinary, but the bedrooms are totally separate from the kitchen and living areas. Facilities include a sauna, private parking, VCR rental, and a washer and dryer. Maid service is included and there are weekly and monthly rates available. Book well ahead in high season. The apartment hotel is home to Harley Davidson motorbike tours and rentals (see p117).

Hotel San Gildar (☎ 2289 8843; www.hotelsan.gildar.com; Carretera JF Kennedy; d/tr US\$118/145; (P) 🚽 🍷) Just northwest of the Costa Rica Country Club is this trendy hotel in a Spanish hacienda-style building. The hotel aims to rejuvenate and relax its guests with comfortable, soothing rooms and a picturesque garden-fringed pool. The hotel's chic bar-restaurant (open 6am to 10pm, mains US\$7 to US\$12) serves continental cuisine and is locally popular.

Alta Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2282 4160; www.thealta hotel.com; d/ste from US\$165/195; (P) 🚽 🍷) On the road between Escazú and Santa Ana is one of the country's premier boutique hotels, the Alta, which is highly recommended for its professional service, stunning location, and top-notch rooms and amenities. The hotel itself is an immaculately sculpted Spanish

Mediterranean-style villa, from where, on a clear day, there are views as far as the Pacific.

Hotel Real InterContinental (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 7000; www.interconti.com; r US\$250, ste US\$400-1000; (P) 🚽 🍷 🍷) About 2km northwest of Escazú is this branch of the well-respected InterContinental hotel chain. The five-story building has 260 deluxe air-con rooms with all the usual upscale business-hotel amenities and an impressive list of facilities, including a pool, spa, gym, three restaurants, two bars, a convention and business center, concierge service and a small gift shop. The country's largest shopping mall, the Multiplaza, is across the street.

Eating

There are a few inexpensive local *sodas* in Escazú Centro, though for the most part, Escazú is home to expensive, cosmopolitan eateries. If you just can't bear the thought of being separated from all of your favorite American chain eateries, there's everything from a Tony Roma's to a TGI Friday's in San Rafael.

BUDGET

La Casona de Laly (Map pp118-19; cnr Av 3 & Calle Central; US\$1-5; 🕒 11am-12:30am) In the heart of Escazú Centro is this much-loved *soda*, which specializes in traditional country-style Tico fare. In the evenings, locals pack the joint for their cheap *bocas* (savory bar snacks) and ice-cold beers.

La Paila de la Bruja (Map pp118-19; dishes US\$2-5; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Fri-Sun) This rustic *soda* in San Antonio de Escazú is a famous institution that prepares traditional Tico specialties using outdoor brick ovens. The terrace is bustling in the evenings, and the dramatic views of the Central Valley make this a memorable spot.

La Esquina Argentina (Map pp118-19; cnr Av Central & Calle L Cortés; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri; dishes US\$2-7) This popular roadside stand sells piping-hot *empanadas* to hungry locals, though the outdoor patio is a good spot to linger over a cup of coffee and spend an hour or two people-watching.

Perro Loco (Map pp118-19; Centro Comercial El Cruce, cnr Calle L Cortés & Carretera JF Kennedy; dishes US\$3-5; ☎ noon-8pm Mon-Tue, to 4am Wed-Sat, 4-10pm Sun) If you've been boozing it up a little too much, this greasy spoon is just what you need. The menu at the 'Crazy Dog' consists of 10 internationally themed hot dogs, all of which are served with plentiful toppings (our favorite is the Chihuahua dog, which comes loaded with fresh guacamole).

Self-caterers can try Más X Menos in San Rafael de Escazú or the Saretto Supermarket near the Autopista Próspero Fernández.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Café de Artistas (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 6045, 2288 5082; dishes US\$4-8; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sat, to 4pm Sun) This intimate café displays rotating exhibitions of local art (some for sale) on its walls and shelves, which makes for a charming and light-hearted meal. The coffees and homemade pastries are excellent, and there's also a heartier selection of vegetarian dishes, sandwiches and salads. Come here for the Sunday brunch, which is accompanied by live music.

Parrilladas Argentinas El Che (Map pp118-19; Calle L Cortés; mains US\$6-10; ☎ noon-midnight) Whether you spend the afternoon hours sitting on the outdoor patio and cradling a cold beer, or stop by for dinner and feast on a huge Argentine-style steak, you're going to like the relaxed atmosphere at this popular local restaurant, south of Carretera JF Kennedy.

Tiquicia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 5839; mains US\$6-10; ☎ 5pm-midnight Tue-Fri, 1pm-2am Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) This typical upmarket restaurant gives a sophisticated spin on traditional Costa Rican dishes by emphasizing fresh produce and high-quality meats and fish. The restaurant is 5km south of central Escazú on a well-paved

road, and has a relaxed, rustic setting with spectacular views of the Central Valley – it's worth the drive here. There is frequently local music on weekends. Call ahead for directions as it's tricky to find.

Los Anonos BBQ (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 0180; dishes US\$7-12; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10pm Tue-Sat, 11:30am-9pm Sun) On the road between San José and Escazú is this BBQ shack, which has been in operation since the early 1960s. The entire restaurant is constructed of polished wood, and there are historic photos of Costa Rica along all the walls. Los Anonos caters to hungry carnivores, and the extensive selection of meats includes both locally raised animals and imported USDA-approved cuts of meat. Credit cards accepted.

