

COSTA RICA

PREPARING TO GO

ATM and Credit Cards – Contact your bank in advance of departing on this tour to determine whether you will be able to use your ATM and credit cards while traveling. When contacting your bank, notify them of your travel dates so that they will anticipate charges being made outside of your hometown and do not suspend your cards for what may appear to them to be “suspicious” charges. Make a photocopy of the front and back sides of your ATM and credit cards to leave behind with someone at home who will assist you in the event your cards are misplaced, lost or stolen.

Clothing and Packing – Your adventure in Costa Rica is casual. Dress for comfort and convenience with a wardrobe that is adaptable and allows for layering. Comfortable, cotton clothing is suggested. Long pants and long sleeves are suggested for sun and mosquito protection. Evenings in all lodges are casual with no specific dress code. Most importantly, bring comfortable yet sturdy walking shoes that have already been broken-in. It is important that your shoes have good ankle support as the walking trails can be wet and muddy.

Pack an adequate supply of your prescription medication, including antibiotics, in its original container to last through your entire journey. In addition, you may want to bring some over-the-counter medications such as Imodium AD, Pepto Bismol, Tylenol, etc.

Bring your travel documents and copies of your passport and credit cards stored in separate places. Also, pack a change of clothing in your carry-on bag to avoid any inconvenience in the event that your flight or luggage is delayed.

Following is a list of recommended items for travel to Costa Rica:

- Comfortable, cotton clothing
- Shorts and long pants
- Short and long sleeve shirts
- Sunglasses, sunscreen, hat
- Swimwear, including water shoes
- A light sweater or jacket for the evenings
- Lightweight, waterproof jacket with a hood or a disposable rain poncho
- Comfortable walking shoes with adequate ankle support
- Binoculars
- Small flashlight
- Insect repellent (DEET 20 – 50%)
- Camera, battery charger, memory cards
- Battery-operated travel alarm clock
- Small, collapsible travel umbrella
- Small backpack for long walks
- Pre-moistened towelettes or liquid hand cleanser
- Prescription medications (including antibiotics) and adequate personal toiletries
- A lock for your luggage

Health – The Costa Rica adventure is a moderately active tour. Activities include visiting national parks, biological reserves, rainforests and villages. You should be in good health and able to climb into and out of small boats and able to walk reasonable distances over unpaved and uneven terrain. Also, some roads to rural locations are unpaved and bumpy. If you get motion sickness, bring medication (i.e., Less Drowsy Dramamine) for the drives between destinations.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises that there is little risk of contracting malaria in and around the areas visited on this tour, but there have been reported cases of dengue fever mostly during the rainy season (not in February). There is no vaccination for dengue fever, but mosquito bites can be avoided by applying mosquito repellent with DEET (20 – 50% concentration) to exposed skin and clothing, wearing long sleeved shirts and long pants if you are outdoors at night, and by avoiding perfumes and colognes.

Drink bottled water and drinks as much as possible and avoid ice.

Luggage – Due to vehicle space constraints during your Costa Rica journey, limit your checked luggage to one average size suitcase per person and one small carry-on containing essentials. For your day-to-day travel while on tour, use a small, soft-sided carry-on piece (lightweight backpack or shoulder purse), and only those items that you need handy during the day. It is recommended that you use the hotel safe and a luggage lock when out of your hotel room for an extended period of time.

Travel Document Requirements – You will need a valid passport for entry into Costa Rica. We recommend that you make at least two photocopies of all the travel documents that you bring with you. Include copies of the photo page of your passport that contains the date of issuance, date of expiration and your citizenship. Secure one set of copies in the safe in your room while traveling, and leave one set behind with someone at home who will assist you in the event your documents are misplaced, lost or stolen.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

Air Conditioning – all hotels and vehicles on this tour have air conditioning.

Currency and Exchange Rates – The official currency of Costa Rica is the Colón (CRC) which is divided into 100 céntimos. U.S. dollars are also widely accepted, but change is usually given in colones. U.S. dollars can be exchanged in banks and many hotels. Major credit cards are widely accepted, although American Express and Discover Card are more limited. ATM's are becoming more widespread throughout the country, but it is advisable to always have some local cash handy, especially outside the major tourist destinations. Currently the exchange rate is about 1 USD to 500 CRC.

Customs and Tax-Free Shopping – Current regulations permit U.S. citizens to bring back \$800 worth of items duty-free, as long as you physically bring them with you.

Currently, Costa Rica levies a 14% Value Added Tax (VAT) on consumer goods and services. As a rule, if you are not a resident of the country in which the purchase is made, you may be entitled to a VAT refund and should inquire about the refund policy where you shop.

Electrical Current – United States electrical appliances are compatible with Costa Rica's electrical system (110 volts) and outlets (parallel two-prong) although some outlets may require an additional adapter (to fit inside a deeper socket). All the hotels have hair dryers.

Etiquette – Costa Ricans (“Ticos”) tend to dress conservatively and treat everyone respectfully. Both sexes shake hands, though men and women often kiss lightly on one cheek when parting.

Internet – Free wireless internet service is available at all the hotels with the exception of a fee at the Marriott Hotel business center.

Phones – The cheapest way to call from Costa Rica to the United States is with an international calling card purchased in Costa Rica. First dial 199, then the PIN on the back of your card (revealed after scratching off a protective coating), then dial the phone number as you would a direct long-distance call.

Check with your cell phone service provider to see if your cell phone will work in Costa Rica. If you have a multi-band cell phone and your service provider uses the world-standard GSM network, you can use your cell phone in Costa Rica. Roaming fees can be expensive, \$2.99 a minute, and you pay the toll charges for incoming calls. It’s cheaper to send a text message since text messages have a low set fee, about 50 cents per text. However, expect reception to be impossible in many areas of this mountainous country. Some providers offer an international calling plan for travelers for the duration of your trip.

To call the United States from Costa Rica dial: 001 + area code + phone number

To call Costa Rica from the United States dial: 011 + 506 + phone number

Safety – Though Costa Rica is considered one of the safest Central American countries, in populated areas it is wise to never carry a wallet in your back pocket or in a pack on your back. A woman should keep a tight grip on her purse (keep it tucked under your arm). Be sure not to leave valuables in your hotel room unless locked in a safe.

Time – Costa Rica is 2 hours ahead of California time in February. Costa Rica does not use Daylight Savings Time so during that time period, Costa Rica is 1 hour ahead of California time.

Tipping – Tipping is not necessary in restaurants where a 10% service charge is always added to your bill (along with a 15% tax). If service was particularly good, you can leave a little at your own discretion, but it is not mandatory (about \$1 per person). You don’t need to tip a taxi driver unless the service has been superior – it is not expected. You can tip a bellman \$1 per bag and housekeeping \$1-\$2 per day. For this tour, driver and guide gratuities are included so no need to tip extra unless a special personal service has been performed for you.

Weather – Costa Rica’s tranquil environment offers stable, tropical weather where the temperature remains fairly constant throughout the year. Rain is common throughout the year since much of the country is a rainforest with more frequent rain occurring in the “wet season” which is typically from May through October.

	<u>February</u> Average High/ Low Temperature	Average Rainfall
San José	75 / 59 degrees	0.2 inch
Arenal	84 / 67 degrees	5.0 inches
Tamarindo	90 / 73 degrees	0.1 inch

February Sunrise: 6:00 a.m.

February Sunset: 5:45 p.m.

