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**COSTA  
RICA**



COSTA RICA  
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BOARD



## THE ESSENCE OF NATURE

*A sustainable and responsible destination*

Costa Rica is a pillar of sustainable tourism, an economic activity that respects the environment and culture and that causes as little impact as possible. It is friendly to the country's cultural and social environment.

The sustainable tourism development model promoted by Costa Rica is the basis for the country's positioning and a destination brand built around socio-economic development, education and training, customer service and the conservation of the country's natural and cultural wealth. This is a free and voluntary program accessible by all of Costa Rica's tourist entities. It is recognized globally as the most comprehensive model of sustainable tourism certification.

In the past 20 years, Costa Rica has increased its coverage of forested land from 30% to 52%, primarily due to sustainable tourism and the Environmental Services Payments program. This program pays landowners with more than 63,000 hectares to commit to preserving forests and reforesting land.

Costa Rica currently ranks as the world's third "greenest" country.

In 1997, the Costa Rican Tourism Board launched the Sustainable Tourism Certification program (CST), which the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recognized as a pioneering program that has changed the tourism industry.

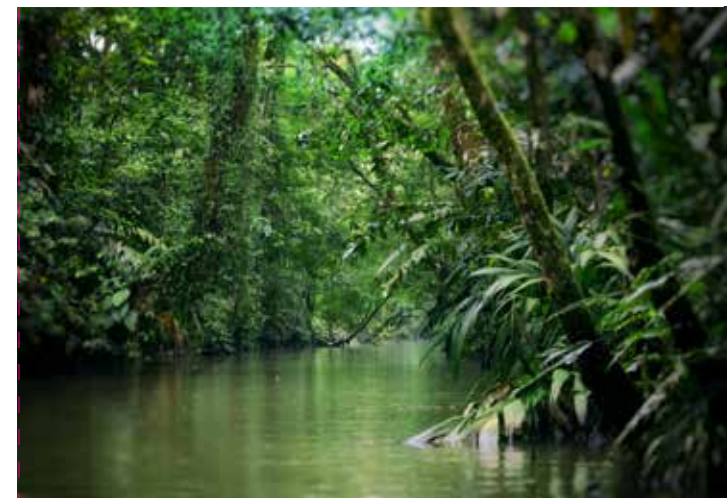


## Biodiversity concentrated in a multi-destination

Costa Rica has approximately 10,000 tree and plant species, 27 national parks, 58 wildlife refuges, 32 protected areas, 15 wetland/mangrove areas, 11 forest reserves and 8 biological reserves, in addition to other areas that protect biodiversity in habitats across the country.

Despite covering only 0.03% of the planet's surface, the country is ranked among the top 20 countries with the most biodiversity. Spread across only 51,100 km<sup>2</sup>, Costa Rica is home to an estimated half-million living species, which represent about 4% of the world's biodiversity. This makes it the perfect place to visit and relax in harmony with nature.

Are you ready to discover it?



## A natural paradise in Costa Rica

Tortuguero National Park, located on the Caribbean coast, is surrounded by a system of canals and natural lagoons. Think of it as a mini-Amazon.

It's also one of the world's most important sites for the conservation of the green sea turtle, and features other interesting species including the manatee and the caiman.

This national park has 442 bird species, or about half of the 918 bird species found in Costa Rica.

Tortuguero is located in a region dominated by Afro-Caribbean culture. When you visit, be prepared for great local cuisine, dances and vibrant traditions.

This region's people are filled with color and life.

## The most stunning trip in the Americas

Every year, millions of migratory birds travel incredible distances across the American continent in search of a better climate and an abundance of food. This usually coincides with the warmest season. During the odyssey, which is filled with many challenges, some species travel up to 32,000 km round-trip, making Costa Rica an excellent option for bird-watching.

The National Bird Route program currently is being developed to create sites where many species are concentrated in different regions of the country. The goal is to develop tourist routes with incredible locations scattered between large natural attractions for bird lovers.



## An ancient survival ritual

Costa Rica is home to some of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the world, where visitors can still observe this ancient survival ritual.

Along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, hundreds of sea turtles from six species arrive to carry out the tireless mission of preserving their species. Ostional Beach in Guanacaste is considered the main sea turtle nesting site in the world for the Kemp's ridley turtle, known for its massive arrivals at the start of nesting.

