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Costa Rica Experience

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Costa Rica Experience **Trip Code:** CRXC **Duration:** From 4 weeks

Trip Highlights

- Volunteer on our awesome Sea Turtle conservation project
- Get off the beaten track and explore 'real' Costa Rica
- White water rafting down a class 2-3 rapid, anyone?
- Surf and snorkel in one of the best spots in Central America!

Overview

If you're looking for an awesome four week adventure, then our action packed, epic Costa Rica Experience is what you've been looking for! Starting in the buzzin' capital of San Jose in the centre of Costa Rica, we will take all of you Real Gappers around the country of our dreams- from the gorgeous Pacific coast, which just so happens to be one of the best surf spots in Central America, to the epic Arenal volcano, one of the most active in the Americas and then down to Panama and the fantastic Bocas del Torro islands for a chill out sesh!

In amongst all of the travelling action, you'll get your very own slice of adventure... (White water rafting? Surfing? Snorkelling and Kayaking? Yes please!). You'll also get the chance to help out on some of our most rewarding volunteer projects, from sea turtle conservations to helping build new homes for disadvantaged local people. It really is awesome to see how far your hard work really goes. So if you're up for an adventure filled, jam packed itinerary of a lifetime - the Costa Rica Experience is for you!

Want to know more? For full trip itinerary and detailed information CLICK HERE.

Destination Info

It's blatantly obvious why Costa Rica is loved by travellers from all over the world. It has something for everybody, from the mind blowing beaches of the Pacific Coast, to the untouched rainforest which covers a large amount of the country.

With over 27% of the country being made up by protected habitats and national parks, Costa Rica is a playground for nature lovers- especially those which thrive on exploration. Your experience of Costa Rica will encompass everything from its rich colonial heritage to its colourful towns and vibrant, friendly people.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival

On arrival you'll soon be welcomed by one of our friendly in-country representatives, collecting you from the airport and taking you to your accommodation in Alajuela. If your flight arrives before 6pm you're in luck- we host an awesome welcome dinner in a great local restaurant. This will be the chance to tickle your taste-buds with a first experience of true Costa Rican cuisine. Depending on your arrival time there may also be some free time before the meal for you to kick back and chill.

Day 2: Getting Started

Rise and shine! It's going to be an early start as we begin with your orientation sesh. Between the hours of 8.00am and 8:30am a representative will collect you from the hostel, walking you through the town of Alajuela to the Real Gap offices, you'll be able to grab some breakfast here. The orientation session generally runs from 8.30am until approx 10.30am with a 15 minute break, so you'll get to learn loads about the area and ask any questions you may have.

After the orientation we'll get stuck straight in, taking you to the Pacific coast. This is the location of your first

volunteer placement with the Turtle Conservation Project. You could be in one of two locations- Junquillal or Zapotillal (...you'll be given a packed lunch, so don't panic about food!).

Day 3-6: Turtle Conservation

Today's the day! In front of you will be the opportunity to make a real difference! Spending five nights at the volunteer house, you'll be sure to make some great mates. Duties at the turtle conservation can vary depending on what needs to be done at the time, but remember… now is the time to get stuck in! You could be patrolling the beach, helping to clear the area, or releasing baby turtles into the sea!

Day 7: Surfers Paradise

We'll be leaving the camp straight after breakfast, taking public transport to Playa Grande. Before we can start paddling out at the surf camp there will be a safety briefing on the beach. From here out we're free to catch some waves with the help of our professional instructors.

Day 8: Kayak Adventure

It's another early start today but well worth it! Once we've met our kayak guides we'll be taking to the calm waters of Tamarindo estuary. This is a great chance to spot some wildlife! Frequently spotted are usually monkeys, iguanas, crocodiles and many species of birds.

The afternoon is free for you to enjoy the beach, or check out the nearby town of Tamarindo!

Day 9: Bijagua

Today we'll be travelling by public transport up into the mountains, to the little village of Bijagua in the northern part of Costa Rica. We'll be staying in 'cabinas'- comfortable, rustic accommodation close to the centre of the village and all amenities.

