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### **COSTA RICA FACTFILE**

[The information in this page is supplied in a spirit of 'honest journalism' (recommendations have not been influenced in any way). By the very nature of the depth of information supplied here, however, changes may have occurred since the time of writing. WorldWiseWanderer cannot take responsibility if you miss your bus!]

**Capital:** San José

**Population:** Approx. 4 million

**Language:** Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica but English is widely understood throughout the tourist areas. On the Caribbean coast many people also speak a lively dialect of Creole English.

**Time/Telephones:** GMT-6hours / International telephone code is 506. Phonecards are inexpensive and widely available.

**Visas:** British Citizens are automatically issued with a 90-day tourist visa upon arrival.

**Money:** Costa Rican Colones. Costs are higher than in neighbouring countries but a thrifty backpacker could still get by on about £100 a week. ATM machines can be found in all the main towns and US Dollars are also widely accepted.

**When to go:** The best time to travel is during the dry season, from December to April (what the *Ticos* call Summer). The height of the nesting season for Pacific Olive Ridley turtles falls in September and October.

**Getting there:** Global Village (tel: 08704 427770 / [www.gvillage.co.uk](http://www.gvillage.co.uk)) offer return tickets to San José from £430.

**Getting around:** Buses connect all the major towns and ferries run regularly to the peninsula towns. The poor roads that act as a natural brake on tourism also offer breathtaking insights into the country's natural variety...and you can't ask for better travelling companions than the *Ticos*.

**Health:** Malaria is also endemic to some regions of Costa Rica and there have been outbreaks of dengue. Get up-to-date advice about prophylaxis, use repellent and sunblock...and if you live *la pura vida* and you stand every chance of coming back home healthier than you left.

## **Accommodation & Activities:**

**San José** - It's a good idea to establish a regular base-camp to which you can return during necessary stopovers and **Casa León** (tel: +506 222 9725) is well-located, friendly and secure (£20 a double).

**Conservation 'anywhere'** – charity organisation **Earthwatch Institute** ([www.earthwatch.org/europe](http://www.earthwatch.org/europe); tel: 01865 318831) is looking for volunteers at three different research projects in the Costa Rican wilderness, studying such things as the mechanics of dry tropical forest, dolphins and sea turtles.

**Nicoya Peninsula - Hotel Los Mangos** ([www.montezumayoga.com](http://www.montezumayoga.com) / tel: +506 642 0076), at Playa Montezuma, is a fantastic place to meet the locals: several species of monkeys and many birds visit the gardens. (£20 for double-room, or £35 for a bungalow).

Activities: boat trips, surfing, horse-riding, quad-hire, mountainbiking and jungle-trekking. The hotel has swimming pool, Jacuzzi, massage and yoga practise.

**Osa Peninsula – Lapa Rios** ([www.laparios.com](http://www.laparios.com) / tel: +506-735-5130), set in a private reserve of one thousand acres of pristine virgin rainforest, stands among the top eco-lodges in the world. The view from the veranda of your thatched bungalow – invariably featuring coatimundis, toucans, scarlet macaws etc – is worth the price-tag of £110 pp/day (full-board).

Activities: Jungle medicine trail, nature-trails (especially nocturnal), horse-riding, bird-watching, game-fishing...

**Osa Peninsula – Tierra de Milagros** ([www.tierrademilagros.com](http://www.tierrademilagros.com) / tel: +506-735-5062) is a perfect beach-and-rainforest retreat where the Golfo Dulce breakers lap the white sand of Osa Peninsula. Private bungalows with all meals are £55pp/day.

Activities: an outdoor yoga platform (with an audience of local howlers), jungle-walking, horse-riding, beach-bumming, chilling in a hammock. (There's also a quiver of surfboards – “boards are meant to be ridden” is a Milagro motto – and they're ridden on one of the most perfect, peaceful right-hand reef-breaks in Central America).

**Caribbean** – Stilted walkways run through untouched, almost impenetrable, virgin jungle, connecting **Almonds and Corals** ([www.almondsandcorals.com](http://www.almondsandcorals.com) / tel: +506 272 2024) to a *perfect* Caribbean beach. Individual 'tents' in their own mosquito-proof cocoons are £60pp/night.

Activities: Divide your time between rainforest trekking and beaching. There's also a fascinating poison-arrow frog sanctuary (where you can test your eyesight) and one of the country's longest canopy-swings (where you can test your nerves).

**Highlands** – **Aventuras Naturales** ([www.toenjoynature.com](http://www.toenjoynature.com) / tel: +506 225-3939) runs highly professional and exciting trips down the Class IV Pacuare River to their private Pacuare Lodge – accessible only by raft and, for a select few, by the occasional helicopter (though mobile phones are *banned!*).

3-day Pacuare Tour costs £170 or a daytrip on the Sarapiquí River (Class III) costs £50.00.

**Turtle landings at Guanacaste Conservation Area:** From San Jose it is a 5-hour bus ride to Liberia from where you can take a ½ hour taxi-ride to Santa Rosa...from here a 6-hour jungle-trek should see you at Nancite Beach. Santa Rosa National Park HQ (tel: +506 666-5051 or fax: +506 666-5020) can issue permits to 'honorary researchers.'

**Health & Safety:** Malaria is endemic to some regions of Costa Rica and there have been outbreaks of dengue. Get up-to-date advice about prophylaxis, use repellent and sunblock...but if you live *la pura vida* (the pure life) you stand every chance of coming back home healthier than you left.

**Further Reading:**

*Lonely Planet Costa Rica* - Rob Rachowiecki (Lonely Planet)

*Rough Guide to Costa Rica* - Jean McNeil (Rough Guides)

*Costa Rican Natural History* - Daniel H. Janzen (University of Chicago Press)

*Costa Rica's National Parks* - Joseph Franke (Mountaineers Books)

**Further Information:**

[www.tourism-costarica.com](http://www.tourism-costarica.com) - Costa Rica Tourism Board.

[www.costaricabureau.com](http://www.costaricabureau.com) - Costa Rica Tourism and Travel Bureau

[www.costaricapages.com](http://www.costaricapages.com) - Costa Rica listings

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