



## FUN FACTS about your journey through *The Coast of Riches*

### Pura Vida

*“Pura vida” is commonly heard in Costa Rica—it means “pure life” and is often used as a greeting in lieu of “hello” and “goodbye”*



Located in Central America, Costa Rica has coastlines on the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. The tropical coastal plains rise to mountains, active volcanoes, and a temperate central plateau where most people live (San José, the capital, is here). This is the only country in Central America with no standing army; it enjoys continuing stability after a century of almost uninterrupted democratic government. Tourism, which has overtaken bananas as Costa Rica's leading foreign exchange earner, bolsters the economy. A quarter of the land has protected status; the beauty of rain forest preserves draws more and more visitors. According to the U.S. Department of State, more than 20,000 U.S. expatriates live in Costa Rica, many of them as retirees. That's because Costa Rica has one of the highest standards of living in Central America. With an economy catering to a growing middle class as well as tourists from around the world, you'll have no trouble finding theaters, galleries, and fine dining in virtually any cuisine. Plus, there is excellent healthcare, high-speed internet (even in seemingly remote areas), reliable electrical service, clean water you can drink from the tap, and good cellphone coverage (including 3G and even 4G in some areas). *We recommend you check with your cell provider to price international rates or better yet, take the sim card and store in a safe place. Check in via email and enjoy a week somewhat off line....* In addition to its natural beauty, culture, welcoming attitude of the locals, and convenience, Costa Rica attracts many expats with its lower cost of living and slower pace of life.

**General Location:** Costa Rica is a small country located in the southern part of the Central American isthmus. It's bordered on the north by Nicaragua and on the southeast by Panama. To the north and east is the Caribbean Sea, and to the west and south is the Pacific Ocean.



At its widest point, it measures 300 km (180 miles) across. In total size, its' 50,700 sq km (20,000 sq mi) makes it a little less than half the size of Kentucky (a State in the US) and about two-thirds the size of Scotland. Despite its' small size, Costa Rica is incredibly ecologically diverse, mostly due to the converging mountain ranges, elevation extremes and bordering water bodies. We are going to do our best to explore the secrets of Costa Rica's environmental richness and beauty in our tours, daily activities and select lodgings.

**The Provinces:** The Population of the country is about 4,331,000 and the Capital is the bustling city of San José, where much of the population resides in or near. Similar to our fifty States, Costa Rica is divided into seven "provinces." All but one (Guanacaste, whose capital is Liberia) have a capital city of the same name. The provinces are:

- San Jose -- features the culturally rich and diverse national capital.
- Heredia -- Due north of San Jose, up to the Nicaraguan border.
- Alajuela -- West of Heredia, to the Nicaraguan border. Features Volcan Poás National Park.
- **Guanacaste** -- The northwest part of the country. One of the most diverse regions of the country, and the world, with cloud forests, active volcanoes, national parks and five-star beach resorts.
- Puntarenas -- Covers most of the Pacific coast and its lowlands, from near the most western parts of Costa Rica (due west of San Jose,) down to the Panamanian

### **Economy:**

*Industry:* Microprocessors, food processing, textiles and clothing, construction materials, tourism

*Agriculture:* Coffee, pineapples, bananas, sugar; beef; timber

*Exports:* Coffee, bananas, sugar, pineapples, textiles

**Background and Behavioral Expectations:** Costa Rica is both safe and very friendly! It's a democracy, has potable drinking water and excellent, if basic cuisine. It has one of the lowest violent crime rates anywhere in the world! As mentioned it has no army, though the well-trained police force is highly qualified to keep the country secure. Visitors are rightly urged to take normal precautions; don't leave valuables out in the open, and protect your cash and jewelry from pickpockets in crowded public places. Use safes in lodgings and carry your money (small bills and or local currency) with you for your day's events. Keep cameras etc. in protected strapped small backpacks and bags. Don't temp folks by flashing money or expensive equipment and make yourself familiar with local currency and what to expect to pay and receive in change. Remember you are a guest in their country; don't get frustrated about money exchanges or not understanding the language all the time. Knowing a few pleasantries like please and thank you and how to ask "How much does it cost", "Where is the bathroom, please" and other simple phrases goes a long way to avoiding trouble and being treated as a welcome, courteous visitor.

