



Travel & Discover Costa Rica

Mytanfeet
.com

An insider's guide to exploring
safer, cheaper and trouble free

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About the Authors



We are Yeison and Samantha, the couple behind Mytanfeet. Yeison is a Costa Rican, born in San Jose and grew up in Heredia. Samantha was born and grew up in the United States. In 2012, Samantha moved down to Costa Rica and since then, we have been traveling around Costa Rica and the world together and blogging about it on Mytanfeet. We know it's tricky to find detailed information about traveling in Costa Rica which is why we've put together this free quick introductory guide. We hope it is useful for your vacation planning!

Yeison and Samantha



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1

Facts About Costa Rica

Important facts to know about
Costa Rica before you go

- Costa Rica is not an island. It is a small country in Central America, bordered to the north by Nicaragua and to the south by Panama.
- San Jose is the capital city.
- Costa Rica is its own country, having gained independence from Spain in 1821.
- The official language is Spanish.
- The current population is 5.24 million.
- Roman Catholic is the main religion.
- Costa Rica is 51,100 sq km (19,653 sq miles) of land and 50,660 sq km (19,559 sq miles) of water.
- Their government is democratic republic.
- Their currency is the Costa Rican colon.
- Time zone is UTC – 6. No daylight savings time. +506 country code.
- Costa Rica is 8-12 degrees above the equator.

- There are 7 provinces, 82 cantons and 478 districts.
- There are 30 national parks, 9 biological reserves, 52 wildlife refuges and 33 protected zones.
- 3 UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Guanacaste National Park, Coco Island, and La Amistad International Park. One World Cultural Heritage site: Stone Spheres of Diquis

Here are some interesting facts about Costa Rica:

- Costa Rica became the first country in the American continent to ban recreational hunting in 2012.
- "Costa Rica" means rich coast in Spanish. Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus) named it that when he saw the beauty of the country.
- The country generated 94.91% renewable energy in 2023.
- It will ban single use plastics in 2024
- Costa Ricans call themselves "Ticos" for men and "Ticas" for women.
- San Jose, the capital city, was one of the first in the world to have electricity.
- Costa Rica abolished its army in 1948 after a civil war. They have had not had an army since then, relying solely on a series of police forces.





2

When Should I Visit Costa Rica?

The best time to visit Costa Rica will depend on what kind of vacation you're looking for

Weather is one of the most important deciding factors when it comes to the best time to visit Costa Rica.

If you want to escape the rain, visit during dry season. Dry season, or summer, is generally from beginning of December to end of April for the country except the Caribbean coast. This time of the year is the high tourist season. Here's what you should know about visiting during this time of year:

1. Rates are higher during this time of year. This is the most expensive time to travel in Costa Rica.
2. It's very busy with a mix of local tourists, snowbirds, expats and tourists.
3. March and April are the hottest months.
4. The Caribbean coast has a different weather pattern. Their summer month is October. It may rain at any time of the year on the Caribbean coast.

If you're on a budget and don't mind the rain, visit during rainy season, Costa Rica's winter. Rainy season or "green season", is generally from beginning of May to end of November. What to know about visiting during this time of year:

1. Rates are lower during this time of year and has less tourists.
2. There is normally a "little summer" in July when the rain stops for a couple of weeks.
3. September and October are the rainiest months for the country except the Caribbean, their rainy months are June and November.
4. It doesn't rain non stop for hours like someone turned on a faucet. Typically the day has intermittent rains with more rains in evenings and nights.



If you prefer less crowds, visit during shoulder season. These are the transition months of May, June and November to beginning of December. What to know about visiting during shoulder season:

1. As they are the beginning and end of rainy season, do expect rain.
2. It's a lot less crowded and a bit cheaper.

3. November is when the snowbirds start coming down
4. After Thanksgiving up until mid-December is not crazy busy as Christmas. Good time to escape Christmas crowds.
5. This is a good time to visit on a budget.



If you want a beach vacation: The best time to visit

Costa Rica for a beach vacation is during dry season, particularly January through April and October for the Caribbean. It's sunny for days on end and you will not have to worry about getting rained on during your vacation.

If you're on a budget: For budget travelers, the best time to come is during green (rainy) season. Rates are lower for hotels and car rentals and you can find more promos for tours and hotels.

If you want to see wildlife: Interested in whale watching or seeing baby turtles hatch? The rainy season is the best, particularly August to November. Humpback whales, dolphins and sea turtles are commonly seen out in the water and the mass gatherings of mother turtles laying their eggs are the

most intense during that time of year. August and September are the best times of the year to see turtles at Tortuguero, July – November are best to see turtles in Ostional. August and September are the best months to see humpback whales up and down the Pacific coast. For birdwatchers, February to July are the best times in Monteverde to see Resplendant Quetzals as it is their breeding season.

