



Dear Koenen Family



We are glad to inform you that the arrangements for your upcoming trip in Costa Rica are confirmed. In order to make the most out of your experience, we kindly ask you to read carefully the information we've prepared for you in this document.

Please note that the following day-by-day plan is a preliminary version. As your travel date approaches, some details such as pickup times or transportation providers might change a bit. An updated version of your day-by-day will be given to you at your arrival if you have booked a transfer from airport with us, or via email in case you do not have this service included in your Costa Rica package. In any case, **please use your updated day-by-day travel plan** to learn the accurate information of all your services.

ERLEBE KIDS and Ecole Travel look forward to welcoming you in San Jose!

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INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS

San Jose



San José is the capital of Costa Rica and the political and economic heart of the country. Because of its location at an altitude of 1200 meter above sea level it has a delicious climate; the average temperature is about 25°C. The city became only important after the independence of Costa Rica in 1821. For this reason, you will not find colonial buildings in its center. Its charm however comes from the cheerful atmosphere that can be enjoyed in the streets: the notes played by street musicians, the trees flowering in all colors of the rainbow during the summer season, the refreshing parks that are like oasis of

quietness in the elsewhere buzzing city. So, what to do in San José?

- The main shopping street called “Avenida Central”. Here you can feel lively day by day of the Costa Rican people. They must cross the Main Street to get to their next bus connection or they are doing their shopping and selling.
- Bring a visit to the National Theatre, one of the most beautiful buildings in the city! There is also a small cafe inside the theatre where you can have a delicious local coffee. The building is considered the finest historic building in the capital of San José, and it is known for its exquisite interior which includes its lavish furnishings. Here you go back to in time.
- The Central Market is also absolutely worth a visit if you want to experience the real Costa Rican culture. Narrow paths, local fruits and vegetables, traditional dishes, souvenirs, and a lot more locally produced supplies, you will find it all in the indoor market. A place you cannot skip is the Lolo Mora's ice cream. They only have one flavor that they're producing for over 100 years! This must be delicious right?! Openings hours: 06:00 till 18:00 Monday to Saturday.
- Visit the famous Gold Museum in the city center and get immersed in the pre-Columbian past. San José offers several museums that are really worth a visit. other options are: he Jade Museum, the National Museum with a huge butterfly garden, Costa Rican art museum at many others.
- The vibrant neighborhood of Barrio Escalante is perfect for dining after a day of exploration." Some nice restaurant options are: Restaurant Arbol de Seda, Costa Rica Beer Factory Inc., Restaurant Apotecario, Restaurant Aguizotes, Restaurant Isolina
- Visit the many parks in the city. The local people like to gather in the parks in San José. Some of the parks

where you can always find something to see are: Parque Central, Parque Nacional and Parque Morazán. Or a bit more outside of the city center, Parque la Sabana.

- Artesanal Marketplace (Mercado de Artesanía Municipal) Here you can find more than 80 little shops that sell all kinds of typical souvenirs.

Tortuguero

Some call National Park Tortuguero the 'Costa Rican Amazon', due to the abundance of rivers, lagoons and marshes surrounded by an extended, evergreen jungle. Tortuguero is in the north-eastern corner of Costa Rica. Its remoteness is accentuated by the fact that it is only accessible by boat or plane. Boats are departing from a small dock that can be reached after a seemingly eternal road that winds through large banana plantations. Despite the quite long and sometimes tiresome trip, Tortuguero is part of the most popular spots for tourists visiting Costa Rica. It has gained fame as one of the most



important nesting sites in the world for the giant green sea turtles. Tortuguero is one of the best places in Costa Rica for the observation of wildlife. During the nesting season of the green sea turtle that runs between July and October, it is possible to book a night excursion and see the nesting by the females. Tortuguero is the only village in the widespread surroundings. It has around 1200 inhabitants, most of them of Afro Caribbean descent. They give the village a colorful and lively atmosphere. So, lots of options to do here!