The Costa Rican currency is called the "colon". It's far more stable than most third world or developing world currencies, but of course, substantially weaker than the currencies of North America, Japan and Western Europe. Compared to those countries, you will find *imported goods* somewhat more expensive than you're accustomed to; foods, coffee and things grown or manufactured in Costa Rica will be wonderful bargains!

Money can be legally exchanged in banks, hotels and travel agencies (the latter two are often faster and more convenient, but may not have enough cash in hand.) It is technically illegal to exchange money on the street, but currently it is so open and pervasive that authorities seem not to be bothering with it. It is best advised to use ATM's and to have what you expect to spend in small bills on hand. *Remember your trip is inclusive except for shopping, tips and alcohol. Meals, transportation, lodging and tours are covered.* Also note **American Express** is not

usually recognized in many Central American countries. Have standard Mastercard or Visa as your debt and if possible check to see if your card waives international fees, they can add up quickly. It is also recommended to avoid cash advances on credit cards as they are usually costly as well.

**The People:** Costa Ricans call themselves "Ticos," and are fiercely proud of their country, and usually very friendly to visitors. Education is compulsory in Costa Rica, so while the level of education is not as high as in some parts of Europe and North America, there are almost no illiterate Costa Ricans, as their education systems boasts about a 96 % literacy rate, higher than that of North America! Unlike most developing countries, you will usually not be approached by a beggar or subjected to an onslaught of people trying to sell you things; this however may depend on where you are.

Costa Ricans are overwhelmingly of European heritage. There are small indigenous populations, scattered and largely situated on a few reservations but becoming more integrated into the tourism trade of crafts specific to their mostly South American heritage. The general language spoken is Spanish. . On the Caribbean coast, there is a large Jamaican/Costa Rican population. Those people still speak English as their native language; with the island lilt (most are completely bilingual.) People of all religions are welcomed, but about 90% of the population is Catholic. Costa Rica does have small but active Protestant and Jewish community.

Costa Ricans are extremely courteous people and don't expect rude gestures, loud voices in public and it is recommended not to talk gender, politics, sex or religion in mixed public groups.

**Indigenous Peoples in Costa Rica:** Costa Rica never had a thriving indigenous culture such as the empires of the Mayan, Aztec or Inka people. The native people were culturally influenced by Mesoamerican tribes from Central America and cultures from northern South America (mostly today's Colombia). Most indigenous groups lived on simple subsistence economy and were ruled by a chief called "cacique". When the Spaniards arrived, many tribes moved back into the mountains in order to avoid slavery and taxation by the Spaniards.

The Costa Rican Indian culture did not leave many artifacts behind – most are simple products like pottery and ornaments. Most prominent are the stone spheres (see picture to the right) that were found in the country's South (area of the Térraba river around Palmar Sur/Palmar Norte). Some of these spheres weigh up to 15 tons and it is unclear how they were manufactured and transported as well as what they were intended for.



The decimation of the indigenous of Costa Rica was due mostly to diseases, rather than targeted genocide (as happened in other Latin American countries, most prominently Guatemala and El Salvador). Today, there are only about 64'000 indigenous people living in Costa Rica (around 1.7% of the population), mostly living in remote mountain zones.

## Indigenous People in Costa Rica:

Gutatusos/Malekus  
Chorotegas  
Huetares  
Cabecares  
Bribri  
Terrabas (Teribes)  
Borucas (Bruncas)  
Guaymies



**MEDICAL CARE:** in San Jose it is generally adequate, but space and availability of services can be limited in areas outside of San Jose. Most large cities will also have a health care facility for minor issues. Holistic Journeys and select hosts will be informed of best medical choices should an emergency arise. It is important that you have your medical information available including international medical and travel insurance. In more remote areas, basic medical equipment may not be available. An ambulance may be summoned by calling 911, but some may not have emergency equipment and can sometimes offer nothing more than transport.