If you want an outdoor adventure vacation: This depends. River rafting is the best during green season as the rivers are at their fullest. However, there are possibilities of storms and rivers becoming too stormy to raft. Canopy tours can be done all year long but if it is storming, they won't run the lines and it's not that fun to zipline in pouring rain. Hiking is done all year long but rain could hamper your hike during green season and the chances of your view at the top may be too cloudy to see anything. Trails are also muddier in rainy season and some places may close if there are lightning storms or inclement weather conditions. This may occur when there is a tropical wave or a tropical storm passing through the country.



3

Weather

Costa Rica has 2 tropical seasons:
Dry & Rainy

Costa Rica has typical tropical weather with two seasons: dry and rainy. It is 8-12 degrees above the equator so it doesn't experience fall and spring or have snow.

Dry Season

Dry season is generally from beginning of December to end of April in Costa Rica. Some characteristics of dry season are:

- Average day time temperature on the coasts is mid 80s and 90s F (29 to 35 C).
- Average daytime temperature in San Jose are low 80s F (26 C).
- High winds and big swells on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts January and February.
- The Pacific coast gets extremely dry. Trees turn yellow, rivers dry up.
- The hottest months are March and April for most of the country.

Rainy Season

Rainy season is generally from beginning of May to mid-December. Some characteristics of rainy season are:

- Sunny mornings and on and off intermittent rains in the afternoon
- Average day time temperatures are mid 80s F (29 C) on the coast.
- In Guanacaste and Puntarenas, the mountains turn green after the first few weeks of rainy season.
- Lots of intermittent rains. It also gets super humid
- Rainy season normally starts a little bit earlier and can end a little bit later in the high elevation rainforest and mountain areas like Monteverde, San Isidro de Perez Zeledon and San Gerardo de Dota.
- The rainiest month is October.
- May and June starts seeing the first rains. July lets up a bit and then from August on, it starts raining more consistently. It is usually cloudy in the morning and then intermittent rains in afternoon, evenings and nights.
- It is common to get tropical waves in rainy season and sometimes tropical storms so try to keep an eye on the weather and use websites like windy.com to find more accurate forecasts.

