Costa Rica

**Location**

Costa Rica is located on the isthmus of Latin America. Neighboring Costa Rica on the north is Nicaragua and Panama to the south. Although Costa Rica is small and covers only 0.03% of the earth’s surface, it’s beautiful landscape brings nearly one million yearly visitors. Costa Rica can be found on a map at 9°93N and 84°08WS and is 19,714 square miles. The highest point is Chirripo Hill, measuring up to 12,533 ft.

**Geography**

Mountains producing a rugged terrain ranging from 1,000 to 2,000m in height cover Costa Rica. The Guanacaste Mountains, Central Mountains, and Talamacan Mountain ranges cover the most area, and are very well known. In addition to the mountains, there are many active volcanoes. Costa Rica is part of the Pacific “Rim of Fire” and houses seven of the forty-two active volcanoes on the isthmus. Arenal, Irazu, and Turrialba volcanoes are just a few that keep the landscape ever changing and on constant alert. The country has many dormant volcanoes as well. Costa Rica is bordered on either side by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the landmass can be crossed in a short 45 minutes by plane.

Much of Costa Rica’s land is forest and the outer ring of costal area is covered with Mangrove Swamps. The coast also has sandy white beaches and is a popular place for tourists to bask in the sun. Costa Rica has been able to protect much of its rain forests, and has saved a larger proportion than any other country. A national park system was set up in the country to continue to preserve the remains of wildlife and beauty that Costa Rica has to offer. The
National park which displays beautiful forestry is Braulio Carrillo, Manual Antonio for its beaches, and Poas where you can observe an active crater.

**Climate**

Costa Rica has a mild average temperature of 89°F on the coast with a warm breeze from the oceans, and cools down to as low as 61°F on average inland. There is no summer and winter in Costa Rica; the seasons are split into dry and wet seasons. The dry season is usually from December to April, and the wet from May to November. During the wet season, the average rainfall is about 100 inches countrywide and often mountain areas receive much more. It isn’t unlikely for mountain ranges to experience as much as 25 feet of rainfall.

**History**

Human existence in Costa Rica can be traced back as far as 10,000 years, but there is historical evidence to show that at that time it was sparsely populated. There is little evidence of any major structural skeletons found to prove that the land was populated during the pre-Columbian era. The only historical landscape lies 30 miles east of San Jose. At its peak in 1000 B.C., it was thought to have a maximum of 10,000 inhabitants. The city is undergoing current excavation and traces of gold and pottery have been recovered and placed in museums to commemorate the history of the country.

Costa Rica was passed over by many explorers for its lack of Indians to serve as slaves, since the land was unpopulated. In 1562, Juan Vasquez de Coronado was sent to be Costa Rica’s governor and Cartago was named the capital. Costa Rica was ignored by the Spanish rulers in Guatemala and after some time, had a favorable trade on wheat and tobacco. Slowly the countries economic situation was improving and independence was won around 1821, shortly after Central America won independence from Spain. The dispute about whether Costa
Rica should remain a part of Central America or join Mexico caused a small civil war between
the people of San Jose’ and Cartago. San Jose’ won, and the capital was moved here with
Juan Mora Fernandez as the countries first head of state.

Today, Costa Rica strives to be known for peace and democracy. This is very evident in
the people who care for the country. Costa Rica likes to stand out as a democratic nation in
Latin America, where dictatorship has much been the trend of government.

**Government**

Costa Rica’s government is a democratic Republican with the capital at San Jose’.

**Important Dates**

Important dates for Costa Rica are mainly religious holidays. Holidays involve the
closing of most businesses, transportation, banks, and schools.

January 1 – New Year’s Day, celebrated by a dance in San Jose’.

March 19 – St. Joseph’s Day, patron saint of San Jose’ and San Jose’ Province.

Easter – Holy Week, Semana Santa.

April 11 – Juan Santamaria Day. A day to commemorate the hero who fought against American
invader William Walker at the battle of Rivas in 1856.

