

Destination: Costa Rica



Costa Rica's stunning scenery and incredible variety of wildlife provide a magnificent backdrop to exhilarating adventure.

COSTA RICA ENCOMPASSES a mere 0.03 per cent of the world's landmass, yet hosts nearly five per cent of the planet's biodiversity. At least 238 species of mammals and 201 species of amphibians call this tiny country home. Whales, dolphins and sea turtles splash off the coast. And more than 900 species of birds nest in Costa Rica's trees.¹

The National System of Conservation Areas protects more than one-quarter of Costa Rica for its flora and fauna.² National parks and wildlife refuges extend across dramatically different habitats – from beaches to volcanoes, and from dry to wet tropical rainforests. Combine this with Costa Rica's leadership in sustainable tourism and it's easy to understand why the country attracts so many eco-adventure lovers.

Here's a taste of what makes Costa Rica a unique vacation destination.

Pick the colour of your sand castle

Do you like your sand white, yellow, gray or black? Costa Rica has them all, dotted along 1,290 kilometres of coastline,³ and the country's beaches offer an amazing range of activities. Depending on where you decide to dip your toes into the ocean, you may have the opportunity to grab a surfboard, saddle up for a horseback ride, cast a fishing rod, or hop into a kayak or canoe. Of course, you can always get back to basics, stretch out on a towel and listen to the waves.

Test the waters at Playa Guiones, a seven-kilometre crescent lapped by warm water and gentle waves that is a short walk at low tide from Playa Rosada, a pink sand beach with excellent snorkeling.⁴ Or head to Manuel Antonio National Park and step out of the chattering rainforest onto beaches begging to be photographed, a rich tapestry of sand, sea, rocky headlands and islands.⁵ Find your own piece of beach paradise and build the sand castle of your dreams.

Dive deep into a dazzling cave

Costa Rica's underwater treasures – accessible only to divers – include reefs and caves teeming with fish, as well as manta rays, moray eels and a variety of sharks. Close to shore, Isla Uvita and Manzanillo, on the Caribbean coast,

¹www.visitcostarica.com ²www.visitcostarica.com ³www.costarica.com ⁴www.visitnosara.com ⁵costarica.com

and Isla del Caño, Bat Island and the Catalina Islands, on the Pacific coast, are good places to start your diving adventure.

Enthusiasts can sign up for a multi-day chartered boat trip to Cocos Island National Park, 550 kilometres away. This UNESCO Heritage Site was once a hideout for pirates and may have inspired Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Mountainous and wet, it features more than 200 waterfalls nestled in lush tropical rainforest, along with spectacular dive sites.⁶

Touch the clouds

Clouds blowing from the Caribbean pile up against Costa Rica's Tilarán Mountains and create cloud forests where one tree may be host to hundreds of species of vegetation climbing towards the top of the canopy. Take the plants' example, find your own shaft of light and lift your face towards the warmth of the sun.

Hike into the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve or Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve, across hanging bridges, and keep an eye out for the brilliantly coloured quetzal. Or take a zip line canopy tour from platform to platform through the treetops.

Explore a volcano

Arenal, an active volcano, soars to 1,633 metres above sea level in a nearly perfect cone. At Arenal Volcano National Park, follow four trails winding for about eight kilometres through six-metre-high "brave cane" (similar to sugar cane), into dense rainforest where howler and spider monkeys perform acrobatics overhead, and across volcanic badlands created by lava flows in 1968 and 1993.⁷

At Arenal, the crater is off limits because the volcano continues to belch poisonous gas. So, to get even more up close and personal with a volcano, head to Turrialba Volcano National Park, home to Costa Rica's second-highest volcano (after Irazú) and the only national park in the country that lets you plant your feet in a volcanic boiling pit.⁸

Write your own adventure

Because Costa Rica offers so many different environments and activities, it's easy to arrange your own customized vacation – whether you're looking for thrilling white water rafting through tropical rainforest, or the relaxed decadence of a five-star all-inclusive resort. Ready to take advantage of this year's dry season, from December to March? Start your planning at the Costa Rica Tourism Board's official web site: www.visitcostarica.com. ■

⁶whc.unesco.org/en/list/820 and wikitravel.org/en/Cocos_Island_National_Park ⁷www.arenal.net and costarica.com ⁸www.visitcostarica.com



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