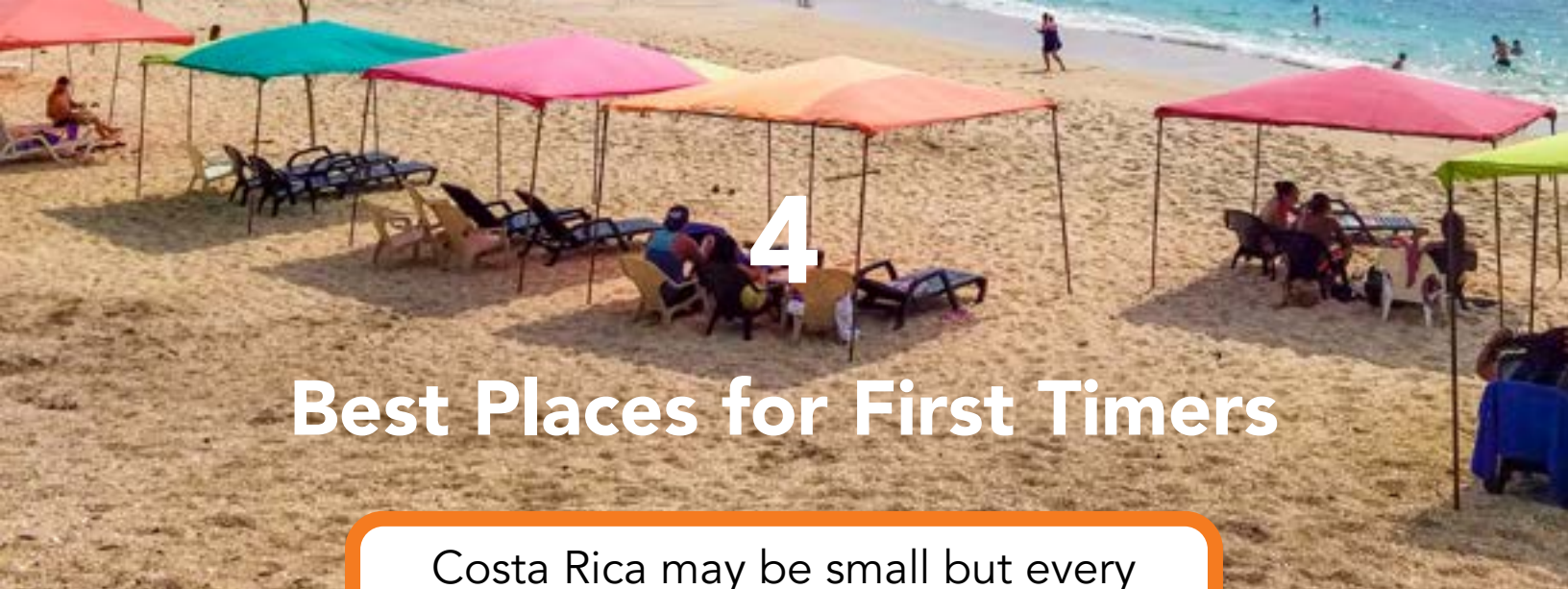


Caribbean

The Caribbean experiences a very different climate than the rest of Costa Rica as it doesn't have the typical dry and rainy season. Instead, it is normal for the Caribbean side to have the possibility to rain almost all year long and it is always humid.

The summer months on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica are September and October. The rainiest months are June and November. January – March are generally drier but keep in mind that it can rain at anytime of the year.

Average temperatures are mid 80s F (29 C) with high humidity.



4

Best Places for First Timers

Costa Rica may be small but every city and beach is completely different

Here are our top 10 destinations in Costa Rica, geared towards first time visitors.

1. La Fortuna

- This area is famous for Arenal Volcano National Park, Lake Arenal and the rain forest. La Fortuna is the town that sits at the base of the Arenal Volcano and Arenal refers to the area around the volcano.
- It is a 3-3.5 hour drive from both San Jose and Liberia Airport. No 4x4 required.
- La Fortuna has a wide range of accommodations and activities, making it ideal for any type of traveler.

2. Puerto Viejo

- Known for its laid back, chill Caribbean vibes, Puerto Viejo is a

destination unlike any other in Costa Rica.

- It's about 5 hour drive from San Jose and 8 hours from Liberia. No 4x4 required.
- Has some of the most beautiful beaches in the country with tons of wildlife and nature.

3. Gulf of Papagayo

- Papagayo Gulf not only has some of the country's most beautiful white sand beaches and snorkel spots, but it also has a marina and a handful of 5-star hotels and all-inclusive resorts.
- Perfect for luxury travelers and honeymooners.
- 30-40 minute drive from Liberia Airport. 5 hour drive from San Jose. 4x4 not required.



4. Tamarindo

- Tamarindo is a popular surfing beach town in Guanacaste and a favorite among city Costa Ricans and international tourists.

The beach is known for great surfing waves and stunning sunsets and the town has a fun nightlife and great shopping. Ideal for surfers, backpackers, wedding parties, friend groups and families.

- Tamarindo is approximately a 1.5 drive from LIR airport and 4.5-5 hours from San Jose. 4x4 not required.

5. Manuel Antonio



- This is one of the most popular destinations in Costa Rica because of Manuel Antonio National Park, famous for its cute sloths and pristine beaches. Quepos is the town near Manuel Antonio.
- About a 3 hour drive from San Jose and 4 hour drive from Liberia. No 4×4 required.
- Great for all types of travelers. Has hotels for every budget, especially luxury hotels.

6. Jaco

- Jaco is the most developed beach town and is also an excellent surfing beach, close to San Jose and the Central Valley cities. Ideal for those who like developed areas, convenience and a good night life.
- Jaco is 1.5 hour driving from San Jose and about 3 hours from Liberia. Both routes have nicely paved roads that goes through the main highway. No 4x4 required.
- Jaco is not quite as family-friendly as other beach towns as it has a

strong sex tourism industry and is well known for a crazy night life. You'll see many guy groups or bachelor parties going on and there are prostitutes (legal in Costa Rica) at some hotels and bars. But the town has cleaned up a lot in the past years.

7. San Jose

- As the capital city, this is an excellent location to experience the typical Costa Rican city life. There are many interesting cultural sites and the food scene in San Jose is growing rapidly.
- San Jose to Liberia is about a 3 hour drive on a main highway (no 4x4).
- San Jose is a great base in Costa Rica since you can take daytrips to see volcanoes, rainforest and beach.

8. Samara

- Samara is a small beach town in southern Guanacaste, known for a laid back vibe, surf waves and family friendly atmosphere
- 2 hour drive from Liberia, about a 5 hour drive from San Jose. 4x4 not required on the paved roads through Nicoya.

9. Tortuguero

- Although Tortuguero is in a remote area of the North Caribbean that is only accessible by boat or plane, it's actually one of the best places

in Costa Rica for first timers. This area, nicknamed the “Little Amazon” of Costa Rica is one of the best for wildlife, nature and rainforest.