- Explore the small town of Tortuguero, get to know the culture, have a chat with some locals and try some local food for the full experience!
- Surely you want to explore the exuberant nature of National Park Tortuguero. Its access to the trails in the jungle is located next to the village. Take boots with you if you are going to hike because the trails can be very muddy. Another fantastic way to see the park is hiring a local guide with a canoa and make a tour through the canals of the National Park. Highly recommended! The park is open every day from 6AM to 12MD and from 1PM to 4PM. Buy your tickets online: <https://serviciosenlinea.sinac.go.cr>
- The Cerro Tortuguero (Tortuguero Hill) is also absolutely worth a visit. You will hike for about 1,5 hours through the park of the inactive volcano that was formed about 1.8 billion years ago. Afterwards you will be rewarded by an amazing view over the canals of Tortuguero

Cahuita



Cahuita is a small village in the southern Caribbean of Costa Rica, region of the Costa Rica with an incredible cultural, ethnic and natural richness. Originally this stretch of land was only inhabited by indigenous people from different ethnic groups, like the BriBri and the Cabécar. Starting from 1872 immigrant workers arrived mainly from the island of Jamaica who constructed the railroad that connected the capital San José with the port of Puerto Limón at the Pacific Coast. They stayed working at the large banana plantations at the Caribbean Coast.

The cultural legacy of these ethnic groups can be enjoyed every day in Puerto Viejo in the music, the food, the language, and the dance. Have a look at what you can do in Cahuita:

- Undoubtedly a visit to the National Park Cahuita will be a highlight of your stay in Cahuita! Access to the park is very easy due to its location next to the village. The trail leads through the magnificent rainforest along the coast. There are different beaches where you can stop a moment and take a dive into the ocean. To enter the park, they will ask for a voluntary contribution. The park is open from 8AM until 4PM.
- Book a combined snorkel/hiking tour in the National Park: the coral reefs are very near to the coast and belong to the most beautiful in the country. You will go by boat to the snorkeling spot. After the snorkeling you will be dropped off at the Cahuita point to walk with your guide through the National Park of Cahuita.
- Try the excellent local restaurants where you can taste the Caribbean kitchen.
- Bring a visit to an indigenous village. Here you can experience the incredible cultural diversity of this region and you will learn more about the culture and customs of the BriBri indigenous people.
- The Reggae bar in Playa Negra If you like to dance, you cannot miss this place and dance to the local music.
- Delrita Patty. Try one of the local snacks at this famous local shop in the center of Cahuita. You can try the typical afro-limonese cuisine in Patí (with spicy meat), Plantin (sweet pastry), panbon or rice and beans. They are open every day, except on Wednesday.
- The Jaguar rescue center The Jaguar Rescue Center is a temporary or permanent home for ill, injured, and

orphaned animals. You will see monkeys, sloths, other mammals, birds, and reptiles. No animal can be touched. www.jaguarrescue.foundation/en-us/

- Chocolate Tour. This Bribri indigenous chocolate tour is offered by several tour operators.
- Car ride to next village Puerto Viejo. At approx. 20 min. by car you can find the lively village of Puerto Viejo with beautiful beaches and lots of restaurants where you can have dinner.

Boca Tapada



Boca Tapada is a tiny village next to the San Carlos river, a mighty river that lingers through the Northern Lowlands and eventually flow out into the Río San Juan, the river that forms the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. It is in the heart of the Maquenque region, which is a wildlife refuge consisting of large patches of pristine tropical rainforest, wetlands, and marshes. It is incredibly rich in biodiversity. The beautiful Green Macaw is maybe its most emblematic representant. Check out the possible activities below!

- A boat trip over the river San Carlos is an absolute highlight of a stay in the region. Not only enables it visitors to enjoy abundant wildlife, but it also brings them in touch with local ambience when they visit the border village at the conjunction of the Río San Juan and Rio San Carlos.
- Go for a birding tour and try to spot the endangered Green Macaw!
- Who doesn't love chocolate?! During a chocolate tour you can learn everything about the cocoa trees and the processes to make chocolate, but the most important part is the tasting! Yummy!
- Discover the dense forest of the Boca Tapada area in the early morning with a rainforest hike or on a guided hike in the night time to have the opportunity to see animals that are only active when the sun goes down.

