

COSTA RICA

FAQs ~ PACKING LIST ~ SPANISH GUIDE

General Info About Costa Rica

The official language in Costa Rica is Spanish, though you will find the vast majority of people in the tourism industry speak English. Costa Ricans, or Ticos, are famous for their hospitality and warmth, so many will be eager to teach you some of their favorite sayings. Tourism is the biggest industry here, so they are happy to have you visit!

Costa Rica uses the metric system so distances and speed are measured by kilometers, not miles. 1km = .62 miles. When someone gives you directions it will be in meters, and traditionally 100 meters equals one block here. So if someone tells you that something is 500 meters away expect about 5-6 blocks.

Entry Requirements

You will need a valid passport to visit Costa Rica and your passport cannot expire during your travel dates. *We recommend that your passport's expiration date be at least 30 days out from your trip's departure date.*

We also recommend you have a printed copy of your airline ticket and itinerary so have proof that you are leaving the country (very seldom asked for, but good to have).

Visitors from the US, Canada, Japan and any country in the European Union **do not** need Visas. If you do not have a passport from one of the above countries, you should contact your local embassy or consulate for details.

Vaccinations

In general, you do not need any special vaccinations to visit Costa Rica as long as you are up to date with your regular vaccinations. Malaria is extremely rare in Costa Rica unless you are deep in the rain forest for extended periods of time. Yellow fever is not a risk in Costa Rica. For further info, please visit the CDC's website: www.cdc.gov/travel/destinations.

If you have visited any of the countries on the following list, you will need a yellow fever vaccination certificate to enter Costa Rica:

South America: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Peru, and Venezuela.

Africa: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Sudan.

Exit Requirements

All visitors must pay a \$29 exit tax at the airport *before* checking into your international flight. We recommend you pay with cash; you can pay via credit card but it is often viewed as a "cash advance" so it costs more. In late 2015, *many of the major airlines started to incorporate this exit tax into the airfare ticket price*, including Aero Mexico, Air Canada, Air Panama, American Airlines, Avianca, Copa Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, United, and US Airways.

Safety & Health

Costa Rica is a very safe country and tourism is by far the #1 industry here (68% of GDP) so it is very tourist friendly. Costa Ricans are famous for their warmth and hospitality and they love showing off and sharing their country with visitors. That said, crime happens in every city in the world and Costa Rica is no exception to that so common sense should always be exercised. It's best to lock valuables in hotel safes to avoid the risk of temptation, including passports. When you are out in public please keep an eye on all wallets, cell phones, and purses as petty theft is the most common crime that happens here.

In general, the food and water is safe to drink in Costa Rica. You can drink tap water if you are located in any major city/beach town, although bottled water is readily available too. If you are in a more remote or isolated destination we'd recommend you drink bottled water to avoid any issues. Bringing Imodium is always a good idea too. Please pack a reusable bottle/canteen as most hotels have potable water refill stations, thus avoiding unnecessary plastic waste.

Keep in mind you are in the tropics and Costa Rica is located just 8-11 degrees north of the equator. To put that in perspective, Los Angeles is 32 degrees north of the equator and Chicago is 42 degrees north. Even if it is cloudy here it is *VERY* easy to get sunburn, so please bring sun lotion. There is nothing worse than being miserable on your vacation or your flight home for something that could have been prevented. If you forget to pack sun lotion buy it here!

Emergency

In case of emergency please call 911. Sometimes it is faster to call the Costa Rican Red Cross (Cruz Roja), and they can be reached at 128.

Costa Rica also has hospitals and pharmacies in nearly every major city and beach town. Despite some of the buildings' older appearance, the medical care in Costa Rica is very good. Medical Tourism in fact is a huge industry here and the private hospitals in San Jose like CIMA and Clinica Biblica are as nice as any hospital in North America. We do recommend you leave a copy of your itinerary with friends or family back home.

USA Embassy – In Costa Rica: 2519-2000 From the U.S.: 011-506-2519-2000
Canada Embassy - In Costa Rica: 2242-4400 From Canada: 011-506-2242-4400

If interested, please provide us with an emergency contact (name/email/phone number) in the event we would need to contact someone on your behalf.

Currency / Money Exchange

The official currency in Costa Rica is 'colones', and they are based on a fixed devaluation with the US Dollar. The exchange rate varies slightly each week, but in general 500 colones is equal to 1 US dollar:

500 colones (coin) = \$1.00
1000 colones = \$2.00
2000 colones = \$4.00
5000 colones = \$10.00
10,000 colones = \$20.00
20,000 colones = \$40.00

US Dollars: We recommend that you bring US dollars with you to start your trip. They are widely accepted throughout the country and are accepted at nearly all higher end hotels and restaurants. We recommend \$20 bills or smaller as anything larger will be hard to make change for. You can also exchange US dollars for Costa Rican colones in the airport or at your hotel, but they will also charge a fee for their service. Our best advice is to simply take out more cash when you need it from the ATMs in country.