- Rainforest sandbar, no road access. Must take boat or plane.
- Best time to visit is July – November for the turtle nestings. Most people stay for 1-3 nights in Tortuguero as it’s very small.

10. Monteverde

- Perfect destination for those who enjoy cooler temperatures, mountains and nature. The Monteverde Cloud Forest is one of the most unique forests in the world and is where the first zipline in Costa Rica was set up. Santa Elena is the main town in Monteverde.

- About a 4 hour drive from San Jose and Liberia. 4wd/4x4 highly recommended and necessary in rainy season.
- Since it’s a smaller, rural mountain town, most visitors stay 1-2 nights. A must for hikers and bird watchers.



5

Flying to Costa Rica

Costa Rica has two international airports:
San Jose and Liberia

San Jose Airport

- In the Alajuela province, about a 30 minute drive to downtown San Jose.
- Biggest international airport.
- Airport code is SJO.
- Fly into SJO Airport if you are going to Puerto Viejo, Tortuguero, Jaco, Manuel Antonio, Dominical, Uvita, Osa Peninsula, La Fortuna, Monteverde, Puntarenas, Bajos del Toro, Sarapiquí
- Close to all the major bus terminals.

Guanacaste Airport

- Ten minute drive to Liberia downtown.
- Airport code is LIR.
- Small airport with ~12 gates.
- Fly into LIR if you are going to Gulf of Papagayo, Tamarindo, Conchal,

Flamingo, Samara, Brasilito, Potrero, Nosara, Playas del Coco and La Cruz. Can also fly into LIR to go to La Fortuna or Monteverde

- Prices to fly into LIR are sometimes a little bit more expensive than SJO.

Customs and Immigration at the Airports

- Customs is for luggage, immigration is for people.
- You will go through immigration first after you deplane.

The officer will ask you for your hotel name, number of days you're staying and your occupation. Will also ask for proof of exit. They will stamp your passport and write how many days your tourist visa is valid for

- Then you will pick up your luggage.
- After picking up luggage, go through customs. You will put all your luggage, bags, backpacks and purses through the scanner.
- After you finish customs, exit the airport.



6

What to Bring

Tips to help you pack for both seasons
and different parts of the country

Packing for Costa Rica isn't too difficult but research the area you are visiting and what the weather will be like during that time of the year so you can pack accordingly. These are our suggestions for essential items.

Clothing

Costa Rica doesn't have a strict dress code and casual is best for the entire country. At the beach, your wardrobe will consist mostly of shorts, tank tops and flip flops. In the city, we recommend a little more formal wear like closed toed shoes, jeans/long pants and a light jacket. If you are visiting areas such as Monteverde, San Gerardo de Dota, San Isidro de Perez Zeledon or the Central Valley mountain areas, you will need warmer clothes.

Our recommendations: We always recommend clothes that dry fast especially if you're visiting the coasts. Additionally, most laundromats don't

use dryers, they hang dry clothes so you will want clothes that dry fast.

Shoes

Sandals work fine for most of the country except the city. If you're doing any activities, closed toed sturdy shoes are necessary. Whenever we travel around Costa Rica, I normally bring one pair of sandals, running/hiking shoes or hiking sandals and a pair of comfortable closed toed walking shoes.

Our recommendations: Closed-toe hiking sandals are amazing for all sorts of outdoor activities and you can go from land to water easily. They dry fast, don't smell, your feet can breathe and are much more comfortable than stuffy shoes. We love our KEEN hiking sandals.

Mosquito Repellent

You need to bring mosquito repellent for Costa Rica. The coasts are the worst places for mosquitoes and there are also other little bugs that bite like gnats. Mosquitoes are not found in elevations above 1500 meters (~5000 feet) but they are everywhere else all year long.

Our recommendations: You can find mosquito repellent in the supermarkets but we recommend bringing your own as it is expensive and they don't have that many natural or alternative products.

Sunscreen

Sunscreen is an essential item to bring and make sure to get at least SPF 30 or higher. Costa Rica is only 8-12 degrees from the equator so it is necessary.

Our recommendations: Bring at least SPF 30 or higher with zinc oxide. If you are going in the ocean, **we encourage you to buy reef safe mineral sunscreen.** If you can, bring sunscreen since it's expensive. Don't forget chapstick with SPF and after sun gel.

Toiletries and Medications

You can find all toiletries in Costa Rica like shampoo, conditioner, lotion, toothbrush, mouth wash toothpaste and floss and we recommend bringing tampons for women (some pulperias, or small grocery stores don't have them), face wash, a mini medical kit, detangler spray for hair, hand sanitizer, a packet of tissues and face wipes.