Day 10: Rainforest Adventure

After a hearty local breakfast, we'll venture up into a private rainforest reserve to see the tree canopy from above! This part of the forest boasts three hanging bridges to walk across- so it's an awesome way to see all of the wildlife that Costa Rica has to offer! The hike will take about 2 hours and in the afternoon you'll have the option of visiting a local farm, whose owners pride themselves on rescuing all kinds of flora and fauna.

Want to get up close and personal with a boa constrictor or a red eyed tree frog? This is your chance! (Optional extra). If that's not your thing feel free to take the time to relax, taking in the sounds of the cicadas and breath-taking views over the mountains!

Day 11: Saddle Up!

You've guessed it! It's an early start today so we'll grab a quick breakfast at the lodge. Once ready we'll head to the town of Bijagua this time to pick up some horses! The ride is about two hours but this isn't your everyday ride, oh no! We'll be riding through luscious jungle and rivers.

Once we reach Volcan Tenorio National Park we'll continue on foot up through the trails of the park, until we reach the majestic Rio Celeste (also known as the 'blue lagoon') with a waterfall and picturesque viewpoint. The hike takes around 3 hours but at the end of it is a traditional lunch awaiting us in a local 'soda' (small Costa Rican diner serving local specialities).

Day 12: Volcano!

After breakfast (priorities first!) we will continue our travels by public transport to the epic Volcano Arenal – a must see on any trip to Costa Rica! The Arenal volcano is one of the most active volcanoes in the Americas. We'll stay in a family run hotel with an amazing view of the perfect conical volcano outside! You'll have some free time to explore the charming town of La Fortuna, there are plenty of souvenir shops, cafès and internet cafes - or you can treat yourself to a massage after yesterday's hike!

Day 13: White Water Rafting Baby!

Today is the day we go white water rafting! Time to let your adrenaline junkie out! After getting picked up from the hotel we'll head to our class 2 - 3 river! First understandably comes a safety briefing but then comes this fun and action packed experience. Lunch is included on this full day out.

Day 14: Hiking and Hot Springs!

We now get to venture closer to the Arenal Volcano! First is a drive round to the other side, entering the National Park. After a short hike through the dry tropical forest, we'll reach the old lava flows from the huge eruption of 1968. Once we've explored this area it's time to move up to the observation area; if we're lucky the ground might begin to tremble with columns of smoke, ash and lava providing a spectacular natural firework display.

It's time to relax as we finish the day at Baldi Hot Springs – natural thermal pools at the bottom of the smouldering volcano! There are 23 different pools of varying temperatures along with water slides, saunas, wet bars and botanical gardens, all for you to explore and enjoy! You may even be able to spot lava flowing from the continuously erupting crater in the distance.

Day 15: Zip Wiring!

Today we have to say goodbye to La Fortuna and the volcano (sad times). We're heading back into the hills again...although not hiking this time! The day is going to be spent on a zip wire tour! The forest is only around an hour from San Ramon up in the mountains. In total there are nine platform cables, a Tarzan swing and three extra-long cables, so it's going to be a mega fun day! Whizzing through the canopy on a zip-wire is an experience not to be missed!

Day 16-20: House Building for the Locals of San Ramon

We've hit another part of the trip where our efforts really count, so it's time to pull those socks up guys! Building new homes for the underprivileged is not only super rewarding, it's also a fantastic opportunity for you to meet the locals and experience their culture!

The work schedule for the construction site will have been discussed on arrival in Costa Rica, ensuring you have a suitable and fulfilling role. Transport to and from your building site is included during your days of project work.

Day 21: San Jose

After a productive few days it's time to say goodbye to our new families and friends, you'll get to see just how touched and thankful the locals are of your efforts! We're taking public transport into the capital city of San Jose. After checking into our quiet hostel, we'll then go for a walk around the Cultural Square, artisan market, and shopping streets. Perfect for buying some souvenirs!

Day 22: Caribbean Coast

An early start today, but you're used to these by now! Of course we're jumping on public transport over to the Caribbean coast - and the beautiful beach town of Puerto Viejo! You've got the whole day to explore whether by bicycle, or just hanging out on the black sand beach.

