

Costa Rica - OVERVIEW

Updated: August 8, 2014



Country Name Long Form: Republic of Costa Rica

Government Type: Democratic Republic

Languages Spoken: Spanish, English

National Flag



Costa Rica is a Tier III Country. Significant security measures are necessary.

	Overall Assessment	Political Violence	Crime	Terrorism	Travel Safety
Costa Rica					
Key: (L) Low – (M) Medium – (H) High – (C)Critical					

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political Violence is rated at LOW

Protests occur in the heavily populated areas on occasion but are generally peaceful. Even though protests are generally peaceful, all protests should be avoided. To avoid perception of interfering in local politics, Americans should avoid protests. The Constitution bars foreigners from political activity, and foreigners involved with protests, even peaceful ones, could be arrested.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is assessed as LOW

There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations operating in Costa Rica. There is a low threat for international and transnational terrorism.

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RULE OF LAW / CORRUPTION

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2013 gave Costa Rica a score of 53, indicating that the country has moderate level of corruption. The CPI rates countries by the perceived levels of corruption in their public sector, with the least corrupt country receiving a maximum score of 100.

CRIME

Crime is assessed as **MEDIUM**

While crimes occur throughout Costa Rica, they are more prevalent in certain locations, including popular tourist destinations and at certain time during the year, including the Christmas holiday season. There is generally a spike in the number of home burglaries and robberies during the holiday season.

The majority of crime and safety threats to the U.S. official and private community involve theft. Petty theft is very common in highly populated and tourist areas. Pickpocketing, mugging, purse snatching and theft are common occurrences and are the biggest issues confronting tourist while visiting. Passport theft is a big concern.

KIDNAPPING

The kidnapping rate is very low and rarely involves U.S. citizens. The majority of kidnappings are a result of feuds between rival criminal organizations. OIJ, Costa Rica's investigative police, have a 100% resolution rate on kidnappings.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual Assaults are not committed frequently against U.S. citizens. In 2013, 11 U.S. citizens reported being sexually assaulted.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Costa Rica is located in an active earthquake and volcanic zone. When planning travel to the area, consider that such a disaster may strike without warning.

Serious flooding occurs annually in the Caribbean Province of Limon and the Pacific Province of Puntarenas and flash floods and severe landslides occur in other parts of Costa Rica as well, depending on the time of year and rainfall.

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Costa Ricans adhere to strict schedules for business, and individuals should ensure they are on time for all scheduled meetings and events.

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- Neither men nor women typically wear shorts. It is more common for men to wear pants and women to wear dresses, skirts or pants.
- Stay in groups, travel in a caravan consisting of two or more vehicles, and stay on the main roads.
- Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary.
- Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security.
- Intercity travel after dark anywhere in should be avoided.
- It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking.
- Official taxis are a suitable means of travel in daylight hours in urban areas. It is highly recommended that taxis be arranged through your hotel, or program office. Negotiate the price in advance.
- Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without a trusted male escort.
- Make sensible security precautions to mitigate the risk of petty crime, particularly pick pocketing and bag snatching.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling to avoid losing it in a robbery.
- Do not resist if you are being robbed and avoid eye contact and to not make any sudden movements. Victims have been killed when they resisted attack or refused to give up their money or other valuables.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and keep a low profile.
- Never leave your food, drinks or belongings unattended.
- Carry bags close to your body and make sure the fasteners are secure.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry or valuables.
- Leave all important documents in a safe or safe deposit box at your hotel and only carry certified copies.
- Trust your instincts. If someone or something makes you uneasy, avoid the situation.

Important Contact Details

International Dialing Code: +506

International Dialing Prefix: 0

Victims of crime in should contact the following phone numbers for assistance

POLICE: The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in is: 911

FIRE DEPARTMENT: 911 or 118

AMBULANCE: 911 or 128

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Note: Police, ambulance or fire department response may be unreliable in some parts of the country.