Fortuna

La Fortuna is a well-known touristic center situated in the Northern Lowlands, in the shadow of the most famous volcano of Costa Rica: El Arenal. The village gained much popularity during the period of extreme activity of the volcano (1968 -2010). Even though the giant is dormant now, the surrounding natural attractions are of such a beauty that La Fortuna remains one of the most visited places in Costa Rica. La Fortuna has a lot of activities to offer. Here you can find a selection of activities that are popular in the region:



Some tips for activities in the area are:

- Visit National Park Arenal: this park is open from 8AM until 4PM and offers some trails that provide amazing views over the volcano and Lake Arenal. The entrance tickets can be bought directly at the entrance or on-line (www.sinac.go.cr)
- Hike over the Hanging Bridges: a trail of a few kilometers makes a loop through the secondary forest and lead over multiple fixed and hanging bridges of different heights. These bridges allow you to experience the rainforest at different levels: from the ground to the canopy.
- Visit one of the hot springs around the volcano and have a relaxing couple of hours.
- La Fortuna Waterfall (www.cataratalafortuna.com) To observe this splendid 70 meters high waterfall, you must pass a path of approximately 530 steps. Once on the foot of the waterfall you can take a refreshing swim in the clear waters of the Fortuna River.
- Catholic Church in the center of La Fortuna with its beautiful and colorful garden in front of it.
- Mirador El Silencio (www.miradorelsilencio.com)
- Coffee and Chocolate tour to observe the whole producing proces and of course taste the result.
- An Adventures tour like Canyoning/ Canopy or White-Water Rafting
- Nocturnal frog tour to see the different species of animals that are active during the nighttime.
- Horseback ride along the slopes of the volcano or to a wonderful waterfall where you can take a swim.
- Tour on the Arenal Lake by boat or kayak and observe the impressive volcano Arenal from a different angle.
- Day tour to the northern wetlands of Caño Negro.
- Arenal Volcano Ecological park (www.parqueecologicocr.com)

Samara

Samara is a small fishing village on the Peninsula of Nicoya in the province of Guanacaste. It is in front of a quiet bay with extended white sand beaches and shallow waters. The local people of Playa Samara and surroundings live from fishing and agriculture. It is common to see a 'sabanero' (cowboy) riding his horse while looking after the cattle at the hot pastures or a fisherman arriving at the shore with his boat full of fresh caught fish. In the last decades tourism has developed significantly, but Samara still maintains its authentic and tranquil character. The numerous



restaurants at the beach offer the visitors impressive sunsets from their table, which contribute to Samara as a dream destination. Samara offers a broad range of recreational activities:

- Surfing, paddle boarding, snorkeling, kayaking on Rio Oro through the mangroves or a sea kayak to Isla Chora in front of the beach
- Book a dolphin tour with the opportunity to observe the gracious animals! From July until October, you may have the luck of an encounter with a humpback whale.
- In the rainy season, trips from Samara are organized to Playa Camaronal (May to November) or Ostional (August to December) where the Olive Ridgley Turtles come ashore to lay their eggs in the warm sand.
- Relax on one of the gorgeous beaches in Samara or check out the beaches in a quieter area in Playa Carrillo at only 15 min. by car.
- *Horseback ride on the tropical beach of Playa Samara*

Monteverde



The famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve has a unique history. It was the first private reserve in Costa Rica, founded in 1972 by US Quakers who established themselves as immigrants in the cloudy hills around the town of Santa Elena in their search for a peaceful existence. Originally, they aimed to protect the clean water that was necessary to produce cheese. It turned out to be one of Costa Rica's natural hotspots attracting thousands of nature lovers from all over the world. There are now various large private reserves in this area that host beautiful birds like the Quetzal, the Bell Bird, and various species of the colorful

hummingbirds. Monteverde has so much to offer, have a look at the options:

- A visit to the world famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve is one of the great options, but if you prefer a less visited cloud forest, the Santa Elena Cloud Forest is an excellent alternative. (www.reservamonteverde.com).
- Birding is also a great option; thanks to all the different species you can spot! you can do this in several parks like Reserva Curicancha (www.reservacuricancha.com)..
- The popular ziplining tour is a local invention and there are various places where you can have some adrenaline kicks! There are also some spectacular hikes over Hanging Bridges.
- The Monteverde area produces highland coffee of high quality. Some finca's offer tours where you can learn about the growing and processing the 'golden bean'!
- Cheese Factory (<http://monteverdecheesefactory.com>). The community of Monteverde was founded by Quakers that made their living farming dairy cattle, and were reliant on the cheese factory. The cheese factory no longer does tours but you can still visit and look through the glass windows to see how the cheese is being made and go to the factory store where you can buy cheese and wonderful milkshakes and ice-cream!
- Children's Eternal Rainforest (www.acmcr.org)
- Coffee and Chocolate tour
- Horseback ride
- Selvatura Herpetarium with a variety of amphibians and reptiles
- Bat jungle exhibit (<https://batjungle.com/>)

- Butterfly garden (www.monteverdebutterflygardens.com)
- Monteverde Orchid garden (<https://monteverdeorchidgarden.com/>)
- Monteverde Frog pond

When you visit the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve please take in consideration that next to the entrance of the reserve there is no space to park. You must park your car at 1 km of the entrance of the reserve (there is a big sign) and then take the free shuttlebus from the parking to the entrance of the Reserve. The cost of the parking is \$5,- and includes the transportation to and from the Reserve.