Day 23: Free Day

Today you have a free day, make the most of it and soak up those Caribbean vibes! You can visit a nearby sloth sanctuary, sharpen up your newly learnt surf skills, get back on that bike, or just hang out on the beach. Whatever you feel like but tomorrow we're off to Panama!

Day 24: Panama Here We Come!

Today we're saying goodbye to Costa Rica (for a few days anyway). We're off to explore the islands off the coast of Panama!

It's around a two hour journey down to the border of Panama and yep you guessed it, we're going by public transport. After completing all the necessary immigration requirements, we're free to explore another country- Woop Woop!

Once in Panama, we'll travel by minibus down to the docks where we hop into a water taxi to the beautiful islands of Bocas del Toro. From the border crossing, the journey is approximately 1.5 hours- which will fly by in no time!

Our home for the next few days? A quiet hostel located on the main island of Isla Colon with an amazing decking area over the ocean. It's going to be an epic few days! The rest of the afternoon is free for exploring, swimming or going for that well deserved cocktail!

Please note that Immigration costs are not included. Typically you should budget $10 (US) for the crossing.

Day 25: Tour of the Islands

Today is a full-on day as we take a tour of the islands. First stop, Dolphin Bay, here we'll hopefully see some friendly dudes playing in the wake of our boat!

We then head off to Coral Cay – this place is the one for snorkelling, with some pristine reefs around. After snorkelling we'll stop for some lunch with a view looking out over the ocean.

Next stop is Red Frog beach (admission $3, not included). A visit to this amazing private white sand beach is simply mesmerising, some would say unmissable! To wrap things up, we'll take a second snorkel of the day over the drop off at Hospital Point.

Day 26: Free Day

A free day in Bocas! Go and explore the islands! There are multiple tours available if you fancy it - a chocolate tour where you can make your own chocolate, a boat trip to Bird Island or as usually feel free to take some time-out and do your own thing.

Day 27: Last Day in Panama!

Today we're going to head off to the ultra-remote Zapatillas Islands, a pristine marine national park (what a way to finish off Panama). This is approximately a one hour boat ride from Bocas del Toro. You'll be spending the day on these islands, so explore until your heart is content people! ($5 park fee not included).

Day 28: Goodbye Panama!

Today we'll be saying goodbye to Panama ('bye Panama!'). We're heading back to the capital city of San Jose. There is still plenty of immigration to pass through so keep those passports handy!

We'll arrive back in San Jose during the afternoon, once there we'll jump on a bus back to the hostel in Alajuela. This is where our awesome adventure started four weeks ago.

Tonight we've got a farewell dinner- this will be the perfect time to reminisce about the awesome memories you've shared together on the Costa Rica Experience! Warning, we have seen tears before.

Day 29: Farewell

Today's the day we all have to say goodbye. Boo. No activities are planned for this day, but of course we'll drop you all back off at San Jose airport for your flights home!

Accommodation

The types of accommodation will vary throughout the programme. You'll be staying in a mixture of hostels, guesthouses and homestay accommodation.

Programme Services and Facilities

Internet

There is Internet access at the backpackers hostel, and also at the Real Gap office in Alajuela, which is available to all customers during orientation. You will also find Internet cafés around the country, which usually charge around $1.50 - $3 per hour.

Telephone

There are plenty of public telephones in Alajuela and all over Costa Rica. These will usually operate with phone cards, which you can purchase from small shops and kiosks. Please check that the phone card you buy is suitable for international calls.

Your mobile phone may or may not work in Costa Rica, depending on your network, and if it does, please be aware that in many areas you may not always get a signal. It is not possible to buy a SIM card in Costa Rica unless you are a landline owner, which can take up to four months to achieve, so please bear this in mind when deciding whether or not to take your mobile phone.

The international dialling code for Costa Rica is +506.

Laundry

Laundry facilities will depend on your location; it is advisable to take some travel wash with you just in case.

Meals

Some meals are included in your programme, these are noted on your programme itinerary. On the days where meals are not included this is a fantastic opportunity to sample some of the traditional local dishes that Costa Rica

and Panama has to offer; food is extremely cheap to buys in both countries.