Playa Grande, located inside Las Baulas National Marine Park, is one of the world's most important nesting sites for the leatherback turtle. Here you can watch one of the most fascinating sea turtles as they nest, and admire their enormous size, with shells measuring 1.8 m and weighing up to 400 kg.

In Costa Rica, you can find six of the seven sea turtle species that inhabit the planet: the Galápagos green turtle, Kemp's ridley, the leatherback, the green sea turtle, the hawksbill, and the loggerhead.



## A perfect whale's tail

A tombolo in Uvita connects the continent with a small rocky island near Dominical Beach in Costa Rica's Southern Pacific. Located in the Ballena National Marine Park, it looks like a perfect whale's tail at low tide. Even more interesting, this location and its surrounding areas are one of the best spots to observe humpback whales.

The warm waters are exactly what these whales are looking for when winter arrives in their original habitat. Humpback whales from the north can be spotted from December to April, and humpback whales from the south can be seen from July to November.

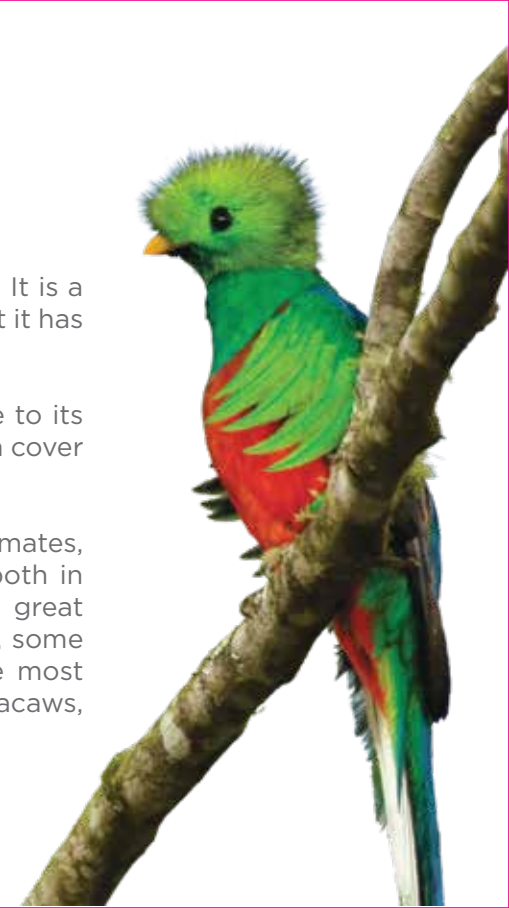
It's an incredible spectacle, as these whales can grow to up to 16 meters long and weigh 40 tons.

## National Bird Route

Costa Rica is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world for bird-watching. It is a small country with only 51,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land territory and 589,000 km<sup>2</sup> of marine territory, but it has an enormous number of birds, more than in all of Europe.

Globally, Costa Rica quite possibly has the most bird species and types of habitats relative to its size. Costa Rica's main advantage is its systems of National Parks and Protected Areas, which cover about 26% of the national territory and house a rich variety of flora and fauna.

Its geographical location, two coasts and mountain ranges create a diversity of microclimates, elevations and life zones. These conditions account for its abundance in natural wealth, both in terms of species and ecosystems. These special natural conditions are responsible for a great diversity of bird life, with more than 900 species grouped in 82 different families. Of these, some 220 are migratory species, primarily from North America. Among them are some of the most fascinating birds in the world, including toucans, parrots, bellbirds, hummingbirds, macaws, tangaras and the extraordinary quetzal.





# UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES



Location: Puntarenas province.



Location: Guanacaste and Alajuela provinces.



Location: San José, Cartago,  
Limón and Puntarenas provinces  
(Costa Rica)

## *La Amistad International Park/Talamanca Mountain Range Reserve*

Natural heritage inscribed in 1983 with an extension in 1990 and shared with Panama.

This exceptional Central American site spans some 200,000 hectares and offers signs of the Quaternary Period's glaciation.

Its geographical location serves as a bridge between flora and fauna from North America and South America. Most of this region's territory, which is inhabited by four different indigenous groups, is covered by tropical rainforest. (UNESCO/BPI)

## *Isla del Coco National Park*

Natural heritage inscribed in 1997 with an extension in 2002.