We advise you to be at the parking around 07:00 am. This way you will have enough time to get the shuttle bus to the entrance, buy your entrance tickets and meet your guide Elvin Rodriguez at 7:30 am.

Some clients have the entrance of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve included. In this case in your day by day-program you will see a line that says: Centro Científico Tropical / Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve entrance fee. Here you will find the confirmation number of your prepaid entrance. There is a special waiting line at the reserve entrance, where you show your confirmation number, and they will give you the entrance tickets.

If you do not have the entrance of the Monteverde Cloud Reserve included in your package, you can buy your entrance tickets at arrival or buy the tickets on-line on the webpage

<https://cloudforestmonteverde.com/producto/day-pass/> , a couple of days in advance of their visit.

Manuel Antonio



Manuel Antonio beach is situated on the Central Pacific coast. It relates to the nearby town of Quepos by a spectacular, 7 kilometer long, windy road where some marvelous views over the ocean can be enjoyed. The region originally was a center of banana exportation. However, this industry collapsed due to a sickness that affected the banana plants. After the creation of National Park Manuel Antonio in 1972, the tourism activity started to grow. Nowadays Manuel Antonio is one of the most popular destinations of the country. The famous National Park hosts a great

variety of wildlife such as monkeys, sloths and coatis that are quite easily to spot. It is also easy to find bars or restaurants with extraordinary ocean views in Manuel Antonio.

Apart from the gorgeous beaches there is a lot to explore in and around Manuel Antonio:

- The National Park is a main attraction of course. It is worthwhile to contact a naturalist guide who will help you to look for and identify the abundant wildlife in the park. You can visit the park from Wednesday until Monday, from 7AM to 3AM. On Tuesdays the park is closed. It is necessary to buy your ticket on forehand online via the following link: <https://serviciosenlinea.sinac.go.cr/>
- Another popular activity is the catamaran tour at sunset that leaves from the port of Quepos.
- Especially in the rainy season rafting at the Savegre river is a spectacular experience.
- Visit the hidden beach Biesanz to experience a more local ambience and to spot beautiful coral and fishes. Or have a massage on the main beach after an exiting surf lesson.
- Kids saving the rainforest Wildlife Rescue Center (<https://www.kidssavingtherainforest.org/tour>) Here animals that are hurt or sick are helped to get better and will be placed back in nature when possible.
- *Kayak tour at Damas Island Mangrove Estuary*
- *Chocolate tour, Canopy tour, Horseback ride are tours that are widely offered in the area of Manuel Antonio and Quepos.*

Alajuela

Alajuela, or 'The city of Mangos', as it is locally known thanks to the magnificent mango trees that arise at the main square, is the second largest city in Costa Rica. It is situated in the heart of the country in the Central Valley, at just 19 kilometers from the capital city of San José. The single most important figure from the city was Juan Santamaría, who was born in Alajuela and gained status as the national hero during the national campaign in 1856 against the US filibuster William Walker. The international airport, just a few kilometers away, bears his name. Around the city the main agricultural activity consists in growing coffee, sugar growing, strawberries and ornamental plants. There are multiple things that you can do in this area:



- Visit the Poás Volcano, an active volcano that has one of the largest craters in the world. The volcano is situated in the national park that is named after this volcano. The park is open from 8AM to 4PM and you must book your tickets in advance: <https://serviciosonlinea.sinac.go.cr>.
- The La Paz Waterfall Gardens is an amazing one-day tour from your hotel! There are five big spectacular waterfalls, and, in the park, there is also an animal sanctuary, butterfly garden and hummingbird garden! Buy your tickets online.
- Are you a coffee lover? Learn more about coffee, its origin, roasting processes, and brewing methods during a tour through the Doka coffee plantation!