What's Included

- Airport transfer
- All accommodation
- Meals according to itinerary
- Welcome and farewell dinner
- All tours and activities as per itinerary
- 24 hour emergency help and support

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Travel insurance
- Some meals
- Alcoholic beverages
- Personal Expenditure

Is This Trip For You?

Volunteer Requirements

- No Spanish is required to take part in this programme, however a basic knowledge will be beneficial to you and the local people that you will be working with.
- Volunteers should be physically fit and be able to swim with confidence.
- Flexibility, enthusiasm and a willingness to work is always welcome!

Additional Information

Your Volunteer Placements

The Costa Rica Experience gives you the chance to take part in a four-week adventure in this amazing country. The programme includes a two short volunteer project placements and a number of excursions.

Sea Turtle Conservation Caribbean Coast
Play a part in the effort to preserve one of the planets oldest species on this isolated beach on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Volunteers are desperately needed to help patrol the beach at night time looking for nesting female turtles – and to relocate her eggs to a safe location inside a custom built hatchery. Without volunteers help, most nests would be poached by humans, eaten by wild animals or washed away in the tide – so every helping hand is appreciated!

The project itself is run by a local NGO, and receives no funding. Therefore be prepared to get back to basics on a beautiful deserted beach! Our accommodation for the week is a rustic style wooden house on the beach, with dorm rooms for the volunteers.

In order for these conservation projects to work, they need a steady flow of enthusiastic volunteers, not only to work directly with the turtles, but also to keep the logistics of the camp running. This means that there is plenty of day time work to be done as well. Although tiring, the memories of releasing dozens of baby turtles back into the ocean are unforgettable!

Generally volunteers are responsible for the following:

- Supervising the turtle hatchery in short shifts 24 hours a day
- Night patrols
- Necessary maintenance on the existing volunteer house
- Collecting scientific data of both adult and baby turtles
- Collection of food and fresh water for volunteer consumption (organized by project host)

Building Houses for underprivileged families in San Ramon
A rewarding way to help a family in need – help build them their own home!

Our building projects work in conjunction with Fundacion Costa Rica – Canada Rural housing programme, to help families with low income become home owners. The foundation supports families from the first application for housing, helping them fulfill the necessary requirements, support during the construction process, and collecting the monthly loan payments.

The Fundación para la Vivienda Rural Costa Rica-Canadá has left its footprints in the rural areas, changing the lives of the people and promoting a substantial improvement in each of the communities and families.

Places that didn’t have public services such as drinking water, electricity and telephone, now have them. Also, places with no adequate access roads, now have the possibility of improving them.

Volunteers play a huge part in the whole construction process. Taking instruction from a local foreman and local builders, we are there from start to finish, from digging the foundations, mixing cement, brick laying and leveling floors – this really is giving back to the communities as you see the results of your hard work each day!

Depending on which stage the house is at you may get involved in some of the following tasks:

- Digging foundations and drainage trenches
- Digging the septic tank
- Mixing cement (by hand!)
- Constructing earthquake supports
- Bricklaying

- Plastering
- Construction of roof trellises

What is a Real Gap 'Experience'?

A Real Gap Experience is a guided group tour that'll show you the best of what a country has to offer. You will have some free time, but a member of our awesome in-country team will be available 24/7 and they'll take you on a journey of a lifetime – we'll take in a mix of iconic locations and 'off the radar' secret spots so you get an all-round experience. All of our Real Gap Experiences include super cool cultural experiences (cookery lesson anyone?) and some include volunteer work so you can give back to a local community.

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore you may not need all of the listed items on your travels.