ATM Machines: Fortunately, ATM machines (*cajeros*) are quite common in most towns you will visit and can be found at nearly all banks. Many ATM machines will even give you the option to take out US dollars or Costa Rican colones.

Credit Cards: Credit cards are also widely accepted in Costa Rica. Most commonly accepted are Visa and MasterCard, although some higher end hotels and restaurants will accept American Express as well. Be aware that many local vendors give discounts for using cash or will charge you more if you pay with a credit card as merchant companies charge high fees on transactions here.

TIP: We recommend you let your credit card company know you will be in Costa Rica so they don't freeze your card for security reasons!

Travelers Checks: We **do NOT recommend** using Travelers Checks when in Costa Rica. Many vendors won't even accept them and there are often long bank lines when trying to cash them. It's simply not worth your time.

Tippling & Taxes

When eating at local restaurants a 10% gratuity is already included in your bill, you will see it listed as '*servicio*'. If you do not wish to tip more than that you do not have to, but if you do leave more it will certainly be appreciated.

Many Costa Ricans make between \$700-\$1,000 a month, so while not mandatory tips are certainly well received. You do not need to tip local taxi drivers. For your private transfer drivers, the tip should be determined by their service, friendliness, and length of the drive. Typically, \$5-\$10 per person is a good guide, but you can certainly tip more if they go above and beyond. For tour guides we recommend \$5-\$20 per person depending again on how friendly and informative they were, but as always it is up to your discretion. When checking out of a hotel we recommend leaving a few dollars for the maid staff as they work very hard and typically don't have great salaries.

Fishing Charters: This is one area where tips are expected as that is the main source of income for the captain and crew. We recommend tipping like in a restaurant, **10-20% of the cost of the charter for the day (not per person)**. You can just *give the tip to the captain* and he will divide it up with the crew later.

Fishing License

By law all anglers are required to purchase a Costa Rica fishing license. Licenses need to be purchased in cash:

\$15 for 7 days
\$30 for 30 days

\$50 for 365 days

Fishing licenses can be purchased from an Incopesca agent who is usually stationed near the marina. This is most common in the Los Sueños Marina & Marina Pez Vela in Quepos. If you are not fishing out of these locations, it's very probable you will not be asked to buy one as they are loosely enforced.

Electric Outlets

The electricity in Costa Rica is 110 V, the same as in the United States and Canada, so you will not need any converters. Older outlets will be two pronged so you may want to bring an adapter if your electronics require a three prong outlet (many laptops will require this). Newer buildings will have outlets with three prongs.

Cell Phones / Staying in Touch

The cell coverage in Costa Rica is very good as there are three big providers now – Kolbi (ICE), Movistar, and Claro. There is 3G and 4G speed in some parts of the country. That said, your cell phone will not work here unless you have an international plan or pay for expensive international roaming charges.

If you have a phone from a GSM provider like AT&T or T-Mobile you can simply buy a pre-paid SIM card from one of the aforementioned companies and you will be all set. You can do that inside the airport or at their local stores. If you have a CDMA provider like Sprint or Verizon, you may need to buy a prepaid phone as your phone is probably locked. Keep in mind most high end hotels and even restaurants now offer Wi-Fi so you can use Skype and other chat services to stay in touch as well. There are also internet cafes in most towns.

The international calling code to reach Costa Rica is +506. When calling direct from the United States or Canada you must dial 011-506 then the number. From the UK dial 00-506 then the number.

To call the United States from Costa Rica you must dial 001+ Area Code + number. To call the UK, you must dial 0044 + Area Code + number.

While you're vacationing you can reach our in-country services:

1. During office hours at [844-986-7584](tel:844-986-7584) ext 2 (Monday - Friday: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm).
2. During or outside of office hours via Facebook Messenger. 'Like' our [CAF Facebook page](#) and send us a message.
3. *Outside of office hours at [+506 7169-5749](tel:+50671695749). If you have [WhatsApp](#) on your smartphone, you may also send an instant message to [+506 7169-5749](tel:+50671695749) (insert phone number into your phone's contacts as shown with +506...).

*For in-country assistance/emergencies outside of office hours, we ask that you please message us via Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp before calling (especially on weekends/holidays) as response time may be quicker.

