

Introduction to Costa Rica and the University for Peace

General information

Costa Rica ('rich coast') is a small, peaceful country that is rich in wildlife, natural diversity, and pristine sandy beaches along its Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Colossal volcanoes are some of the many unique attractions that you can find in Costa Rica's many National Parks.

From high, dry mountains to verdant rainforests, Costa Rica is home to a wide range of ecosystems. Costa Rica is well-known for being a peaceful, safe country and was the first country in the world to abolish its army, in 1948.



Location

Costa Rica is bordered by Nicaragua to the north, Panama to the south-southeast, the Pacific Ocean to the west and south and the Caribbean Sea to the east.

Biodiversity

Costa Rica is home to a rich variety of plants and animals. While the country has only about 0.1% of the world's landmass, it contains 4-5% of the world's biodiversity and is one of the 20 most diverse countries. Over 25% of Costa Rica is composed of protected forests and reserves. Among the most common ecosystems in the country are tropical rainforests, cloud forests, páramo (hot grassland), dry pacific forests and mangroves. All of these ecosystems host an incredibly diverse selection of flora and fauna, each type adapted for life in their particular environment.

Culture

Costa Ricans often refer to themselves as tico (masculine) or tica (feminine). The tico ideal is that of a very friendly, helpful, laid back, unhurried, and environmentally aware people. Visitors from the US are often referred to as gringos, which is virtually always congenial in nature. The phrase "Pura Vida" (literally "pure life") is a ubiquitous motto in Costa Rica. It encapsulates the unique tico ideology of living in peace in a calm, unflustered manner, and appreciating life surrounded by nature, family, and friends.

Weather conditions

The climate of Costa Rica is tropical all year round. The dry season in Costa Rica begins in December and ends in April. Given Costa Rica's latitude, the number of daylight hours does

not change drastically with the seasons. The sun rises around 5 a.m. and sets around 6 p.m. year-round. However, changing altitude does result in temperature differences. The Central Valley, at 1,140 meters (3,800 feet), averages 22°C (72°F), while at sea level, the temperature is 26°C (80°F), tempered by sea breezes on the coast. Light clothes are recommended during the day, and a light sweater may be needed for the evenings. Food: Comida típica or typical Costa Rican food is tasty and mild rather than spicy, with a high reliance on fresh fruits and vegetables. The main staple meal consists of rice and beans, which are incorporated into the most typical Costa Rican dishes of gallo pinto and casados. Gallo pinto consists of rice and beans seasoned with coriander, onions and a special Lizano

sauce, usually served for breakfast with a side of scrambled or fried eggs and a cup of coffee. Casados are dishes of white rice, black or red beans, meat (pork, steak, fish, or chicken), a small portion of salad, and fried plantains.

Health

Tap water is safe to drink throughout the country. However, bottled water is available in most places.

Safety

Use common sense when you are traveling around, and walk in pairs rather than alone. We suggest you bring a small flashlight, as some streets are not well-lit. Always yield to vehicles, as pedestrians are not typically given right-of-way. Take care not to display valuables in public (and it is better not to bring expensive jewelry at all). Consider keeping a small lock on your backpack as you walk around in public areas or take public transportation. Always keep an eye on your possessions, and make use of safes in your hotel room.

Electricity

The electrical current used in Costa Rica is 110 volts, AC.

Money

The unit of currency is the colón. The approximate trading is 500 colones to the US dollar. Major credit cards are accepted at most places of business.

University for Peace

Headquartered in Costa Rica, the United Nations-mandated University for Peace (UPEACE) was established in December, 1980 as a Treaty Organization by the UN General Assembly. As determined in the Charter of the University and endorsed by the UPEACE Council, the mission of the University for Peace is “to provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace with the aim of promoting among all human beings the spirit of understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among peoples, and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress, in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations. Today, UPEACE offers short courses and trainings, as well as ten full-time Masters Programs in different

areas of peace-building and hosts students each year from more than fifty countries around the world.

Emergency numbers

General Costa Rica: 911

UPEACE Main line: 2205 9000

UPEACE emergency hot line: 8310 6060

Taxis

Red Official Taxis: 2224-7979