Most prescription and over-the-counter medications are available throughout Costa Rica; however, some U.S. citizens travel regularly to the United States to fill prescriptions that are unavailable in Costa Rica. Always carry your prescription medication in original packaging with your doctor's prescription.

The U.S. Embassy *does not* pay medical bills. Be aware that U.S. Medicare and Medicaid do not apply overseas.

**Medical Insurance:** *Make sure your health insurance plan provides coverage overseas or better yet get additional coverage.* Most care providers overseas only accept cash payments. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services. U.S. Embassy San Jose maintains a list of local doctors and medical facilities here. We recommend you carry international travel and health insurance, Travel Guard is a reputable company to research and covers individual trips, international trips, flights, medical, etc. Learn more by going to: <http://www.travelguard.com> . We also recommend you have extra prescriptions with you, a copy of your prescriptions and an analogous prescription recommended by your healthcare provider. We recommend copies of your current immunizations, allergies to medications, contacts, glasses and a copy of your driver's license, passport and/or other type of official ID.

**Pre-Trip Preparation (Immunizations)** While not subscribing to any particular vaccination protocol, Hopewood recommends making an appointment with your personal healthcare practitioner at least 30-60 days before your trip to discuss and educate yourself about the area of travel, your age, your health concerns and with some of the new global issues your reproductive concerns after traveling (Zika). Make an Individual Health Action Plan for yourself and along with that make a Holistic First Aid Travel and Emergency Kit. Don't worry too much

as most all first aid and personal care items can be found in pharmacies and general stores along the way if need, but pack your favorite first aid items. You can compare your list to our list below.

The following diseases are found in Costa Rica, most of Central America and Mexico and in southern and eastern seaboard states in the US: The best protection is common sense, being proactive, being in good health and asking for help when an issue arises. Zika virus, Dengue, Chikungunya, Malaria, Traveler's Diarrhea.

There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika, Dengue or Chikungunya. You can protect yourself by preventing mosquito bites for all mosquito borne diseases by following suggestions:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE, also called para-menthane-diol [PMD]), IR3535, or 2-undecanone (methyl nonyl ketone). Always use as directed.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women can use all EPA-registered insect repellents, including DEET, according to the product label.
- Most repellents, including DEET, can be used on children older than 2 months. (OLE should not be used on children younger than 3 years.)
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents). You can buy pre-treated clothing and gear or treat them yourself.
- Stay in places with air conditioning and window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net if air conditioned or screened rooms are not available or if sleeping outdoors.
- Mosquito netting can be used to cover babies younger than 2 months old in carriers, strollers, or cribs to protect them from mosquito bites.

**Vaccinations:** Proof of yellow fever vaccination must be presented upon arrival for all passengers coming from certain countries in South America or Africa. Be up-to-date on all vaccinations recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Starting healthy and staying healthy includes being prepared and ready for the trip to limit stress and a depressed immune system. Eat and sleep well and do a regular multivitamin along with adaptogenic immune supporting foods and herbs especially 30 days before your trip. Leave plenty of time to get to the airport, have your papers at hand and copies of these in carry-on bags as well having first aid, money, prescriptions, extra eye glasses or contacts and one of two changes of cloths in your carry-on. We highly recommend only 1 small suitcase and a comfortable pack (carry-on) for pleasure and day trips.

### **Visa requirements**

U.S. and Canadian citizens need a valid (with a minimum of 6 months remaining before expiration date) passport in order to enter any of the countries in Central America.