INFORMATION ABOUT COSTA RICA



National Parks/ reserves

- **National Park entrance fees:** the entrance fee for most National Parks is \$17 per person.
- If you need to buy tickets of the following National Parks, please book in the official SINAC link: <https://serviciosenlinea.sinac.go.cr/> .
 1. Tortuguero National Park.
 2. Manuel Antonio National Park (*closed on Tuesdays*).
 3. Rincón de la Vieja National Park (*closed on Mondays*).
 4. Carara National Park.
 5. Tenorio Volcano National Park.
 6. Arenal Volcano National Park.
 7. Poás Volcano National Park
 8. Irazú Volcano National Park
- When buying **Tortuguero National Park's tickets**, please consider the following information:
 - ✓ The sector of the National Park you will visit is called Canales.
 - ✓ You only need to buy the ticket for the day you are having tour inside of the park.
 - ✓ The same entrance ticket will work for as many tours you have on the same day.
- The Tortuguero hotels (Evergreen lodge/ Laguna Lodge/ Pachira Lodge/Aninga lodge/ Mawamba lodge/ La Baula Lodge/Caribbean Paradise Lapa Verde / Manatus Hotel / Turtle Beach) includes two tours in the package:
 - ✓ The boat tour to the National Park of Tortuguero
 - ✓ Walk through the village of Tortuguero

Some clients have an extra tour booked with other providers than the hotel. This can be the sunrise tour with Tortuguero Natural tours or any other provider (see your day-by-day program). Please indicate to the guide of the Tortuguero hotel, that you have extra tours outside of the hotel package, so that the guide can help you plan those two tours that are included in the package.

Tortuguero Natural tours (Simeon) will pick you up at the dock of your hotel at 05:45 hrs. So please wait for them at the dock.

- If you need to buy your tickets to **Manuel Antonio National Park**, we suggest you buy your tickets **as soon as you can**, to guarantee your space.

- If you need to buy your tickets to the **Monteverde cloud forest reserve**, you can do it at their website up to 2 days before your visit (<https://cloudforestmonteverde.com/es/tickets/>) or on the spot.
- In the following national parks, you must buy your tickets **directly at the entrance of the park**:
 1. Marino Ballena National Park – Uvita. (card or cash accepted)
 2. Cahuita National Park. (only cash accepted).
 3. Gandoca-Manzanillo wildlife refuge. (only cash accepted).
- If you have booked a tour to Corcovado National Park and/or Caño Island Biological Reserve, your entrance tickets are already included there. In case you are visiting a National Park that is not mentioned above, please feel free to ask us which the correct way is to book.
- Please make sure to always bring water when visiting a National Park, since it is not possible to buy anything once you are there. Keep in mind that single use plastic bottles are not allowed.

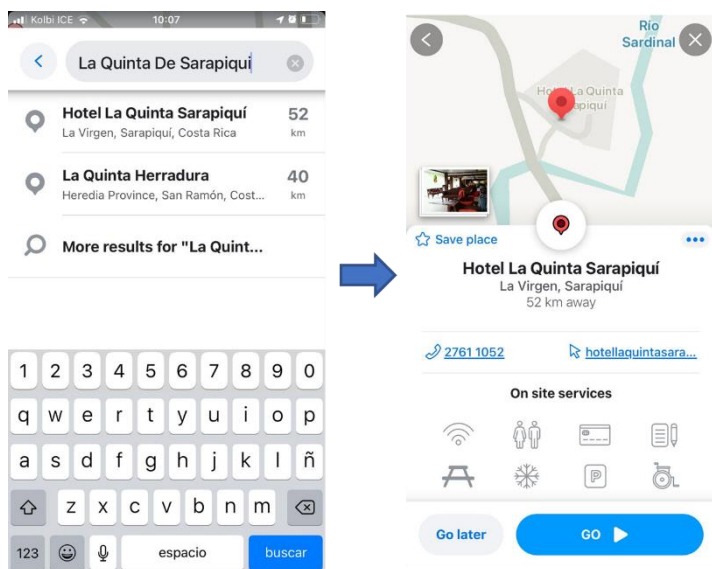
When visiting a National Park, we suggest you bring a copy of your passport as it might be required by the authorities to verify your identity.



Driving in Costa Rica

Driving in Costa Rica is safe and easy, and all international driving rules apply. In case you are self-driving, please consider the following:

- When you receive your car, the representative will ask you for your passport, drivers' license, and credit card. Make sure to have these documents at hand.
- Together with the representative, you must check the car carefully for any previous damage. You need to ensure that the gas tank is fully filled, the tires are in good conditions (do not forget to check the spare tire) and if the required safety kit is available.
- Wi-Fi is always included in your car, either by a portable device or integrated with the vehicle. We advise you ask the representative of the car rental company to help you set the wi-fi up.
- We suggest you download **Waze** or **Google Maps** in your cellphone, which are the best navigational apps to use in Costa Rica. When start driving from one location to the other, please consider the following recommendations:



✓ Write the name of the hotel/national park/ reserve you are going to, exactly as shown in your Day by-day program.