Personal Admin

- Passport, travel insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money
- Cash for airport departure tax
- Proof of inoculations - including yellow fever - please speak to your GP about any other necessary immunizations
- Guidebook on country – recommended Lonely Planet or Footprints

General

- Camera / Film / Batteries
- Notebooks and pens, diary etc
- Torch / Extra Batteries
- Sunglasses
- Pocket-knife (comes in handy for general use – please do not pack in your hand luggage!)
- Water bottle – at least one litre
- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use
- A sleeping bag liner (in some accommodation sheets are not included)
- Mosquito Net (if required)
- Personal enjoyment - books, cards, music etc
- Personal hygiene items (deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrush etc)
- Spanish dictionary, verb book etc

Clothing

- Hat
- Comfortable walking shoes
- A pair of thick socks for walking
- Sandals
- Waterproof Jacket
- Fleece/pullover (for cool evenings)
- Long trousers and long sleeved top- must be dark coloured for Sea Turtle conservation project.

- Clothes and shoes suitable for working on a building site
- Swimwear
- Towel

Medical

- Personal medication
- First Aid Kit (e.g. Antihistamines, Anti- diarrhoea tablets, headache tablets)
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito and insect repellent

Minimum Age

The minimum age for this trip is 18.

Minimum Numbers

This programme requires a minimum number of participants to run.

Flights

Your flight to Costa Rica should arrive at Juan Santamaria International Airport (SJO), San Jose, Costa Rica at any time on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

Please note: This programme requires a minimum number of participants to run. Please contact us to confirm whether the minimum numbers have been met for your start date, we recommend that you do not book your flights until we have confirmed these numbers and the programme will be running.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

Please note: If you are flying to Costa Rica via the USA you will need to obtain Travel Authorisation by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) no later than 72 hours before departure. This is compulsory and will cost USD$14 to register. To register, please visit: www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov

FAQs

1. **How many people can go on this trip?**
   Typically the Costa Rica Experience has a maximum of 10 people. A buddy list will be sent to you before you leave with contact details of other people on the trip, so you can get to know each other before you leave.

2. **What is the currency?**
   The Currency in Costa Rica is the Colon. You would typically pay for day to day things (meals, drinks etc) with local currency, although for many tourist activities they prefer US dollars. In Panama the currency is the Balboa, although the US dollar is also legal tender and the exchange rate is tied to the dollar so 1 Balboa is equal to 1 US Dollar.

3. **Can I drink the tap water?**
   In most parts of Costa Rica you can drink the tap water. Speak with your tour guide before drinking it though as some of the areas you will visit on this trip is it not advisable.

4. **Do I need Malaria tablets?**
   There are areas along the Caribbean coast that are considered low-mid risk areas. Consult your doctor at least 6 week before you leave to get the most up to date advice. Unfortunately we cannot offer medical advice as we are not medically qualified to do so.

5. **Can I continue with the volunteering projects after the Experience?**
   Yes, absolutely! Many people choose to remain in Costa Rica to volunteer after the Experience and it's a great way of getting to know the locals better. Speak with one of our travel advisers and ask thier advice as many of them have travelled to the projects and can give first hand advice.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The currency in Costa Rican is the Colón (CRC), which is subdivided into 100 Céntimos. Coins come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100 and notes come in denominations of 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000.

While Costa Rica's close proximity to North America means that US Dollars are widely accepted at most establishments in Buena Vista and some large country towns, it is advisable to have some local currency to pay for transportation or goods at smaller establishments.

Credit cards such as MasterCard and Visa are accepted in cities and most tourist areas, though use in less commercial areas may be limited. This is also true of ATM machines or 'Cajeros automáticos'. ATMs commonly dispense both US Dollars and Nuevos Soles and usually charge for using international cards.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant $8.46
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) $1.66
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $1.29
Water (0.33 litre bottle) $0.96

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Citizens of the European Union, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia will be issued a Tourist Visa on entry for stays of up to 90 days. For longer stays or other nationalities, please consult your nearest Costa Rican Embassy or High Commission.

Cultural Considerations

Costa Rica is caught between old cultural forces and new ones. Family ties are strong, and the major traditions within family are often strongly religious, such as: baptisms, first communions, engagement parties, weddings and funerals. Gender roles tend to be fairly traditional, though in urban areas women's opportunities are improving all the time. The Costa Ricans are friendly people and it is customary to greet and part with handshakes.

