



Costa Rica

Planning a trip to Costa Rica? Then you should talk to us... We know this country exceptionally well. We offer independent expert advice and the ability to deliver top quality itineraries with the best tour operators that are exceptional value for money. Arranging your travel through The Specialist Travel Consultancy also reduces the time you have to spend researching and planning your trip. And our service is completely free!

Contact us to discuss your travel requirements on **0845 838 7667** or for more information on the service we offer please visit our website: www.thestc.co.uk

We arrange tailor made trips:

- Cultural tours •
- Walking & trekking •
- Geography & Biology tours •
- Spanish Schools •
- Link school visits •
- Adventure Travel & Expeditions •

Facts & Highlights

Country Name: The Republic of Costa Rica.

Area: 51,032 sq km; 19,652 sq miles

Population: 4.2 million

Capital City: San José (1.0 million)

People: Only 1% of the population of Costa Rica is indigenous. The remainder is an eclectic mix of Afro-Caribbean, European and North American.

Language(s): Spanish (Official)

Religion(s): Roman Catholic 75%; Evangelical Protestant 15%; Others 3%; None 7%

Currency: Colon

Government: Presidential system of democracy with presidential elections held every four years.

Time: GMT -6 hours



Nature's Finest: Experience the natural wonders of one of the most biologically diverse countries on our planet.

Thrills and Spills: Experience some of the best white water rafting in the world, followed by superb wildlife watching on the quieter sections of the rivers.

Trek: In Jungle or high mountain, Costa Rica offers numerous trekking possibilities, with many opportunities from short day walks through to extended expeditions.

Turtles: See one of nature's most endearing spectacles - nesting turtles on the beaches of Tortuguero National Park.

Relax: on the idyllic Pacific and Caribbean beaches, after some discovery and adventure further inland.

"No Artificial Ingredients" - Costa Rica's tourism "tag-line" says it all...

This is a country that is defined by its natural wonders, with 26% of the country given up to national parks. Costa Rica holds an astonishing 5% of the world's biodiversity - even more amazing when you consider that the country accounts for less than 0.1% of the world's landmass.

From towering volcanoes to tropical rainforests and pristine beaches, Costa Rica is nature's gem in Central America.

The country has a stable economy and is prospering from the lure of its natural wonders, as well as the export of bananas and coffee. Democracy has ruled for over 100 hundred years with only one or two small "hitches" along the way, and the standard of living is amongst the highest in all of Latin America.

The capital, San Jose, may not win any charm awards, but it is centrally located amongst the highlands and affords good access to the rest of the country.

A little way north of the capital lies the gigantic crater volcano of Poas, 2707m. This still smoking crater rises out of beautiful rainforest where humming birds and many species of butterfly live. A little to the east lies another, higher volcano, Irazu (3432m) which, in contrast to the rainforests of Poas, has desolate grey sand and would look more at home on the moon than a country in the tropics. In the north of the country, the world famous Arenal Volcano is a spectacular sight, spewing smoke and lava high into the air.

This whole region is full of opportunities for rafting, trekking and numerous other activities, some adventurous, others more relaxing such as bathing in hot springs. A little south of here is the Monteverde Cloud Forest, where cooler climes host an incredible array of bird and plant life. The best way to experience this area is from an aerial walkway or "zip line" through the canopy.

Both the Pacific and Caribbean coastlines are home to some of the country's best national parks. In the west, Manuel Antonio National Park is famed for its Iguanas and Sloth Bears, while Tortuguero in the east is home to Mangrove swamps and nesting turtles (Greenbacks, Leatherbacks and Loggerheads all use this area for nesting). Although often on the tourist "trail" the Parque National Corcovado in the far south of the country is very much a wilderness area. The rainforest here offers some of the best wildlife viewing in the country, along with remote rainforest trekking opportunities, and is a highlight for many.

Costa Rica is also a great place to either brush up on, or take a crash course in Spanish. There are numerous places where Spanish courses can be arranged, and we can tailor these to the ability of the group.

Whatever the reason for your planned trip, be it geography, biology, conservation or adventure, we will take time to understand your requirements and work with you in establishing a suitable programme.



Suggested Itineraries

Two weeks (Highlights Tour)

Day 1 Fly to San Jose.

2 Drive to Caribbean coast, then by boat to Tortuguero N.P.

3 Guided tour of water channels and hike up Tortuguero Hill.

4 Head inland to the Arenal Volcano.

5 Morning hike to La Fortuna waterfall; afternoon visit volcano itself.

6 Transfer to Tilaran Mountain Range, with breathtaking views of Gulf of Nicoya and islands below.

7 Visit Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve, famous for its biodiversity.

8 Drive coastal road to Manuel Antonio.

9 Guided visit to Manuel Antonio N.P.

10 Drive to Golfito, stay at lodge in rainforest.

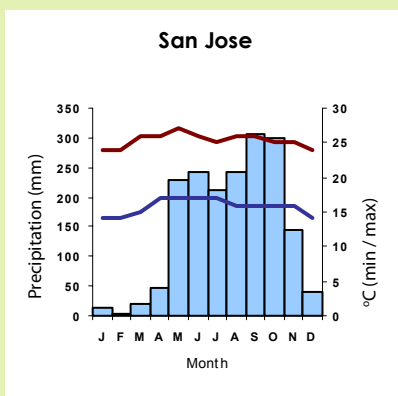
11 Possible activities include tour of private rainforest, boat trip or swimming.

