

Travel

Exploring World Class Destinations on a Budget

In Costa Rica, natural attractions get top billing

In Costa Rica, it is easy being green. Flora and fauna are the main attraction in this developing country. Discover the awesome silence of the rainforest and within minutes, bask in the sun on white sand beaches. Meet the large community of American expatriates and get to know the ticos (Costa Ricans) themselves. Soon this peaceful country will feel like home.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

First decide whether you want to visit a particular region of Costa Rica, or if you have more time and can visit a couple of areas. To get between destinations, use overland transport as much as possible. You'll get a better view and a stronger taste of the country and culture.

Many travelers head for the Nicoya Peninsula on the Pacific side, known for its surfing spots and white sand beaches. Colorful Montezuma is one of several bustling beach villages. Nearby, visitors can view wildlife like armadillos and anteaters. Aventuras de Montezuma can arrange kayaking, snorkeling and horseback tours (most activities start at about \$25). Or discover the area on your own by bicycle (about \$15 per day).

Head inland to cool off in the cloud forest of Monteverde where you can take the "Skywalk" (about \$45) and view the forest canopy and its inhabitants from 130 feet in the air. A half-day away, view the live lava show at Arenal Volcano. Take a night tour, or watch the fireworks while bathing in the Tabacon Hot Springs (about \$15).

Afro-Caribbean and indigenous culture give the Caribbean side of Costa Rica a completely different feel. Start with Tortuguero, where the giant green sea turtles nest from July through October and hundreds of canals offer up-close encounters with toucans, howler monkeys, sloths and caymans. The best turtle tours start at 10 p.m. and cost about \$15. Expect to pay about \$10 for quiet canoe trips through the canals.

Further up the Caribbean coast, the town of Puerto Viejo is one of the coolest hangouts, with gorgeous beaches and the vast expanse of the

Bribri Indigenous Reserve nearby. Personalized tours to learn about Bribri life and customs cost \$50.

ENTERTAINMENT

Costa Ricans aren't heavy drinkers but they know how to have a good time. There are plenty of Latin dance clubs, as well as open-air bars that have a live DJ or musicians. On the Caribbean coast, you'll hear reggae everywhere you go. At most local spots you'll find residents and tourists enjoying the evening together.

FOOD & DINING

The national dish, gallo pinto, is about the closest you'll come to authentic local food. The rice with black beans dish often comes with your choice of fish, eggs, or chicken. On the Caribbean side, it's livened up with coconut milk.

Many of the best restaurants are owned by foreign nationals and offer a wide range of international fare.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In Montezuma, save money on clean, comfortable lodging at Horizontes de Montezuma. Rooms have balcony views of jungle and ocean, starting at just \$39 per night for double occupancy (www.horizontes-montezuma.com).

Close to the Monteverde cloud forest is the new Trapp Family Lodge, a family-friendly inn with balcony views of the forest. Rates for two people start at \$70 per night (www.monteverde-info.com/trapp).

On the Caribbean side, Caribblue is a B-n-B-style resort with gorgeous bungalows built of indigenous tropical woods surrounded by lush jungle, just a minute's walk from the beach. Rooms start at \$65 per night (www.caribblue.com).

Be sure to add 16.39 percent tax to all accommodation prices, which are stated above in US dollars. For more information visit www.visitcostarica.com.



Costa Rica's Arenal Volcano rises dramatically above the rain forest canopy.

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Did You Know?

April through November is the "green season" in Costa Rica. Rates on everything from lodging to transportation to tours and attractions may be lower during this time. And even though this period sees more rainfall than usual, it's usually a "tropical" rain, meaning the sun will shine soon.

Expert Travel Tip

Courtesy of Daniella Porri, Manager,

United Nations Travel: "It's best to have at least your first and last night booked in advance. Keep your remaining nights open when traveling outside of holiday weeks. Locals and fellow travelers will have the best advice on any new inn/lodge or the best-kept secret in accommodations. If you are traveling at peak times, make refundable reservations that can be changed at the hotel. That will allow you the flexibility to explore other options."

Reader Travel Tip

Jackie Mimless of Plymouth Meeting

writes: "When two people are traveling together, pack some of your clothing in the other person's suitcase and vice versa. If your luggage gets lost, you will still have some clothes."

\$25 For Your Tip

Tell us about the travel bargains you've found. If we publish your item, we'll send you \$25 and credit you by name. Include your address and phone number, as well as the name, address and phone number of any facility you mention, for fact-checking purposes. Photos are welcome. Send items to: Travel, c/o Hollister, 3 E. Wynnewood Rd., Wynnewood, PA 19096-1917; or email [contact us@hollister1.com](mailto:us@hollister1.com) (type "Travel" in the subject line).