Religion

Roman Catholicism is the official religion and about 90% of the population is Roman Catholic. Religion is an important part of life in Costa Rica, and we would urge you to be respectful at all times in and around places of worship. Do not be surprised to see individuals crossing themselves when passing any object of religious significance or reciting religious adages at appropriate times.

Clothing

Casual dress is fine but you should avoid beachwear away from the coast and dress conservatively, especially in rural areas, which tend to be fairly traditional and religious. When entering a religious area, please make sure you are appropriately covered.

Tipping

A 10% service charge and 13% tax is automatically added to restaurant bills. Taxi drivers are usually not tipped.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Unfortunately, tourists are often targets for pickpockets and thieves. Please educate yourself about South America and Costa Rica in particular, before you leave, so that you can be alert to all types of situations. Safety guidelines will be covered in detail at your orientation session upon arrival but please familiarise yourself with the following general travel safety rules.

- Avoid travelling alone, especially at night.
- Find out where the unsafe areas are and avoid them.
- When travelling keep all-important documents and valuables in a safe place, like an inner hidden pocket or money belt.
- Carry only as much cash as you think you will need for the day.
- Don’t wear expensive jewellery or watches.
- Be wary of people who seem too friendly too fast.
- Keep cameras out of sight. Always keep bags and purses in your sight, especially on public transport.
- Before swimming, ask how safe the area is.

In Costa Rica you should avoid sleeping on beaches or camping outside of official sites, as unprotected areas can be dangerous at night. Riptides (or ripcurrents) are a problem in the seas of Costa Rica, and can be very dangerous. Always follow beach guidelines and do not swim or surf against the advice of the coastguard.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

Language Guide

The main spoken language in Costa Rica is Spanish. Here are a few basic phrases that should help you get by during your trip. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello - *Hola!*

Good day - *Buenas dias!*
How are you? - *Como estas? ('Como estas usted?' if you need to be extra formal!)*
Goodbye - *Adios*
Please - *Por favour*
Thank you - *Gracias*
I don't understand - *No entiendo*
I don't speak Spanish - *No hablo espanol*
Sorry/excuse me - *Lo siento*
Where is…? - *Donde esta…?*
The bill please - *La cuenta por favour*

Food & Drink

The standards of health and hygiene are among the best in Latin America - milk, ice cream and other dairy products are safe. Avoid uncooked meats. If you are at all unsure about something, remember it is always better to be safe than sorry. Typical dishes of Costa Rica include:

- Gallos - Filled tortillas
- Casado - Rice, beans, beef or fish, fried plantain, chopped cabbage

- Arreglados - Puff pastries filled with beef, chicken, vegetables or cheese
- Sopa Negra - Soup with black beans and an egg in it
- Gallo Pinto - Rice & beans with sour cream or fried eggs

Drinks

You can drink tap water in most major towns, though be advised that it is heavily chlorinated. In other locations bottled water is readily available.

There are many types of cold fruit drinks, (made with milk or water). They are very popular and most of them are delicious. Coffee is usually good. The local beers are Bavaria, Pilsen, Imperial and Tropical.

Smoking / Alcohol / Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Costa Rica, and readily available. However, please respect other volunteers. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Many regions in Costa Rica have banned or limited smoking in public places and many restaurants will have a separate seating area for those wishing to smoke.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Costa Rica. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Costa Rica has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Public Holidays

To view a list of the public holidays for Costa Rica, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/costa-rica/

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. Many schools, government offices, stores and banks are closed on National Holidays. Please note that there may be slight date variations for some of the holidays each year and that the list is not exhaustive.

Weather

Temperatures in Costa Rica are high throughout the year with the warmest weather on the lowlands and the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. San Jose and other mountainous areas are cooler and vary between 16-26°. The hottest months of the year are between March and April with the rainy season falling between March and November; the coast is humid and rainy for most of the year.

Time

Costa Rica is six hours behind GMT.

Electricity

In Costa Rica the electric system is 120 Volts and frequency 60 Hertz. If your device does not accept electricity at this voltage you will need an adapter.

Outlets in Costa Rica generally accept 1 type of plug:

Flat blade plug

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

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