State Department Travel Information:

- Costa Rica: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/costa-rica.html>

**Electricity:** Central American countries use the same electrical voltage and outlet design of the United States, 120V/60Hz system. We don't however recommend bring hair dryers or unnecessary items. Chargers for computers, phones, cameras, I-pads and back up travel chargers, batteries, cords and plug-ins are recommended. Phone service is 3 and 4 G but international plans are expensive. Check with your provider and see what plans they offer. You can also purchase cheap phones with minute cards at or near the airport.

**Rainy/Dry Seasons:** Central American countries see a marked difference between the "dry" season and the "wet" season. The dry season typically falls between November-April and the wet season can begin as early as May and continue through the end of October. Usually the mornings of the wet season do present an opportunity to see the sun and venture out without rain, however, around noon-1 p.m. most days will begin to see cloud cover and rain showers, continuing into the evening. *Please explore the regions we will be visiting on your computer and get educated and excited about your adventure. Feel free to ask Holistic Journeys for more information in regards to the weather during your exact tour dates, but as you know global weather is changing so plan accordingly in your packing. Please see suggested packing list below.*

**More on Banks/ATMs/Conversions:** We recommend *visiting* your bank before you leave to let them know what country or countries you will be traveling in, giving them departure and return dates. Please have them authorize both your ATM and credit cards for international withdrawals in these countries and check to see all passwords are working.

- Please do not bring large amounts of US \$ into the country. It is difficult and time consuming to exchange money (ie. Long bank lines).
- The ATM will give you the best exchange rate and is most convenient. Please try to find ATMs inside grocery stores, convenience stores, or inside banks. Avoid ATMs with 24 hour unsecure walk up access from the street unless it has been recommended by a by our guide.
- Approximate Costa Rica Conversion: 554.8 Colones: 1 Dollar

**Airport Arrival and Departure:** Please plan your arrival before 2:00 pm at SJO on the first day of the trip. That will give you plenty of time to get through customs and meet the shuttle. We plan to leave no later than 3:00 pm and if everyone is there by 2:00 or 2:30 pm. There is no waiting area per say but a few benches and shelters outside of arrivals. It can be an interesting scene so be prepared to take a deep breath, gather your gear and look for a sign that says Finca Luna Nueva. Have contact information available so you can contact Finca Luna and/or Hopewood Holistic Health, should you have a flight delay or problem in travel. Please use email or call the office at Finca Luna.

**RECEPTION: (506) 2468-4006 or 2468-0864 USA / CANADA: 1-800-903-3470**

**SKYPE: finca.luna.nueva**

**FAX: 011.506.2468.0864**

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It usually takes only 20-30 minutes to clear customs, baggage and customs are well marked and they shuttle you outside quickly to meet arriving parties. We will be there with a sign indicating Holistic Journeys/Finca Luna and welcoming smiles. There is also a tax free liquor store in the airport. You are welcome to purchase you own special preference but know that there is beer, wine and spirits available at each location. Should you have liquor in your rooms, please be discrete in drinking and alcohol associated behavior. Note, you are almost always required to pay a **departure tax of \$28 USD per person** when leaving Costa Rica by airplane at either the Juan Santamaria or Liberia international airports. Exit fees are waived when you leave Costa Rica by sea or over land. Fees may be paid using Visa or Mastercard, a debit card, or in cash with U.S. dollars or Costa Rican colones. You can pay your departure tax at the far right side of the airport before checking in for your flight. - See more at: <http://costarica.com/travel/exiting-costa-rica/#sthash.ZbrDd3bX.dpuf> It never hurts to check with your airlines and its always better to be pleasantly surprised to save \$28.00 that to be shocked and or hold up the lines in a scramble to find cash or credit card. You must also show proof of departure or round trip air tickets or Costa Rican officials will NOT let you inter the country.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/costa-rica.html>  
<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/costa-rica-facts>  
<https://signup.internationalliving.com/X120KG45/costa-rica/costa-rica-healthcare>  
<http://www.infoplease.com/country/costa-rica.html?pageno=4>  
<http://costarica.usembassy.gov/costarica-unhcr.html>  
<http://www.travelcostarica.nu/indigenous-costa-rica>