Located 550 km from the Costa Rican coast, Isla del Coco is the only Eastern Pacific tropical zone that has tropical wet forest.

This national park is an ideal laboratory for studying biological processes due to its location at the first point of contact with the Equatorial Counter Current and its multiple interactions that occur in surrounding marine ecosystems.

Its waters are famous, and many divers say it is the best place in the world to observe large pelagic species such as sharks, manta rays, tuna and dolphins. (UNESCO/BPI)

## *Guanacaste Conservation Area*

Natural heritage inscribed in 1999 and expanded later to include the Santa Elena region.

This conservation area has important natural habitats for the preservation of biological diversity. Among them are the best dry forest habitats in the region extending from Central America to northern Mexico.

Other habitats also can be found that are essential to the conservation of rare or threatened animal and plant species.

This site has highly important ecological processes, including terrestrial, coastal and marine environments. (UNESCO/BPI)





## THE ESSENCE OF OUR CULTURE

### *Guayabo*

*A look at Costa Rica's indigenous past.*

Located on the slopes of Turrialba Volcano, the Guayabo National Monument is considered one of Costa Rica's most important archaeological sites.

In 2009, the American Society of Civil Engineers declared it a World Heritage Site for Engineering, making it the third archaeological site in Latin America to receive this distinction, after Machu Picchu and Tipón, in Peru.

Guayabo received this recognition because of its still-functioning system of aqueducts, built 700 years ago. It also was recognized because of a stone road that was used as a transit route and forms part of the site's drainage system. The road leads to a ceremonial center.

Visitors can still admire its original design today, including rounded stone stairways that lead to the central mounds.

Built between 300 B.C. and 1400 A.D., Guayabo was inhabited by indigenous groups from the cultural region known as the Intermediate Area, which extended from Alajuela, in Costa Rica, to the countries of Colombia, Venezuela and parts of Ecuador.



## The spectacular

## Diquis site



Important cultures developed in Costa Rica's Southern Pacific during the pre-Columbian era, such as the Chiefdom Settlements with their Stone Spheres of Diquis.

These expert builders and skilled artisans worked with stone, gold and ceramics. They crafted objects that had symbolic, artistic and religious value, such as cylinders with designs in low-relief, sculptures and the famous stone spheres.

A total of 235 types of stone spheres are registered in Costa Rica, all with a perfect circumference and diameters measuring anywhere from 20 centimeters to more than 2 meters. They can weigh up to 24 tons. Most of the spheres were found in the Southern Pacific. Their production lasted for about 1,000 years, during a period that started between 300 A.D and 1500 A.D. and lasted up to the Spanish Conquest.

Today, visitors can check out a group of the most representative spheres in the Diquis Valley at an exhibit open to the public at the Finca 6 Museum Site in Palmar Sur. This was the first archaeological site in Costa Rica to be declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2014.



## The tradition of the oxherder and the oxcart

Intangible cultural heritage inscribed in 2008 (originally proclaimed in 2005). The oxcart is Costa Rica's most famous type of traditional craft. The tradition of painting and embellishing oxcart began in the early 20th century. Originally, each of Costa Rica's regions developed its own design, which allowed people to recognize where an oxherder was from by the decoration of his wheels.

## The oxcart and the yoke as intangible cultural heritage

The oxcart is a national symbol of Costa Rican labor and a genuine expression of popular art because of its unique figures, lines and strokes.

The same is true of the yoke, a wooden instrument used to join oxen to the cart. Both were declared masterpieces of World Heritage by UNESCO in 2005.

In Costa Rica, you'll also find the world's biggest oxcart and yoke, which measures 2 meters tall and six meters long. It stands out not only because of its monumental size, but also because of the vivid colors that decorate it. The yoke measures 2 meters tall and 4 meters long and was made in 2007.

Both are displayed at the Central Park in Sarchí, a location recognized as the home of Costa Rican crafts and an obligatory stop for any tourist hoping to learn about traditional Costa Rican art.



## Wellness Pura Vida



If your goal is to incorporate healthy activities and habits into your lifestyle and travels, Costa Rica is the destination for you. Enjoy well-being as a way of living that combines recreational activities with physical activity and healthy food.

A wide range of activities is available for those looking to refresh their minds, souls and bodies.

