



# Costa Rica

## Destination Guide

### ARRIVING IN COSTA RICA

- 1) Costa Rica has a paperless arrival system, so most travelers will not need to fill out immigration or customs forms. You should keep your passports and travel documents easily accessible in a carry-on bag.
- 2) You may deplane using a set of steps and walk outside before entering the airport terminal. Please advise airline personnel if you will require mobility assistance.
- 3) Enter the Immigration line. Have your passport in hand and answer any questions from the officer. You could be asked to show confirmation of your return flight.
- 4) Go to the luggage carousel and claim all your checked bags.
- 5) Take all your belongings through the Customs line. Your bags may be x-rayed or selected for additional inspection.

### LEAVING THE AIRPORT

After clearing Customs, you'll enter the arrivals hall.

**HOTEL OR OTHER SHUTTLE SERVICES** – These must be reserved before your arrival. Follow the instructions in your travel documents to locate your transportation.

**CAR RENTAL** – Follow airport signage to the rental car desk.

**TAXI** – Follow airport signage or look for the taxi coordinator. Agree on a fare before entering the vehicle. (Note that airport taxis often cost 30-40% more than shuttle service, are generally only available as small 4-door sedans, and may not be air conditioned.)

### MONEY MATTERS

**CASH** – Costa Rica uses colones—pronounced “coh-LOH-nays”—and ATM machines of public banks usually offer the best exchange rates. US dollars in bills of \$20 or less will often be accepted, but usually at a less favorable exchange rate than paying in colones.

**CREDIT CARDS** – Many major businesses accept credit cards, but smaller shops, restaurants, or street vendors may be cash-only. Your card company may charge a foreign transaction fee for purchases.

**SECURITY** – Before you travel, advise your bank that you will be using your debit or credit card in a foreign country. Avoid carrying or displaying large amounts of cash, and don't leave it unsecured in a hotel room or vehicle.

### CULTURE

**LANGUAGE** – Spanish is the primary language, but in tourist areas many locals will speak at least a little English. A friendly smile, patient attitude, and hand gestures can often bridge the gap. Learning a few basic Spanish phrases or using an app like Google Translate can be helpful.

**DRESS (BEACH AREAS)** – Daytime dress is casual. Shirts and swimsuit coverups are recommended while not at the pool or beach. In the evening, some restaurants prefer diners to avoid shorts, t-shirts, or flip flops. All-inclusive resort restaurants may have a specific dress code. Ask your Travel Specialist if you have questions about your resort.

**DRESS (RAINFOREST/VOLCANO AREAS)** – Be prepared for changing weather by dressing in layers and bringing rain gear. Wear sturdy walking shoes or hiking boots on trails. Activities such as ziplining, rappelling, ATV rides, etc. may require longer shorts or pants and closed-toe shoes.

**TIPPING** – Many restaurants include a base service charge of 10%, with the option to leave an additional amount based on your experience. Service employees such as housekeepers, luggage handlers, and bartenders appreciate tips to supplement their modest incomes. Tipping is also appropriate for guides, drivers, or crew members at the end of a tour or activity.

## STAYING HEALTHY

**WATER** – Although tap water is considered less risky than in other countries, bottled water is the safest bet—especially for those with sensitive stomachs.

**SUN** – Be sure to apply plenty of sunscreen in a higher SPF than normal, even on cloudy days. UV levels are more intense near the equator, at higher elevations, or when the sun is reflected off water or sand.

**BUGS** – Insects are common. Consider using bug spray to ward off mosquitoes and no-see-ums, and pack anti-itch cream. Keep your balcony door closed and do not leave food in your hotel room.

## ELECTRICITY

Voltage and frequency are the same as the United States and Canada, so no converter is needed. Outlets, however, may only accommodate plugs with two equal prongs. Polarized plugs or those with a third grounding pin could require an adapter. A surge protector is recommended to protect electronics from power fluctuations.

## GETTING AROUND

**ROAD CONDITIONS** – Roads are often unpaved, bumpy, and windy. Although distances may seem short, the rough terrain increases travel time. Consider bringing motion sickness medication.

**TAXI** – Taxis are convenient for shorter distances in town. Use only legal vehicles, preferably called by a hotel or restaurant. Confirm that the meter is started, or negotiate a set price in unmetered cabs, before starting your trip.

**RENTAL CAR** – Road, traffic, and weather conditions make driving a challenge. Navigation can be difficult due to lack of signage, so be sure to have an updated map or GPS device. Driving at night is especially risky and is not recommended. Never leave belongings unattended in a parked vehicle.

**GUIDED TOURS** – Booking excursions and activities through a reputable tour company is often the best choice, because the service of an experienced local driver is included.

## TIMESHARE / VACATION CLUB

Offers of discounted tours, promotional items, or other “freebies” are likely connected with a timeshare or vacation club company. Their presentations may take up considerable time and can be high-pressure sales pitches. Firmly say no if you do not wish to be approached about this. If you do attend, USE EXTREME CAUTION before entering into a contractual agreement in a foreign country.

## DEPARTURE AIRPORT

**PRE-BOOKED TRANSFERS** – Confirm your pick-up time with the transfer company at least 24-48 hours before departure. Be in the hotel lobby at least 20 minutes before your pick-up time to complete your checkout.

**AIRPORT ARRIVAL TIME** – Plan to arrive at the airport 3 hours before your flight, to allow time for multiple lines and security checkpoints. Airline check-in closes one hour prior to departure. This cutoff is strictly enforced, and late arrival will result in denied boarding.

**DEPARTURE TAX** – Costa Rica’s exit tax—around \$30 per person—is now included in the ticket price of most major airlines. Ask your Travel Specialist if you have questions about your airfare. If this tax was not included, you will need to pay it at the airport BEFORE checking in at the ticket counter. Cash is preferred, but Visa and MasterCard are accepted with additional fees.

## RETURNING TO THE U.S.

- 1) You may be given immigration forms to fill out during your flight. Keep a pen, your passports, travel documents, and receipts from anything you purchased during your trip easily accessible from your seat.
- 2) After deplaning, you will enter the Immigration line. Have your passport and completed forms in hand, answer any questions from the officer. NOTE: Some airports now offer automated kiosks for this process.
- 3) Go to the luggage carousel and claim all of your checked bags.
- 4) Take all of your luggage to the Customs line. You may be asked questions about what you are bringing back into the country, and your belongings may be subject to search.
- 5) For connecting flights or to reach the final airport exit, you may need to pass your checked luggage back to the airline. This is usually done at a counter outside of the Customs area.
- 6) DUTY FREE REMINDER: If you have to pass another security checkpoint before proceeding to the next gate or to the airport exit, you will not be able to carry your liquid duty-free purchases with you. These need to be placed in your checked bags before handing them over to the airline.