Domestic Flights

SANSA: 30 lb. per person checked bag + 10 lb. carry-on bag. Anything exceeding the free baggage allowance is considered as excess baggage and can only be transported by paying an

additional fee for it. Overweight and additional baggage is transported subject to available space on the plane. Additional charge is \$1 USD per pound over.

Private Ground Transfers

Costa Rica is such a small country that none of the distances you travel will be that far, but it is better to rely on our time estimates rather than physical distances when planning your trip. Costa Rica is a very mountainous country with mainly two lane roads, and although they are improving, not all of them are in great shape. Be prepared to have slowdowns and stoppages, and remember that driving standards here are different than back home. We only work with the most professional and safest transfer companies to ensure your safety and comfort. Feel free to stop at any time during your transfer for restrooms, photo opportunities, snacks/meals, or to simply stretch your legs. *Longer stops to enjoy side-trips in route (over 1 hour) do need to be pre-planned in advance.*

Whenever you leave a transfer please make sure you have all your bags, phones, and sunglasses with you.

Rental Cars

Please note that basic insurance for your rental is included in the price. This covers minor damages, scratches, small dents, tires, for one designated driver and is non-refundable. You will need to pay a refundable deposit directly to the car rental agency (via major credit card) at the time of pickup. This refundable deposit varies depending on the rental car agency and covers collision, major damage, and car theft. This hold will be released and the voucher ripped up upon return of the car. If you like to add an extra driver or opt for full coverage insurance you may do so with an additional cost.

If you are involved in a traffic accident here in Costa Rica **DO NOT MOVE YOUR VEHICLE**. By moving your vehicle, it is accepting responsibility for the accident, whether it was your fault or not. Your rental car agency will leave instructions and phone numbers for you to follow if you are involved in an accident.

Be sure to give yourself enough time to get to destinations. Costa Rica does not use street names and numbers for addresses, they use distances and direction from physical landmarks such as buildings, businesses, or even trees. Again 100 meters refers to one block, so locals will give you directions in terms of distances to be traveled. We strongly advise against driving at night as roads here can have big potholes and curves and many of them are not well lit. Please be aware of the risk of leaving unattended luggage or valuables in your rental car to avoid being the target of theft.

Additional Travel Tips

Liquor and wine: If you're interested in enjoying wine, liquor, and/or cigars during your stay, we recommend making these purchases at Duty Free before leaving the airport. It's the easiest (and cheapest) way to enjoy a drink in your room without having to make a second stop in route or pay a higher mini-bar bill. Plus, the selection is often better at Duty Free.

Check-in and check-out times: Please let us know if you'd like to request an early check-in time or late check-out time, and we will make a note of this in your reservation. This does not guarantee the requested time as it depends on other guests' arrival/departure times, but it will

be noted in advance, which could help. If you arrive early to a hotel and your room is not ready or if you wish to stay later, ask the front desk hold your belongings while you enjoy the pool, beach, etc.

Flying home: When leaving Costa Rica, your items will be searched (again) before boarding the plane. They will take any liquids. Make sure to pack all liquid make-ups, creams, etc. in your checked luggage or they may be confiscated (even if it's under 3 ounces...better be safe than sorry). That also means you are unable to take purchased drink items on the plane. Also, since food at the airport is expensive, if you have the time, ask your driver to stop to pick up food/snacks for your wait in the airport (non-liquids of course).

Internet, electricity & water: Internet, electricity, and even water are services/luxuries we are used to having consistently in our lives back home. While most hotels have internet or back-up plans for power outages, please don't let little "speed bumps" like these ruin a trip if, for some reason, they are temporarily unavailable. Also, certain parts of the country experience water shortages, especially the Guanacaste area (northwest corner of the country). Please take this into consideration when taking showers and using water.

Pollution: Unfortunately, you will see litter and polluted areas of the country due to a lack of education and/or collection systems. This is not a "when in Rome" scenario. Please set an example and use trash bins and recycle bins (when available).

Souvenirs

We encourage you to purchase souvenirs directly from artisans and/or local shops to ensure 1) those making the object(s) are directly compensated for their craft and 2) that the item is original. Another great option is to purchase consumable items that the country is known for, such as coffee or chocolate.

You cannot collect sea life, seashells, nor any other plant or wildlife object. Not only is this hurtful to the ecosystem, it will be confiscated from your luggage and risk being fined.

Professional photographer: Speaking of souvenirs, one of the best mementos you can take home are professional pictures of your vacation. This is also a great, unique way to create holiday greeting cards and other card announcements. We have a list of professional photographers to capture your special vacation moments whether it's on the beach at sunset, in front of a waterfall, in the mountains, etc. Let us know if you're interested, and we can help set-up a photography session during your time in country.