Geography & Climate

Costa Rica is one of the smallest countries in Central America, but geographically and ecologically, one of the most diverse in the world. The country's geography ranges from tropical beaches to rainforest, active volcanoes and impressive mountain peaks. It is a geographers' and biologists' dreamland.

The central regions are dominated by the highlands and volcanoes that run the length of the country. From the highest point, Cerro Chirripo, 3,819 m, it is possible to see both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean on a clear day. The country is dotted with areas of savannah, deciduous forest, tropical forest as well as grazing pastures, mangrove swamps, cloud forest, and barren volcanic mountain sides.

Costa Rica's dry season runs from December to April, while the rainy season stretches from May to November. The coastal region, in particular the Caribbean coast, is very much tropical whilst the highland areas are always cooler. The Pacific side of the country is the drier, while the Caribbean side sees almost 300 days of rainfall a year.



12 To lodge at Cerro de la Muerte, in cloud forest, for quetzal spotting.

13 Walk to Copey, a tiny picturesque village nestled in the highlands of the Central Mountain Range. Afternoon return to San Jose.

14 Depart San Jose.

15 Arrive London.

Costa Rica Traverse (Coast to Coast)

DAY 1 Arrive San Jose

2 Transfer to Dominical on the Pacific Coast.

3 Commence cycling on paved roads. Spend night in the huge Tinamaste cave.

4 Hike to road then bike to Cannan.

5/11 Complete cycling, commence week long trek gradually ascending remote trails through Indian settlements and cloud forest in the vicinity of Cerro Chirripo (3819 metres), the country's highest mountain.

12/16 Rafting, biking and trekking alongside and on the Pacuare River including a rest day, before kayaking to the tidal mouth of the Caribbean Sea.

17 Transfer to San Jose.

18 In San Jose, fly to UK.

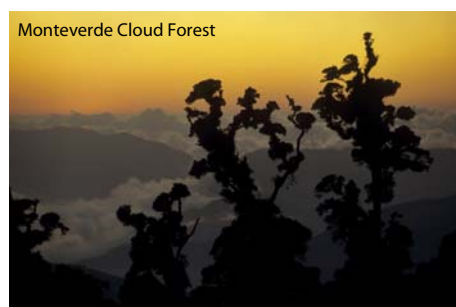
19 Arrive UK.

Project Work

The majority of project work on offer in Costa Rica is either community based or conservation orientated such as helping monitoring habitat regeneration and species diversity. Different tour operators have access to different project possibilities, so call us with your requirements and we can assess all the options for you.

Regulations & Red Tape

A full passport, valid for 6 months after your return date, is required for travel to Costa Rica. British passport holders do not currently need a visa for stays of up to 90 days in length. However, travellers must be in possession of a return air ticket.



National Holidays

1 Jan - New Year's Day

March / April - Easter (varies)

11 April - Dia de Juan Santamaria. Celebrations are held to remember the national hero, especially in his home town of Alajuela.

1 May - Labour Day.

25 July - Dia de Guanacaste, celebrating the annexation of this northern region from Nicaragua.

2 Aug - Virgen de Los Angeles.

15 Aug - Dia de Madre (Mother's Day)

15 Sept - Independence Day.

12 Oct - Dia de la Raza (celebrating the discovery of the Americas by Columbus).

25 Dec - Christmas Day.

Festivals

The traditional, indigenous, "Fiesta de los Diablitos" is held in February (dates vary) and is marked with masked dancing in the Reserva Indigena Boruca.

Price Guide

Prices vary enormously depending on the length and style of trip required, as well as the number of participants involved and date of departure. A 2 week trip to Costa Rica starts from around £2,150 per person including international flights. A month long expedition is likely to cost in the region of £3,200 up to £3,500. Much depends on the regions visited, nature of project work and various other factors.

Useful Addresses

Embassy of The Republic of Costa Rica:

Flat 1, 14 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3LH
Tel: 0207 706 8844

Web:

www.costarica.embassyhomepage.com

Institute of Tourism in Costa Rica:

Postal address: Apartado 777, 1000 San José, Costa Rica

Web: www.visitcostarica.com

More Information

To discuss the travel, tour and expedition possibilities Costa Rica offers in greater detail, and to get free, impartial advice on suitable tour operators, please contact:

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