✓ Please check that the destination you are heading to is in the correct location. For instance: there is Trapp Family Hotel in Monteverde and Trapp family hotel in Alajuela.

✓ When driving in rural areas, it is normal that the wi-fi signal is lost. Please make sure to set your directions up from the moment you start driving, and

don't close the app until you've arrived at your destination. This way, even if the signal is lost for a while, the app will still show you the route to follow.

- A voucher of 100 USD will be made to your credit card. The car rental company will only make use of this guarantee in case of extra costs not covered by the full insurance (fines, tank not full etc.). If there are no extra costs at the end of the rental, this guarantee will be released of your credit card.
- We suggest you drive defensively: You don't know the roads and the unexpected situations that you may encounter. (Potholes on the roads, animals crossing, bikers on the highways, etc.). Please drive with even much more caution than you normally do.
- The biggest chance on rain or low hanging clouds (in the mountains) is in the hours of the afternoon. So, on travelling-days leave in the morning. It gets dark between 5:30 and 6:00 pm. Try to reach you destination before it gets dark.
- Most connections between the touristic destinations are in acceptable condition. However, especially in the rainy season you must be very alert on potholes that are not visible due to the rain. Sometimes there are so called 'derrumbes' or landslides that may cause the closure of roads from one moment to the other.
- Bridges in the countryside are narrower than the roads. The traffic from one of both sides must give priority. This is always indicated by a road sign: a triangle with red borders and the text: 'ceda el paso', that means: 'give priority'.



- If a police officer stops you and gives you a fine, never pay him/her directly. Please receive the fine and go to one of the public banks (BCR or Banco Nacional). We advise you to contact us or the rental car company so they can give you the right instructions.
- Try to park your car at designated parking places. Never leave any valuables, suitcases or electrical devices in the car. At restaurants or nearby beaches, there are normally '*guachimans*': persons who will keep an eye on your car and receive a tip on your return. ₡500 to ₡1.000 is a good tipping amount for them.
- You can find gas stations in most of the big destinations around Costa Rica. All gas stations accept credit or debit cards. We suggest you to be always prepared with enough fuel. Also, please consider that your car must be returned with a full tank.
- Hopefully you do not need this information, but if you are involved in an accident, please do not move your vehicle. You must report the accident by calling 911 and wait until a police officer arrives and prepares a report. Call to your car rental company right away, as they have offices all over the country and they can assist you with the accident.



Money & Spending

The Costa Rican national currency is the colon. Besides colones, American Dollars are accepted almost everywhere. It is better to bring small notes (\$1, \$5, \$10 or \$20). Euros or English pounds can only be changed in some banks, and you probably will have to make long lines to change your money.

- **Exchange rate:** the colon is not a strong and stable currency. It is connected to the USD and suffers changes sometimes daily. To know what the exchange rate of the day is, we advise you to check inside of the banks or on the following webpage: <https://www.bccr.i.cr/SitePages/default.aspx>
- **Credit card:** Paying with credit card is possible in almost every place. VISA and Master Card are widely accepted. American Express is not commonly accepted. Please note that Costa Rican cash machines will first dispense money and then your card, which is different from other countries. Some travelers take their money and forget to get their card
- **Taxes:** Restaurants include 13% taxes and 10% service costs in their prices. Please note that these additional costs are not always included in the prices in the menu, they are charged when paying the bill.
- **Tipping & Bargaining:** Tipping is usual in hotels for maids, bellboys, drivers, and guides (in short: people offering services in the tourist sector). Tipping is not usual for people offering service in the non-tourist

sector (supermarkets, taxi drivers, public buses). Bargaining for better prices is not part of the culture. Please, just limit this to the souvenir shops. It is very easy to offend a Tico if you try to do it elsewhere!



Climate

Costa Rica is a country with a tropical climate. We have only 2 seasons per year, the dry & the rainy season. The first one is from December to May and it's considerate as summertime here. The rainy season is from May to November, considered as winter, although it will not be cold. The climate normally is unpredictable and changes a lot, we would like to recommend you bring your jacket always with you.