Mirador Valle Azul (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2254 6281; dishes US\$8-12; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Sat) A tough, steep drive takes you to the aptly named Mirador Valle Azul (Blue Valley Lookout), from where the views of the San José valley are breathtaking – get there before sunset. The cuisine is European inspired, and features a wide selection of pastas, meats and seafood as well as a few Costa Rican standards. On Saturday and Sunday evenings, there's a good chance there will be live music here. It's 700m south and 700m west from Hotel Mirador Pico Blanco.

Samurai (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 4124; Calle L Cortés; dishes US\$9-25; ☎ noon-3pm & 6:30-10pm) Sushi is all the rage these days in Escazú, though this upscale Japanese eatery, complete with tableside hibachis, also offers authentic *teppanyaki*, as well as mixed fish and seafood grills. If you're a traditionalist, the sushi here is about as good as it gets, and though it's pricey, the quality is undeniable.

Restaurante Cerutti (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2228 4511, 2228 9954; Calle L Cortés; dishes US\$10-20; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 6-11pm Wed-Mon) This restaurant, south of Carretera JF Kennedy in San Rafael de Escazú, is regarded as one of the best Italian restaurants in the capital. The food here is predictably top-notch, and features hand-selected seafood and delectable homemade pastas. The ravioli with ricotta and mushrooms (US\$15) is a local favorite, though you can't go wrong with its big list of risottos. Credit cards accepted.

Drinking

The hottest nightclub in the most exclusive district of San José is the **Centro Comercial**

Trejos Montealagre, a more upscale version of El Pueblo (p104). This complex is packed on weekends with the trendiest scenesters in the capital, and there's no shortage of dance spots to show off all the new threads that daddy's money bought you. The most established clubs are Baboleo, Taos and Frankie Go, though like all things fashionable, this is likely to change. At the time of writing the hottest beats were the Puerto Rican-inspired reggaeton, though again, like all things fashionable, this is likely to change. A recommended spot in Trejos Montealagre is Órale, which serves Tex-Mex fare that's popular among pre-partiers, though things really get hopping on Friday nights when there's cheap drink specials.

An Escazú institution, **Taberna Arenas** (Map pp118-19; Escazú Centro; ☎ from 4pm) is a delightful, old-fashioned Tico bar, diagonal from the Shell gas station. Arenas has exceptional *bocas* (US\$1) and a good selection of domestic and imported beers. Owner Don Israel is a true charmer, and has his photos with various heads of state on the walls, among the agricultural implements that are de rigueur in any decent country bar.

Two hearty drinking options are in the Plaza San Rafael shopping center a few hundred meters east of the soccer field. **Balcony Lounge** (Map pp118-19; Carretera JF Kennedy; ☎ noon-1am) is an upscale bar and gringo hangout that specializes in well-crafted martinis, while the more laidback (but equally gringo) **Henry's Beach Café & Grill** (Map pp118-19; Carretera JF Kennedy; ☎ 11-2:30am) is your best spot for partying it up on the dance floor.

On the road into town from San José, you'll find the **Q'tal Club** (Map pp118-19; Calle L Cortés; ☎ 6pm-2am), which is a sophisticated lounge complete with its own house band. There are frequent live jazz performances here; there is a US\$5 admission price.

Entertainment

For first-run Hollywood movies, check out the **Cine Colonial 1 & 2** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 9000;

ground fl, Plaza Colonial Escazú, San Rafael; admission US\$3) or the **Cinemark** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2288 1111; Multiplaza Escazú; admission US\$3).

Shopping

Biesanz Woodworks (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 4337; www.biesanz.com; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, Sat & Sun by appointment) You'll find delicate and high-quality wood craftsmanship in the traditional pre-Columbian style at this showroom in Bello Horizonte. A variety of bowls and other decorative containers are all beautifully produced, the majority using a traditional crafting method in which the natural lines and forms of the wood determine the shape and size of the bowl. This makes every piece unique. The products are expensive (starting at US\$50 for a palm-size bowl), but they are well worth it.

Multiplaza Escazú (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2289 8984; www.multiplazamall.com; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun) A full-scale suburban-style mall that has just about everything you need (or don't) – from clothes to eyeglasses to shoes. There is also a good food court. Of particular interest to travelers is the **Cemaco** (☎ 2289 7474), a sort of Wal-Mart-style department store that sells basic fishing and camping supplies, including propane gas for your portable stove. If you're coming from San José, the mall can be reached by taking any bus that is marked with 'Escazú Multiplaza.' (See p111 for more information on these buses.)

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses between San José and Escazú cost US\$0.25 and take 25 minutes. All depart San José from east of the Coca-Cola bus terminal and take several routes: buses labeled 'San Antonio de Escazú' go up the hill to the south of Escazú and end near San Antonio de Escazú church; those labeled 'Escazú' end in Escazú's main plaza; and others, called 'Guachipelín' go west on the Carretera John F Kennedy and pass the Costa Rica Country Club. All go through San Rafael.

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