TRAVEL & ROAD SAFETY

- The infrastructure in Costa Rica is largely underdeveloped.
- Road infrastructure in large cities such as the capital San Jose is adequate. A small percentage of rural roads are paved and existing infrastructure is often old and badly maintained.
- The majority of Costa Rica's power is supplied by hydroelectric sources, although geothermal and wind sources are used to a lesser extent.
- There are some power supply problems along the Costa Rican Pacific coast, especially in tourist destinations such as Playa del Coco and during peak holiday seasons.
- Telecommunications, including internet services are widely available, especially in large cities and resort towns, and the service is generally reliable.
- Mobile phones from the U.S. and several other foreign nations cannot be used in Costa Rica; however phones can be rented upon arrival in the country.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- No travel to downtown area of San Jose after dark.
- No travel to El Pueblo Centro Commercial area of San Jose.
- No travel to ATMs after dark.
- No travel to rural or isolated roads alone or after dark.
- No deviation from approved travel routes.
- No bathing or swimming in rivers.

HEALTH

The provision of medical care in Costa Rica is good in the capital San Jose, but limited in the rural areas of the country. Private medical facilities are available in the capital and boast 24 hr. emergency services as well as surgical theaters and 24 hr. pharmacies. Some medical practitioners may speak English, but in most cases a Spanish translator will be required.

- Tap water is generally not safe to drink in Costa Rica; individuals are advised to consume only sterilized or bottled water. This applies to water used for brushing teeth, making ice or washing foods.
- Unpasteurized milk should be avoided. Powdered or tinned milk should be used as alternative if pasteurized milk is unavailable.
- Fruit and vegetables should only be consumed if they have been peeled or cooked.
- Undercooked meat and fish should be avoided.
- Food from street vendors should also be avoided as this carries a higher risk of causing infection.

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to Costa Rica:

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- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Typhoid (recommended)
- Yellow Fever (required for travelers arriving from a country where yellow fever is present)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, varicella (chickenpox), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

SIGNIFICANT DISEASES –

- **Malaria** – A life threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes. The malaria risk in Costa Rica is prevalent in the Limon, Puntarenas and Alajuela provinces and along the country's border with Panama.
- **Dengue Fever** – An infectious disease carried by mosquitoes. Outbreaks occur annually in Costa Rica, particularly during the rainy season (May to November). The worst affect areas include San Jose and the Central Valley. The number of dengue cases has significantly decreased in 2014, although the disease remains a prominent concern.
- **Chikungunya virus** – A mosquito borne illness with symptoms similar to dengue fever. While chikungunya has not yet reported in Costa Rica as of mid-2014, the government has placed the country on high alert after the disease was first reported in the Caribbean in late 2013. There have been hundreds of thousands of confirmed or suspected chikungunya cases throughout the Caribbean, Venezuela, Guyana Suriname, several Central American countries and the U.S.
- **Diarrhea** – A common illness among travelers and can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. One of the most common causes is a bacterium known as E. coli, which is transmitted by ingesting contaminated food and liquids.

HOSPITALS –

CIMA Hospital

Barrio Los Laureles

San Rafael de Escazu, San Jose

Tel: +506 2208 1000

Hospital Mexico

Transversal 74, San Jose

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Tel: +506 2242 6700

Hospital Clinica Biblica

Avenida 14, San Jose

Tel: +506 2257 5252

US EMBASSY – CONSULATE LOCATIONS

UNITED STATES EMBASSY

Calle 98 Via 104

Pavas

San Jose, Costa Rica

Tel: +506 2519 2000

Fax: +506 2519 2305

Email: consularsanjose@state.gov

TOURIST POLICE:

Tel: +506 2586 4620, +506 2586 4287, +506 2586 4458

USF INTERNATIONAL HOTLINE

USF 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 813-317-5815

AXA Assistance 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 1-877-577-9504 / +1-203-399-5130 (Call collect from abroad)

ASSIST ID #: GLMN 04983932. <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

* Information derived from CIA World Fact Book, US Department of State, OSAC, and Travel Guard. This travel overview summarizes some of the most important concerns; however, it does not negate the need for detailed trip planning.