King Sailfish Mounts: If you do have the catch of a lifetime and wish to commemorate that with more than just a picture we can offer you **discounted** replica mounts, plaques, or mini mounts with our conservation partner, King Sailfish Mounts. It is not a taxidermy so **you don't need to kill the fish, just take a few good pictures, and if possible length measurements**, and your replica mount can be made to the exact size, coloring, and unique markings of your catch. We can talk more about specific and placing an order you're your return home. Just know that **you do not need to purchase this on the boat or back at the marina** as many boats will try to push you to do so.

What to Pack

Keep in mind that Costa Rica has a wide variety of climates so if you are going to spend any time in San Jose, the Arenal Region, the cloud forest, or other high altitude destinations you will need to be sure to have clothing for cooler weather. Temperatures can vary from 60 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit in higher altitudes while at the beach it is always 70-90 degrees. Below is a quick list to help remind you of what to bring on your trip.

Documents:

- Valid Passport with extra copies printed out
- Printed copy of your international airfare
- Printed copy of your Final Itinerary (the version set 2-3 week prior to your trip)

Luggage:

- Day pack or hydration pack for hiking, tours, fishing trips, etc.
- Soft sided luggage to avoid going over domestic flight weight limits
- Waterproof bag for wet/dirty clothing
- Refillable bottle for water (many hotels have jugs of purified water to refill canteens thus avoiding plastic waste)
- Headlamp (especially useful in eco-lodges and during night tours and cave tours)
- Reading material
- Binoculars for birding/wildlife enthusiasts

Clothing:

- Quick drying hiking/athletic shorts
- T-shirts / dry fit shirts
- Bathing suit
- Undergarments
- Long pants and/or hiking pants
- Mid weight sweater or long sleeved shirt for higher altitudes and cooler evenings
- Sandals
- Hiking shoes, running shoes, or close-toed sandals if doing adventure tours
- Water shoe or old pair of athletic shoes with traction that can get wet/muddy for water based activities (rafting, waterfalls, tubing, etc.)
- Sunglasses
- Hat or visor
- Leave fine jewelry behind, it's not worth the risk



Pack for a Purpose: You can have a BIG impact in the countries and local communities you visit by allocating a small amount of space in your luggage to pack supplies needed by community projects. Ask us what items are needed in the locations you'll be visiting, and we'll be happy to provide a list of items you can donate.

Dress Code / What to Wear:

Costa Rica is a very laid back and casual country so in general you can wear what is comfortable. You are also on vacation and everyone knows it, so most places will not require a dress code. Most people wear shorts, t-shirts, sundresses, flip-flops or sandals. If you're going out for a nicer dinner, you might wear a button-down shirt or polo shirt for the men and a nice top or sundress for the ladies. Nothing formal is ever required. If you plan to have a professional photography session during your stay, please plan your outfits accordingly.

Costa Rican Spanish 101: A Quick Guide

Let's face it, if you don't speak Spanish by now, this guide isn't going to make you fluent overnight - but it will at least get you started! Costa Ricans (proudly referred to as 'Ticos') would love to help you practice, so don't be afraid to try!

- 'Pura Vida' – this is the big one, it is the official Costa Rican saying. There is no literal translation, but it roughly translates to “no worries” or “it's all good”.
- May I have _____ (primarily for ordering)/ Regálame _____
- Please / Por favor
- Thank you / Gracias
- How are you? / Como está?
- I am well / Estoy bien.
- How much (as in cost) _____? /Cuánto cuesta _____?
- Good Morning / Buenos días
- Good Afternoon /Buenas tardes
- Good Evening /Buenas noches
- I cannot eat _____./ Yo no puedo comer_____.
- Do you have _____?/ Tiene _____?
- What time is it? / Qué hora es?
- Where is _____? / Donde está _____?
- Wine / Vino
- Beer / Cerveza
- What is your name? / Como se llama Ud.?
- My name is _____. / Me llamo _____.
- Bathroom / Baño
- Men / Caballeros, hombres
- Women / Damas, mujeres
- Where are you from? De donde es?
- I am from _____. / Soy de _____.
- ATM / Cajero automático or cajero
- Bank / Banco
- Tip / Propina

Fishing Spanish:

- Marlin – Marlin
- Sailfish – Pez Vela
- Tuna – Atun
- Mahi Mahi - Dorado
- Roosterfish – Pez Gallo
- Snapper – Pargo

- Grouper – Cabrilla
- Tarpon – Sabalo (also just called tarpon sometimes)
- Snook - Robalo
- Rainbow Bass – Guapote