If you're taking any medicines, write down a list of them and keep it with you at all times. Try to include the active ingredients in each medicine or find the Spanish name.

For medications, you can find mostly all OTC at the pharmacy. Contact lens

solution is mostly sold only at pharmacies. We do recommend bringing allergy medicine like Claritin and Sudafed, as those are very expensive in Costa Rica. You can buy anti-nausea medicine at the pharmacy as well.

Rain Jacket

A light weight waterproof rain jacket is an essential item if you're visiting in rainy season. You may want to throw your rain jacket in if you're visiting the South Pacific or Osa Peninsula during dry season. It can still rain during those months since that area is much more humid.

Our recommendations: We love our The North Face Venture Jackets. Look for a jacket with ventilation to let air flow through for the humidity.

Backpack

For day trips, sightseeing and tours, you need a day pack.

Our recommendations: In rainy season, you must bring a waterproof backpack.

Micro Fiber Towel

A micro fiber towel is awesome for wiping sweat off, using as a fan to cool off or to wrap your stuff in if it starts raining.

Sunglasses and Hat

Two more essential items for Costa Rica. I do however recommend bringing 2 pairs of sunglasses. One cheap pair so that you won't cry if it gets lost in the ocean. A hat or visor is also essential.

Insulated Water Bottle

Having cold water on a hot day at the beach is the best thing! Tap water is safe to drink for most of the country (except rural areas) but if you have a sensitive stomach, you can bring portable travel water filters.

Cameras and Technology

An action cam is the best to capture all of the adventures. GoPro is a must and make sure to bring the correct mounts. If you're a photographer, bring a wide angle for landscape shots and a telephoto lens for birds and wildlife.

Our recommendations: For GoPros, most tour companies will have the part that attaches to the helmet but you need to bring the other attachment. Bring plenty of SD cards. It is very difficult to find Class 10 SD cards outside the city. Also bring a surge protector as hotels don't have that many sockets.

Accessories and Extras

- Adapter – Costa Rica uses the same voltage as US and Canada (110 V)
- Flashlights.
- Battery pack.
- Ziplock bags to protect your electronics.
- Laundry bag.
- Spanish dictionary or guide.
- Costa Rica waterproof map.



7

Safety Tips

Practical tips for staying safe while traveling in Costa Rica

Before leaving home

- Leave contact information and travel plans to a family member or someone you trust.
- Print or save on your phone confirmations for airplane tickets, hotel reservations and other bookings.
- Leave expensive jewelry at home.
- If you are taking medications, make sure to bring a list of them and also a copy of your prescription if you are taking narcotics.
- If you are not going to use all your credit cards, leave the ones you don't need. Remember to let your credit card company know you will be in Costa Rica so they don't block your card.
- Take note of your embassy's location and contact information.

During your travel

- Don't wander alone at night or early mornings.
- Have a full color copy of your passport with you at all time and leave the original at a safe place.
- Take a picture on your phone of your immigration stamp.
- Keep your valuables close to you at all times. If you have a backpack, we recommend wearing it in the front if you're in the city.
- Make ATM withdrawals during the day in a well-lit, public area. Avoid help from strangers. Make sure to count the money at the ATM before you leave and safely stow it away.
- Before you go in the ocean, ask about the current wave condition. Rip tides are common at some beaches.
- When drivingn don't pick up strangers on the road.
- If you get flagged down, make sure it is a real cop. They will have a badge and "Transito" on their uniform if they are transit police. There are also tourist police that say "Policia Turistica"
- When you park, don't leave valuables visible. Always roll up your windows and lock your doors.
- Don't leave belongings unattended in public areas. Never leave your purse, backpack, cell phone or wallet on the floor. Always put it in a place that you can see clearly.
- If calling a taxi, verify it is an official taxi by the yellow triangles on the

door, a meter and the code of the province you are in.

- Always have some cash with you in local currency (~20,000).
- If you get lost, ask the police or a public business.
- If you see any suspicious activity or feel uncomfortable, don't take any risks. Go to a safe place immediately.

Emergencies

- The emergency number is 911 and they have English speaking staff.
- If your passport or valuables get stolen, report it immediately to your embassy or consulate. You must also report it to the closest Judicial Investigation Police office (OIJ).

Tourist Scams

- **Broken taxi meter:** Some taxi drivers may claim the meter is broken. If so, get out and find another one. By law, all taxi drivers have to turn on the meter (called Maria).
- **Incorrect currency exchange:** The exchange rate is ~ 500 to 1. Make sure to always calculate the correct exchange rate if you are paying in USD.
- **Cheap car rentals:** Some third party websites like Expedia may post super cheap car rental rates which don't include all the insurances,

fees and taxes. So you think you found a cheap rental but when you go to pick up your car, you're slapped with all these last minute fees and insurances you had no idea about. Always double check with the company you are renting from what the final price is.

