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## Costa Rica House Building Volunteers

Adventure



Relaxation



Culture



**Trip Name:** Costa Rica House Building Volunteers    **Trip Code:** CRHB    **Duration:** From 1 week

### Trip Highlights

- The smiles of families when you give them the keys to their brand new home
- Exploring the beauties of San Ramon, in the picturesque Alajuela province
- The opportunity to discover central America's beautiful Costa Rica in your free time; do a canopy walk, visit volcanoes or soak in a hot spring



### Overview

Volunteering Costa Rica is a hugely rewarding programme, where you will be able to help in building new homes for people living in some of the poorest rural communities of Costa Rica. You'll live and work with the local people to get a real feel for what life in this wonderfully diverse country is really like.

The people of Costa Rica need your help.... living in houses that do not have adequate sanitation or protection from the weather, is common place in many rural communities, but you can be a part in changing this. With a bit of hard work, you can really make a difference by building new homes that are safe and secure for the people that need it most.

### Destination Info

This programme is based in the town of San Ramón, in the picturesque Alajuela Province of central Costa Rica. San Ramón lies 30 miles north of the capital San José and 28 miles inland from the beautiful central Pacific beaches, making it is great base for exploring the highlights of Costa Rica during your free time. San Ramón itself is a tiny city surrounded by dramatic mountainous landscapes and is a close knit community with some of the friendliest people in the country, so you can be sure that a warm welcome awaits you.

## Itinerary



### Sunday – Monday: Arrival and Orientation

On arrival at San José International Airport, Costa Rica, you will be met by one of our representatives who will take you to your first night's accommodation in the historic town of Alajuela. The following day, Monday, you will receive a detailed orientation from our local team which will cover important information about your programme and provide you with lots of information about Costa Rica along with tips on the best places to visit during your free time.



### Tuesday

After spending two nights in Alajuela, you will be transferred to San Ramón to start your programme, volunteers usually travel by public transport. On arrival in San Ramón you will be introduced to the delightful family who will be your hosts for the duration of your programme, before having a bit of time to settle in and get familiar with your new home. Later on you will be taken to your project so that you can meet the people that you are working with and witness first-hand the wonderful work that has already taken place. If there is time you may even be able to start getting your hands dirty and stuck in to the project work!

### Wednesday – Friday

Having settled in and got to know your host family, Wednesday will be your first full day of project work. Don't worry if you are unsure of what to do, there will be plenty of people around that will be able to help and show you the ropes!



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The working day is normally from 8am to 4pm, with a lunch break in the middle of the day. Your evenings are your free time so you are welcome to spend them as you wish, you may like to spend some time with your host family and practice your Spanish or perhaps meet up with your fellow volunteers.



## Saturday – Sunday

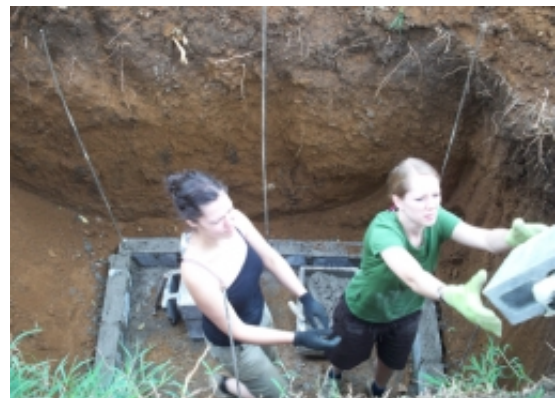
The weekends are your free time, this is a great opportunity to explore Costa Rica and visit some of the splendid things it has to offer. From canopy walks to volcanoes to beaches, there is something for everyone!

## Following weeks

For the remainder of your time on the programme your work schedule will run from Monday to Friday, starting at 8am and finishing at 4pm; your free time will be in the evenings and at weekends.

On the final day of your programme, you will need to make your own way back to Alajuela where you will be able to arrange a transfer back to the airport.

**Please note:** Itineraries are subject to change without prior notice.



Each house can take between ten and 24 weeks to build from start to finish, the stage of building work that you will be involved in will very much depend on the progress of the houses that are being built at the time you arrive.

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As the programme is funded by the Costa Rican and Canadian Rural Housing programme and is a scheme to provide affordable housing to the lowest income families in the rural areas; one of the requirements of the scheme is that the family for whom the house is being built for is very much involved in the building process as well. So as well as working with your fellow volunteers and builders from the scheme, you will be working alongside the people that you are helping and this will give you the wonderful opportunity to get to know the people that will benefit from the house that you are building and gain an insight as to how much of a difference the new home will make to their lives.