One of the most important elements of this tourism segment is the inclusion of culture in activities, knowledge of local cuisine and visits to indigenous regions.

Additionally, visitors can go trekking (light walks), take a forest bath (breathing the forest's fresh air), and go earthing (walking barefoot on earth or sand).

Guests can complement wellness travel by enjoying local cuisine, sampling wines, eating high-quality and healthy food, combining

food with spas (“splunch”), buying local products, and learning everything you need to know about eating well and feeling well.

In Costa Rica, you will find spas and relaxation centers that combine international quality standards, personalized attention and the pura vida lifestyle of Ticos.

You can explore new relaxation options such as popular wraps, in which volcanic mud, tropical fruits and even chocolate are used to hydrate the skin while providing nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

Hydrotherapy and hot springs are another form of utilizing our country's water resources to return home recharged. You can also sample local ingredients such as coffee, brown sugar, chocolate and cocoa, which is used to exfoliate the skin and help eliminate dead cells and toxins.

It also improves blood circulation and allows positive energy to flow through the body.





*The secret to longevity*

*is hidden in Costa Rica*

Elderly residents on the Nicoya Peninsula, located south of Guanacaste province, are known for their advanced ages extending well into the 90s and beyond. They are some of the world's longest-living people.

This was confirmed in a study by University of Costa Rica demographer Luis Rosero Bixby, who in 2004 found that the mortality rate among 90-year-old Costa Ricans is 10% lower in this particular Guanacastecan region.



Spanning approximately 4,100 km and with a population of about 132,000 people, Nicoya has about 5,000 residents who are older than 75, according to data from the Central American Population Center (CCP).

This caught the attention of writer Dan Buettner, founder of Bluezones.com, who has worked to identify the world's "blue zones." There are five blue zones in the world, and Costa Rica has one of the largest.

In addition to common factors in the region, such as water rich in calcium that strengthens the bones, and a traditional diet rich in fruits and corn, living with family and a pura vida lifestyle are part of the secrets to living a longer life.

Living according to what there is and what you have brings happiness, which boosts endorphin levels and strengthens the immune system.

Without a doubt, it's a unique way of living in Costa Rica that can be described as "Wellness Pura Vida."







## THE ESSENCE OF ADVENTURE

*Volcano territory*

Forming part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, Costa Rica's continental territory is the result of complex volcanic activity that began 75 million years ago and continues today.

Including every crater that has experienced an eruption, the total number of volcanic structures in this small territory is a surprising 112.

The national parks located in the Central Valley protect the region's main volcanoes – Poás, Irazú and Turrialba – and offer infrastructure for visitors to enjoy the many birds, scenery, craters and natural forests.

One of the country's most popular attractions is Arenal Volcano, declared a national park in 1991. Its lake, hot springs and nearly perfect conical shape, together with the beautiful landscapes, nature trails and adventure activities, are some of the main attractions that surround it.

## A paradise for scuba divers



The famous French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau called Isla del Coco “the most beautiful island in the world.” Its surrounding waters, filled with incredible biodiversity, make it the perfect site for scuba divers.

Most of these sites belong to protected nature areas across the country, such as the famous Isla del Coco National Park, a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site.

It is said that Isla del Coco was a refuge for pirates, merchants, whalers and even colonizers. Today it’s known for its natural wealth, including the peculiar and threatened hammerhead shark, as well as humpback whales, bottlenose dolphins, hawksbill turtles and a large variety of coral species, to name a few.

The Gandoca-Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge, with its 5,013 continental hectares and 4.4 marine hectares, extends across about 70% of the Southern Caribbean. Its wetlands were declared of international importance, and its unique qualities stem from the incredible species found here.

Costa Rica’s oceans are home to at least 6,777 species comprising 3.5% of the planet’s known marine species. They are a true paradise for scuba lovers.







## Traveling above the forest canopy

Considered a new adventure sport, canopy tours offer a unique and ecological experience full of adrenaline that comes from flying above the treetops, observing nature along the way.

The idea for canopy tours was born in Costa Rica in the 1990s and entails a series of cables suspended between trees from which visitors can glide using a pulley secured to a harness.

Cables vary in length (stretching up to 1,000 meters long) and end at wooden platforms built into the treetops. These are located up to 30 meters above the forest floor. The impact on flora is minimal, because biologists were the ones who first used this technology more than three decades ago to conduct research.