- **Children with palm leaves:** If you see a child with palm leaves and they offer you a flower or some animal they made from it, don't accept it. They'll act like it's a gift but if you accept it, then they'll start following you and asking for money.
- **Cheap tours:** If someone from the street is offering super cheap tours, don't trust them right away. Most of the times, those vendors are not certified and aren't selling official tours. It is better to book with your hotel or find reputable tour companies online.
- **Bottled water:** When you're at a restaurant, make sure you ask for a "vaso de agua" not "botella de agua." A glass of water is free, bottle water costs money and in tourist areas, usually a lot!



8

Getting Around

How to take the public bus,
taxis and shuttles

Tips for Taking the Bus

1. All bus fare must be paid in local currency when you get on
 - For long routes, you buy your ticket beforehand at the bus station. Arrive at the bus station at least 30 minutes early, 1-2 hours early in busy times such as Christmas and Easter. You can pay in cash or credit card and they will assign you a seat.
 - It is highly recommended to buy tickets beforehand for the cross country routes due to availability
 - For buses that you pay when you get on, you don't need exact change but you do need to tell him how many people when you get on.
 - Most bus drivers do not speak English so it is recommended to learn how to say numbers in Spanish.
2. Check the bus schedule before you go and note that buses are

not always punctual. We recommend to always arrive at least 30 minutes to 1 hour before the scheduled time.

Tips for Taking a Taxi

1. Color is important

- Taxis are red with a yellow light and yellow triangle on top.
- Both the driver and passenger door have the plate number.

2. License plates always go by province

- Taxi drivers can only operate in the province they are licensed.

3. Do not take a taxi that is not operating in their province.

- Indicated by the first letters of the plate

TSJ – Taxi San Jose

TH – Taxi Heredia

TL – Taxi Limon and so on

4. Avoid pirate taxis

- They generally charge more and don't have insurance like the legal taxis.

5. Check the meter is on (called MARIA)

- It is the law for every cab driver to use the meter
- If your driver refuses to turn it on, you can take their license plate and report them to the police.
- Rural and city rates are different.

6. Orange taxis are for the airport only

- These taxis are exclusively for the airport.
- Charge more than red taxis.

7. Pay with small bills in local currency

- Most drivers don't have change for big bills and in some areas, do not take dollars. Always have small colones with you for taxis.

8. Don't slam the door

Uber and Didi readily exist in San Jose, Heredia, Alajuela and Cartago. Uber exists in many places in Costa Rica like Tamarindo, La Fortuna, Jaco and Quepos. However, we do not recommend depending on those rideshare apps as your main mode of transportation.

Tips for Taking Shuttles

There are two shuttles you can book in Costa Rica: private and shared.

1. Advantages of Taking Shuttles in Costa Rica

- Direct and faster than a bus. Whether you take a private or shared shuttle, it's faster than a bus. You don't need to switch buses or wait for people to get on/off.
- Don't have to worry about driving.
- More comfortable than a bus. Cool down with AC and bigger seats.

- Easy to book. All you have to do is book the shuttle, get picked up and you're good to go!

2. Differences between private and shared shuttles

Shared:

- Shared shuttles are usually up to 10-15 people so it does require extra time to pick up other passengers.
- They can't pick up directly at the airports, travelers must go to the designated airport pick up place such as Denny's Restaurant for SJO Airport and Hilton Garden Inn by LIR Airport.
- Can only pick up and drop off at hotels/hostels.
- There are usually schedules only in the morning and afternoon.
- One scheduled stop
- Limited luggage space.

Private:

- Private shuttles can pick you up directly from the airport at any time.
- You can stop at any time for food, bathroom or to take pictures on a private shuttle.
- They can pick you up and drop you off at any hotel, hostel or vacation rental.



9

Renting a Car

Tips to help you drive safe
and watch out for various road conditions

Costa Rica drives on the same side of the road as the US and Canada.

Driving License

You are allowed to drive using your driver's license that was issued by your home country. You can only use it within the time of your visa so if your tourist visa is stamped with 90 days, you can drive legally for 90 days. If your tourist stamp has 150 days, you may drive legally for up to 150 days. Many car rental companies also require you to have a license for at least 2 years and the minimum age to rent a car is 21 or 23 depending on the company.

Road Signs

Road signs are all in Spanish and they use the same symbols and signs as the US but you need to familiarize yourself with the ones that are different.