Water

The water in Costa Rica is drinkable all over the country. We do advise to be more careful with drinking the water on the Caribbean side of the country, Tortuguero, Cahuita and Puerto Viejo. Most hotels offer water in bidons at the reception or the restaurant, where you can refill your reusable bottle.



Protection against insects and sunburns

In Costa Rica you will find all kinds of insects during the day and the nighttime. We advise you to use insect repellent during the whole day or use long pants and shirts with long sleeves in the nighttime.

Although the hotels you are staying in, are clean hotels, insects can appear as most hotels are in the middle of nature. Most insects will not harm you at all but if you feel there are insects or other animals in your hotel room you do not like, please contact the reception of your hotel so they can help you out.

As you are in a tropical country close to the Equator, the sun can be very strong. Even on a cloudy day we would like to recommend you use a strong sunblock.



Safety

Costa Rica is quite a safe country to travel through, but it is important that you always will be alert on your belongings and that you follow the next recommendations:

- Do not walk through the center of San José with a lot of money. Don't wear valuable jewelry and be cautious with cameras. In general, you do not have to take too much cash with you: there are sufficient cash machines available where you can get cash money.

- In hotels, please make use of safety boxes. In the case these are not available in your room you can always leave valuables in the safety box of the reception of the hotel.
- It is important to leave your car at a safe parking lot. At local restaurants there is almost always someone who keeps an eye on your car in change for a small fee
- **Theft:** In case of a theft of one of your belongings you must contact the regional OIJ (*Organismo de Investigación Judicial*). Here you can declare the theft and the police will make a declaration.
- When your **Passport is lost or stolen**, the procedure at the Embassy to get an emergency passport might take more than two weeks. When you are traveling through the United States the paperwork at the USA embassy might take another two weeks. That is why it is VERY IMPORTANT to NEVER leave your passport unattended. Always carry your passport and other important belongings with you. NEVER LEAVE THEM IN THE CAR. You can also keep your valuables in the safe deposit box in your hotel room, or at the reception of the hotels.



Communication

SIM cards for local calls are best to get in San José. There are various stores (Kölbi, Movistar, Claro) where you can buy them. We suggest you the pre-paid ones SIM cards. Do not forget to bring your passport so you can have one. It is possible to fill your sim cards with credit in most of the supermarkets around the country, just by giving your phone number.

WIFI is available in almost all hotels, at least in the reception area.



Typical Costa Rica

- **Pura Vida!**

Costa Rica has its own slang. It is called: 'Pachuco'. The most famous expression from this 'street-Spanish' is 'Pura Vida!' literally: 'Pure Life'. The 'Ticos' (another expression, meaning: 'Costa Ricans') use this at random to express a positive feeling or position. If someone is asking you how you are, 'Pura Vida!' is an excellent answer.

Soda: Soda's are simple lunchrooms (often without license to sell alcohol!) that you will find all over the country. Inside and outside San José these are the best and cheapest places to get the traditional Costa Rica dishes costs between \$6 and \$10.

- **Traditional Costa Rican dishes**

Below you will find some dishes you must have tasted before you leave:

Arroz con Pollo (con Camaron etc.) Rice with chicken (or shrimp, palm heart or other combinations). Really tasteful when spiced with the one and only Salsa Lizano. Costa Ricans swear by it!

Casado. Typical lunch plate consisting of rice, beans, plantain, salad of cabbage and some pasta, all combined with chicken, beef, fish or pork.

Tamal. This dish is traditionally served during Christmas but is available in Costa Rica's the whole year around. It is made from a mass of maize, filled with peas, paprika and little pieces of chicken or beef. The mass is wrapped in banana leaves and cooked on a wooden fire.

Gallo Pinto. The inevitable typical breakfast that is served in any hotel in Costa Rica: rice and beans, a little spiced, and eaten in combination with sour cream, tomato, and scrambled eggs. Don't miss it!

- **A little Spanish course...**

This is an example of a conversation that every day is repeated a thousand times in Costa Rica:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • How are you? Everything fine? | Cómo está? Todo bien? |
| • I'm alright! How about you? | Bien, gracias, y usted? |
| • Pura Vida, thanks God | Pura Vida! Gracias a Dios |
| • Okay, it is a pleasure to see you, I wish you all the best | Bueno, me alegra verle, qué le vaya bien! |
| • Thank, greets to your family! | Gracias, saludos a la familia! |

Costa Ricans like courtesy. It means that if you enter a place, it is usual to say something, even if it is just a simple 'Hola!' (Hello!). It also is a custom to give a sign of appreciation if someone is doing you a favor or offering you a service. If you order a Coca-Cola, it is: 'Una Coca-Cola por favor'. And if the waiter brings you the drink it is always: 'gracias!'