May 1 – Labor Day. Dia de los Trabajadores.

June – Corpus Christi

June 29 – St. Peter and St. Paul Day
July 25 – Guanacaste Day. To celebrate the annexation of Guanacaste from Nicaragua in 1824

August 15 – Mother’s Day and Assumption Day,

September 15 – Independence Day.

November 2 – All Soul’s Day

December 8 – Immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary.

December 25 – Christmas Day

**Population**

The population of Costa Rica in 2004 was approximately 3.6 million people. Forty percent of the population (about 1.2 million) live around the capital city of San Jose’. San Jose’ is located in an area called Central Valley which is a plateau that lies in the center of the country. The Central Valley is home to 60% of Costa Rica’s total population. The people in Costa Rica are known as Ticos, are quite diverse, and are mainly descendants of Spanish immigrants. There are also people from Africa and Asia, and even some European. Not all of Costa Rican’s people are dark-skinned, when visiting the valley it is most common to see fair-skinned people. These people are mainly of European descent, whereas, the coastal inhabitants are from African roots. There are still Indian tribes present in the Talamanca Mountains. These people are much less technologically advanced and rely much on farming to support their livelihood.

The population density of Costa Rica is about 70 people per square Kilometer, which is one quarter the population density of the United Kingdom. This is however 2.5 times more than that of the United States.
**Currency**

The official currency of Costa Rica is the Costa Rican colon. One U.S. dollar is equal to 240 colon. Travel is fairly cheap in Costa Rica since the US dollar carries much more value than the colon. The US dollar is widely accepted in Costa Rica.

**Education**

Costa Rica prides itself on their education since many developing nations are not so lucky. The push for education comes from many of Costa Rica’s leaders since they are educators. The main focus is to expand primary and secondary levels of educations in even very unpopulated areas of the country. Costa Rica has a 96% literacy rate thanks to the great effort of Costa Rica’s leaders. Primary school lasts six years, followed by high school that lasts between 5 to 6 years. The first few years focus on academics, and the latter years prepare for a technical or professional field. Costa Rica is considered to have one of the best educational systems in Latin America with even small towns supporting their own high schools. Education is regulated by a division called the Ministry of Education and is supported by articles in the Constitution to uphold the advancing levels of education.

There are private schools in Costa Rica as well. Many of these are North American Schools, and a few German, European, and Japanese. For those that can afford private schools, it offers an alternative to crowded public schools, and exposure to various other cultures.
Language

The official language of Costa Rica is Spanish. English is also widely accepted and spoken.

Religion

The official religion of Costa Rica is Roman Catholic with 76.3% of the population practicing. The next most popular religion is Evangelical with 13.7% practicing with Jehovah’s Witness and other protestant religions in the minority.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the basis for the Costa Rican economy. Popular crops are coffee beans, tobacco, wheat, and bananas. Coffee has historically been Costa Rica’s most valuable crop. There are many Costa Rican coffee blends today noted for their distinctive bitter flavor. Bananas are a close second in importance. The smaller crops are becoming increasingly important in the growing economy. These smaller crops are pineapple, sugars, oranges, rice, hardwoods, ornamental plants, as well as raising cattle for beef and milk.

Although Costa Rica relies much on agriculture, tourism brings in more money yearly than any one exporting crop. Costa Rica remains a high tourist area, and benefits greatly from people visiting.

Food

Rice and Beans are a very traditional food of Costa Rica. These are eaten by many African Costa Ricans and served with a side of salad and plantains. Plantains look similar to a banana but are not sweet. They function much like a potato, and are often served fried.
Plantains are also incorporated into dishes made with chicken and other meats. Many Costa Rican dishes have a spicy kick to them to add an extra burst of flavor to the dish. Being a costal country, Costa Rica also has a lot of seafood. Seafood is served in many ways, and may be accompanied by a fresh exotic fruit salsa. Bananas, oranges, and pineapples are a few fruits that grace the country and are used widely in dishes.

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