- Alto – stop
- Velocidad maxima – maximum speed. Remember they use kilometers here so you'll see KPH
- Ceda el paso – yield
- Puente angosto – narrow bridge
- Desvio – detour
- Despacio – slow
- Cruce de monos – monkey crossing (or could be another animal)
- Una via – one way
- Carretera en mal estado – road in bad condition
- Curvas peligrosas adelante – dangerous curves ahead
- No hay paso – don't enter
- No estacionar – no parking
- No virar en u – no U turns
- Calle sin salida – dead end
- Tarifa liviano – lightweight fare (you will see this at the tollbooths)

Road Conditions: City

In San Jose, most of the roads are paved with painted lines and signs. You need to be careful on freeways because roads can end with no warning and you'll have to merge with little space. In the smaller cities and beach towns, they don't normally have painted lines.

Road Conditions: Rural

If you are heading out of the city to more rural areas, a 4×4 or 4WD is highly recommended. Roads to national parks, some beaches, waterfalls and the little country towns are not normally paved and require a car that will be able to pass through muddy roads and potholes. Always make sure to check with your hotel and research if where you are going requires a 4x4. It is also common to see animals out on the road such as bulls, horses, goats, chickens and dogs.



Accidents

If you get in an accident or incident, do not leave the scene! Wait there until the police and insurance agent arrives, and if there is a fatality ,you also have to wait for the doctor on duty to pronounce. You are now legally allowed to move your car as long as both parties consent and if it is blocking traffic.

Make sure to contact your car rental company right away to report the incident. If you do not, you will have problems with the rental agency and insurance.

Tips for Driving

1. Don't let road rage take over
2. Be patient
3. Don't be alarmed if you are heavily tailgated. This is very common in Costa Rica whether you're going the speed limit or over it.
4. Drive defensively.
5. Don't speed!
 - Many roads are curvy without warning signs
 - When it rains, the roads can be very slippery
 - Driving tickets are very expensive here
6. If driving at night, be very aware of people walking and biking in the road. Many people don't wear reflectors at night
7. Always signal.
8. Don't pass the car in front of you unless you have experience and feel comfortable.
9. If someone flags you down, make sure it is a real police officer first.
10. If you get a ticket, pay it.
 - There is a new law that any unpaid ticket gets handled by immigration and you can be denied exit out of the country.

Road Conditions

Here are the road conditions for major touristic destinations.

1. Arenal and La Fortuna

The roads around Arenal and La Fortuna are in good condition and are paved to main attractions.

2. Monteverde

Monteverde is one of the destinations in Costa Rica where it is highly recommended to have a high clearance car in dry season or 4wd in rainy season. Route 606 is asphalted over all the way up to Santa Elena so if you are staying in a hotel in town, you can rent a sedan and make sure to book transportation to the attractions. If your hotel is outside Santa Elena downtown, it is best to rent a 4wd.

3. Puerto Viejo

The roads around Puerto Viejo are in fairly good shape for the most part. The main road that goes into town and along the beaches is paved. There aren't any painted lines but at least the road is paved.

4. Costa Ballena (Dominical, Uvita, Ojochal

For the Costa Ballena in the South Pacific, it is highly recommended to have a 4x4. Though the main road through this area, the Costanera Sur, is a very well paved road, all the roads up the mountains are unpaved so make sure to check with your host.

5. Manuel Antonio and Jaco

The roads in Manuel Antonio are all paved. Jaco is equally in good shape with paved roads in town.

6. Osa Peninsula

As a very remote destination in Costa Rica, a 4×4 is necessary. The main road down to the Osa Peninsula from the east side (Puerto Jimenez) is all paved but that's it. The road to Drake Bay has several bridges so no more river crossings, but is unpaved and hilly for much of the route.

7. Tamarindo

You don't need a 4×4 and can rent a sedan if you're only staying in Tamarindo.

8. Samara

Samara town has paved roads and doesn't require a 4×4. A section is unpaved but it is nothing bad and can be driven to with a sedan.

9. Santa Teresa/Mal Pais/Montezuma

Even if you're taking the ferry and going through Cobano, rent a 4×4 or

high clearance car. The roads around Santa Teresa are largely unpaved and are dirt roads. The road to Montezuma is paved but if you are driving to Cabuya, the road is unpaved with lots of potholes.

10. Playas del Coco/Hermosa/Ocotlán/Panama

The road to the Gulf of Papagayo beaches are all well paved. It is not necessary to have a 4x4.

11. Tenorio Volcano National Park (Rio Celeste)

From Bijagua to the park entrance, the road is asphalted over. However, in rainy season, it is recommended to have a 4wd as there are some concrete sections which is very slippery when wet and the road is narrow and curvy.



10

Handling Money

Costa Rican currency
and how to handle money

The Costa Rica currency is the colon (colones plural), named after Christopher Columbus. The Costa Rican currency symbol is a c with two lines across.