The project work is likely to be very tiring and physically demanding but in return the sense of achievement will be incredible. You will be required to get involved in lots of different aspects of the building process, some of these tasks may include the following:

- Carrying materials and tools to the building site
- Digging trenches for the foundations
- Laying floors
- Mixing concrete
- Putting roofs on the houses
- Building septic tanks
- Preparing frameworks for the buildings

It is not a requirement of the project for you to have any building experience or skills, as the team you will be working with will be able to teach you everything you need to know. However, if you have any previous building or construction experience then please do tell the local team so that they can put your skills to good use.

## Accommodation

Homestay with local host family

## Programme Services and Facilities

### Internet

You will be able to use the internet cafes in town during your free time, this will be at your own additional cost.

### Telephone

Your mobile phone may or may not work in Costa Rica, depending on your network, if it does, please be aware that in many areas you may not always get 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.

Your host family may have a landline phone where you will be able to accept incoming calls.

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The international dialing code for Costa Rica is +506. To place an outgoing direct dialed international call, dial +44 for the UK followed by the telephone number. For example to call Real Gap dial +44 1892 516164.

## Laundry

Your host family will be able to do your laundry for you, however you may prefer to wash your own underwear, it is possible to purchase washing powder locally if required.

## Electricity

Please note there is no electricity available at Buena Vista project site, but it will be available at the hostel used during the orientation at the beginning of your programme.

## Meals

Included in your programme will be three meals per day, these will be provided by your host family and will be based on a Costa Rican diet which can be fairly basic including items such as rice, beans, corn, pasta, vegetables, meat and seasonal fruits.

## What's Included

- Airport pick-up
- Accommodation
- Orientation
- All meals with home-stay family
- Laundry once a week
- Full support and assistance
- 24-hour support number



## What's Not Included

- All flights
- Travel insurance
- Return airport transfer
- Visas



## Is This Trip For You?

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You may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. However, you will still have the full support of your in-country team and those at the project. If you are looking for a group volunteering experience we have plenty of options for you to consider.

## Additional Information

### Accommodation

For the first two nights of your programme in Costa Rica, during your orientation, you will be accommodated in a comfortable Backpackers Hostel which is centrally located in Alajuela.

After your orientation, you will be transferred to San Ramón for your project. You will be staying with local host families for this programme; this is a great way to really get immersed in the culture and lifestyle of the local Costa Rican community. Volunteers are normally accommodated in a shared room with another volunteer and will have access to a shared bathroom.

## 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. In addition it is worth noting that you can buy lots of the below in Costa Rica and at a very cheap price and there will be opportunities for you to shop in local markets and towns.

## Personal Admin

- Passport, 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 (please speak to your GP about necessary immunisations)
- Guidebook on country - recommended Lonely Planet or Footprints

## General

- Camera / Film / Batteries
- Notebook and pen / diary
- Torch / Extra Batteries
- Sunglasses
- Pocket-knife (comes in handy for general use)
- Water bottle – at least 1 Litre
- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use
- Personal enjoyment - books, cards, music, to enjoy with your fellow volunteers etc.
- Personal hygiene items (deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrush etc)
- Spanish dictionary, verb book etc.

## Clothing

- Hat
- A pair of thick socks for walking
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Sandals

- Waterproof Jacket
- Fleece/pullover (for cool evenings)
- Long trousers
- Warmer clothing for winter
- Work clothes – something that you don't mind getting dirty
- Swimwear
- Towel
- Work gloves, particularly during the rainy season

## Medical Kit

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

## Possible gifts for your host family

Some volunteers in the past have asked about taking a gift for their host family, if you would like to do so please just take a something small as a polite token to thank them. Possible gifts could include:

- Items typical of your home country such as biscuits, cakes, English tea etc.
- Photo frame or small ornament
- Something for the kitchen...tea-towels, utensils
- Nice toiletries

By the end of your stay, you will have got to know your hosts fairly well and may like to buy a gift for them locally to say thank you and farewell.

## Minimum Age

Minimum age 17 years with written parental consent, maximum decided on potential participants health and fitness.

## Minimum Numbers

There are no minimum numbers on the trip.

Please note: you may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact us

## 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.

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.

**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](http://www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov)

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.

## FAQs

**1. Do I need to know Spanish to participate?**

You will need a basic level of Spanish to get by living and working in the community. Most volunteers join our Spanish language school for a week or more before starting on the project. Contact our travel advisers for details and costs.

**2. Can I travel on afterwards if I wish?**

You will be more than welcome to travel afterwards.

**3. Can I travel with my friend?**

You and your friend/s can join this trip with you and we will make sure you all stay together.

**4. How big are the groups?**

The group sized always change but generally there are between 4-8 people.

**5. Do I need building experience?**

No, you will be taught everything you need to know to help build a house out there.

**6. How long does it take to build the houses?**

The build time varies depending on the size of the house. Typically it takes 10 to 24 weeks per house.

## 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





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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 Rica 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.

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- 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](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

USA: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

Australia: [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://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

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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/](http://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 we make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of recommended 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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