In Costa Rica a lot of hands are shaken (and a lot of kisses given). If you meet someone you met before and there is a beginning of knowing each other: Shake hands!

If you have a friendly relationship with a woman or girl, there is nothing strange to give her a kiss when you greet her or say goodbye. But attention! Just one kiss is given in Costa Rica.

It is handy to learn by heart a few words to be able to express yourself politely. It makes contact with the local people so much easier.

Hello! How are you?	Hola! Como está?
I'm fine, excellent!	Pura Vida!
Please	Por Favor
Thank you	Gracias
Here you are	Tome
With pleasure	Con mucho gusto!
Very well!	Muy bien!
Goodbye	Hasta Luego!
The bill please!	La cuenta por favor!
What is your name?	Cómo te llamas?
I am from England/Scotland	Soy de Inglaterra / Escocia
Good morning	Buenos días
Good afternoon/night	Buenas tardes/noches



Spotting animals in Costa Rica

When you visit Costa Rica, you expect to see a lot of wildlife. To have the best result observing animals in their natural habitat, the most important characteristic you need are patience and be lucky.

The best time to see animals is early in the morning at sunrise, or in the afternoon around 16:00 hrs. Animals are more active at these hours, as it is quieter and cooler. Many animals are only active during the night. There are special night tours available, to get a chance to observe these animals.

Stay alert always because animals appear unexpected. If you lose your attention, it is quite possible to miss unexpected chances! Animals are not just living in the National Parks, also around your lodge or hotel it is possible to see beautiful animals and birds.

We advise you to hire the services of a naturalist guide with telescope for your hikes in the National Parks. In general, they are worth the fees they are asking. They let the forest live for you! If you decide to hike on your own, look around very well and use some good binoculars to see the animals more closely.

The best way to visit a National Park is to walk as quiet as possible in small groups.

- How can I contribute?

Most visitors to Costa Rica come to see our nature and wildlife. A few simple acts can help to make your impact on nature as small as possible, so visitors after you can enjoy the same nature and wildlife.

Avoid disturbing the wildlife. Do not use flashlights when taking pictures.

- Do not feed the animals.
- Do not take shells from the beach.
- Do not leave garbage in the parks or on the beaches.
- Try to use as less as possible plastic bottles. Use a bottle that you can refill. At most of the hotels you can in bidons with fresh water.
- Participate in the sustainability program of your hotel: recycle and reduce the use of water and electricity. Do not leave the air-conditioning on when you are not in the room.



Ecole Travel & Sustainability

- **Certification CST/ Marca País**

Tourists from over the world come to Costa Rica to see and experience its unique nature. The challenge is to preserve this nature and its extraordinary biodiversity. The numbers of tourist arriving are higher each year. That means: more hotels, more garbage, more crowd in the national parks. In short, nature in Costa Rica is under pressure.

A lot of hotels and tour operators are conscious about this and have made sustainability part of their policy. During your roundtrip you will get to know recycling programs, the use of energy reducing bulbs, invitations in your hotel room to participate in the hotels energy and water reducing policies.

A lot of hotels use solar energy, have their own plant for the treatment of wastewater and use locally grown products in their kitchen. Less visible but even important are the efforts made to involve the local population in their sustainable policies.

The Costa Rica state started a certification program to acknowledge these activities and to make them more visible for the public. The program is called CST (Certification for Sustainable Tourism). In this area Costa Rica is leading neighboring countries try to setup something similar.

Ecole Travel (certificated with Elite CST) tries to use as much certified hotels as possible in your itinerary. Ecole Travel compromised itself with the initiatives of the country to promote Costa Rica through its multiple attractions. For this reason, Ecole Travel is accredited by the Costa Rican Tourism Institution to use the country brand: Essential Costa Rica in its marketing and publicity campaigns.

- **Ecole Travel / Code of conduct against sexual exploitation**

Ecole Travel has signed the code of conduct against sexual exploitation. This code is promoted by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and ECPAT International that seeks participation and compromise to discourage and sanction the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents associated to tourism.

Thank you for your attention and enjoy Costa Rica!

Best, Ecole Travel Team