The exchange rate fluctuates often. As of 2024, it is around 500 CRC to 1 USD. However, exchange rates change daily and what is the exchange rate today, is not usually the same exchange rate the next day. It is important to check.

Coins:

5, 10, 25, 50, 100, and 500 coins. 5, 10 and 25 are not commonly used however 50, 100 and 500 coins still are.

Bills:

1,000 colones



10,000 colones



2,000 colones



20,000 colones



5,000 colones



Using USD in Costa Rica

USD are readily accepted in touristic parts of Costa Rica. You will notice that hotels, tours and many restaurants are quoted in USD in places like Tamarindo, Santa Teresa, Samara, Playas del Coco, Puerto Viejo, Jaco, Manuel Antonio.

When Should You Use Dollars or Colones?

- Pay in USD when things are quoted in USD. These are things like tours, shuttles, hotels, etc. Usually the more expensive products.
- Use colones for smaller priced items quoted in colones. These are supermarkets, souvenir stores, general stores, farmers markets, street vendors, taxis, buses and toll booths. You should also use colones if you happen to be in a rural area or the Central Valley cities.
- The buses that you pay when you get on (mostly the local ones in San Jose) do not accept any currency except colones.
- You can use dollars at gas station and large supermarkets even though they are priced in colones, they will give you your change back in colones and they should post the exchange rate they use somewhere near the front
- You can tip in either colones or dollars but dollars is preferable in the tourism industry.

Where to Exchange Money in Costa Rica

The best places to exchange money are banks and authorized exchange windows. You can also exchange at some hotels such as the big chains like Marriotts and Westins but most hotels are not allowed to. There is also a currency exchange in both SJO and LIR airports.

Other Currencies

We recommend exchanging your money into dollars or colones before going to Costa Rica because euros, pounds, Canadian dollars or any other foreign currency besides USD are not accepted. Very few banks will exchange other currencies so it is best to get USD or Costa Rican colones.

However, if you don't want to exchange into USD, you can exchange your money into colones at the airport exchange as they take other foreign currency. Even if prices are listed in USD, colones is accepted everywhere for everything, just make sure to calculate the correct exchange rate.

Tipping

Tip is called service tax with a flat rate of 10%. Tipping is completely optional in Costa Rica but very greatly appreciated.

- At a restaurant: Tip is usually included in the prices on the menu (it will say if it is or not). Look on the bottom of the menu to find out. It will say impuestos incluidos or i.v.i if included.
- Tours: Some tour places will have tip boxes but it is optional. The normal amount to tip is 10% and you can tip in colones or USD.
- Drivers: 10% is a good standard for tipping drivers as well.
- Hotels: You can leave 1000-2000 colones a day for maids.

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Resources & Discounts

Costa Rican currency
and how to handle money

Discounts

We have several discounts through our blog you can take advantage of.

Car Rental

We have an exclusive discount for Mytanfeet readers. Get a minimum of 10% off the car rental rate, two free additional drivers, free prepaid SIM card, free cooler, free surf racks, free baby & booster seats, 33% off GPS and many more extra benefits.

Please email us at web@mytanfeet.com to get more information on the car rental discount.

Tours Discount

We have 7% discounts for tours in La Fortuna, Guanacaste, San Jose, Manuel Antonio, Tortuguero, La Paz Waterfalls and Jaco.

We also have a \$10 USD discount for the Tortuga Island 1 day cruise. We have a \$5 USD discount for Tortuga Island cruise and The Springs hot springs day pass. We have additional discounts for Vandara Explore Park, Rainforest Adventures Braulio Carillo and Vista Los Sueños Park.

Please email us at web@mytanfeet.com for more information on our tour discounts!

Hotels Discount

We have a 10% discount for Adventure Inn (San Jose Airport hotel, use our promo code "mytanfeet" on the hotel's booking page) and 5% discount for Treebu Hotels in Monteverde (Hotel Poco a Poco, Sibulodge and Monteverde Country Lodge. Use promo code "mytanfeet" on their booking page.)

Please email us at web@mytanfeet.com for more information on our tour discounts!

A photograph of a person's feet resting on a white hammock. The hammock is strung over a body of water, and the ocean is visible in the background under a clear blue sky. The text 'A Note from the Authors' is overlaid in white on the image.

A Note from the Authors



Thank you for reading our ebook and subscribing to our blog!

We hope this guide was helpful to you and don't forget to stop by our blog Mytanfeet for more stories, tips and photos! To get updates on our current adventures, tips and advice, make sure to like our Facebook page as we post all of the good stuff there!

Thank you so much!

Yeison and Samantha

Mytanfeet