Canopy tours have been adapted to a large variety of environments and landscapes in the country, including mountains, canyons, rivers, waterfalls, cloud forests, tropical forests and dry forests.



## Costa Rica: A surfer's paradise

Every surfer who visits the country seems to agree that Costa Rica is one of the best places in the world to hit the waves.

The reasons are simple: beaches with excellent year-round waves, a pleasant climate, warm waters, friendly people and reasonable prices.

The country is one of the few in the world where two oceans are separated by only 6 hours of driving distance. This makes it possible to surf in the Caribbean at sunrise and end the day taming the Pacific waves at sunset. It's definitely a paradise for surfers!



A group of five people are in a tan inflatable raft navigating white-water rapids. They are wearing red life jackets and yellow helmets. The water is turbulent with white foam. The background shows a lush green forest with large rocks.

## Conquering the forceful waters

Every adventurer and nature lover should experience navigating Costa Rica's rapids. You can do this at all levels, from calm Class I-II rapids to Class V rapids, which are for experts only.

This requires the ability to keep a raft afloat while following a guide's instructions and paddling in sync with others. In many cases, rafting is a family activity that provides fun for the family, including the kids.

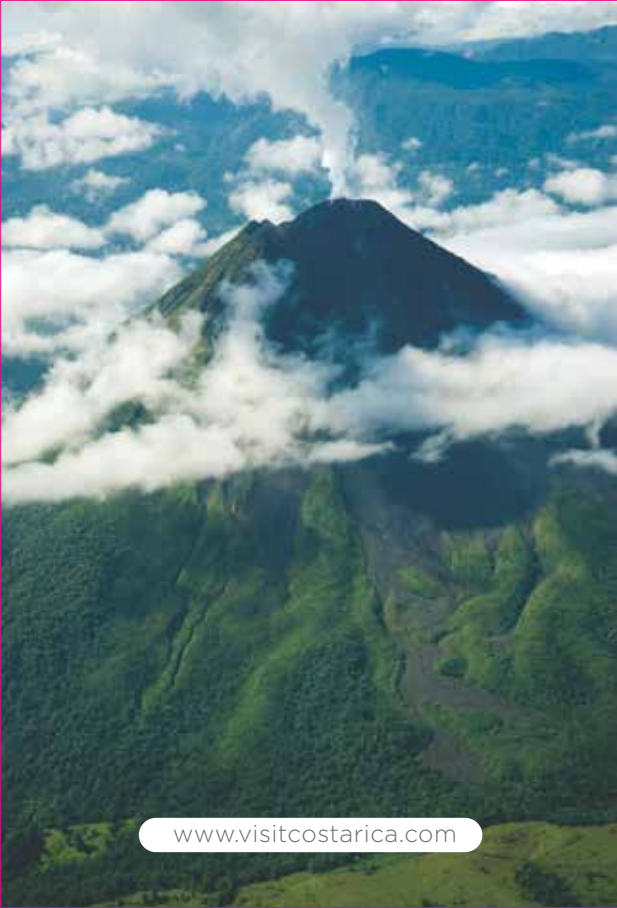
The age for children varies according to the level of rapids and the season - either dry season or rainy season. Kids ages 2-6 can float on rivers with calm water (Class I) such as Peñas Blancas at Arenal, Corobicí River in Guanacaste or Sarapiquí River.

Kids ages 7-11 can float on rivers with Class II and Class III rapids, such as Sarapiquí's Virgen section, Balsa River at Arenal, or Savegre from Manuel Antonio. Beginning at age 12, kids can do Class III rapids such as Sarapiquí's San Miguel section, Tenorio River in Guanacaste, or Naranjo River from Manuel Antonio.

Class IV rapids are for adults only, and can be found in the Pacuare and Naranjo rivers at El Chorro section. Finally, Class IV rapids are for experts only in the upper part of the Pacuare River.







[www.visitcostarica.com](http://www.visitcostarica.com)



Form of government: **Democracy**

Area: **51.100 Km<sup>2</sup>**

Official language: **Spanisch**

Currency: **Costa Rican colón**

Airports:

- Juan Santamaría International Airport (**SJO**)
- Daniel Oduber International Airport in Liberia (**LIR**)

