



Thank you for selecting Foto Verde Tours! We want you to know that we make our best effort to ensure that your photo adventure to Costa Rica will be an unforgettable experience (in a positive sense, of course!). Below you will find our pre-trip document, which includes important tips, information, and suggestions pertaining to your Costa Rica trip. Please study the document carefully, and if you have questions or suggestions, feel free to contact us. There is a lot of info here. If you prefer to download this info as an Adobe Acrobat (PDF) document, [click here](#).

General Travel Info

Following our suggestions will make your trip to tropical Costa Rica go as smoothly as possible. The present section contains information to help you stay healthy, relate well to the people you meet during your travels, and to keep your belongings safe and organized.

GENERAL TIPS

1. Water is basically safe to drink in anywhere in Costa Rica, particularly in the lodges that Foto Verde uses. The same goes for the ice, fresh fruit, and salads. If it makes you feel more comfortable, you can buy bottled water in any supermarket, restaurant, or hotel.
2. Electric power in Costa Rica is 110 volts, 60 cycles, same as in the US but different than Europe and some other countries. Check your electrical appliances' information if you are not sure whether they will work in Costa Rica. Travel voltage converters are widely available if you come from a region of the world where 220 volt power is more common. A useful accessory regardless of voltage is a 3-prong to 2-prong adapter as one occasionally encounters electrical outlets suitable only for 2-prong plugs. This is an easy way to avoid a complicated situation

where you are unable to recharge camera batteries or plug in your laptop computer.

3. Be careful when in sunny areas. Sun rays are nearly perpendicular in the tropics, and you can get sunburned very easily, at low and high elevations alike.

4. Our local currency's denomination is the colón (pl. colones). By the time you arrive the exchange rate will be approximately ₡500.00 colones per every US dollar. The colón recently was placed on a crawling band exchange system whereby its value is determined within a range set periodically by Costa Rica's Central Bank. This new policy is expected to help fight Costa Rica's 14% annual inflation rate by keeping Costa Rica's currency from losing too much value relative to the US dollar, though there are concerns that a stronger dollar could hurt the export sector, which is critical to the country's economy.

5. Major credit cards and US cash are accepted almost everywhere. Euros are accepted in some places only. The best places to exchange US dollars into colones are the hotels, for their exchange rate is usually very good and in this way you will be saving time and long lines at the bank. Many ATMs will also dispense cash in dollars or colones with your VISA or Mastercard. Please be careful if using ATMs, as they are popular targets for thieves in San Jose and other areas.

6. Travelers' cheques are welcomed in most hotels and souvenir stores, with \$20 cheques being the most widely accepted denomination. If you want to cash or to pay with traveller's cheques, please do not expect dollars back. You will receive colones according to the exchange rate of the day. You will be also urged to write your passport number on the back of the cheque.

7. When paying with a credit card, you will be charged in colones, not dollars. This is actually a good deal for you, since you will be paying back in dollars and saving the difference on the exchange rate.

8. You might need local currency for some things you might like to buy on the streets or along the road and for postage perhaps. In order to avoid the hassle of changing colones back to dollars upon your departure, it is best not to exchange a large amount of dollars into colones at once.

9. There is a departure tax to be paid in the airport the day you depart back to the US. The tax totals \$26 US per person, and it is preferred that this be paid in cash (dollars, colones, or a mix). Travelers' cheques are not accepted, and the only credit card that can be used is VISA.

10. Guides, drivers, maids, and bellboys expect tips. Taxi drivers who service the airport and

some San Jose hotels now also expect tips.

11. Added to the price of every single item you buy in Costa Rica or every service you pay for, there is a 13% sales tax. Also in bar or restaurant bills, there will be an extra 10% service added. This automatic service charge is the equivalent of the waiter's tip in the US, and you need not tip over and above this amount.

12. In-country flights have a limit on the luggage you can take with you. It is restricted to 25 pounds per person, including carry-on. If your itinerary includes a domestic flight, keep this in mind and pack lightly. We can help to arrange storage of any extra luggage for this portion of your trip.

13. Passports and airline tickets are difficult to replace if lost or stolen. Besides an extra charge, this means presenting your case to local police and having to come in person to your embassy in San Jose. Always keep these and other important documents in a safe place. Many of the hotels we use have safe deposit boxes in the room, so it's a good idea to avail yourself of this service.

14. Though you will need your passport to enter the country, we suggest you also bring along a photocopy of your passport so that you can use it instead of the original to check in to your hotels and fill out forms, reducing the risk of losing or misplacing such an important document.

15. Roads are poorly marked in some areas of Costa Rica. Addresses are usually given using very well known spots as reference points. Nonetheless, your Foto Verde Tour info packet contains very detailed information, including highlighted sections of our road map, in order to facilitate your driving around.

16. From any public or private phone in Costa Rica you can call anywhere in the world. In the hotels, always check if there is an additional cost for international calls. Your 1-800 numbers will be charged as normal long-distance calls from Costa Rica.

17. The best deal regarding international calls is actually to use a phone card or to call collect. Paying here is more expensive. Keep the following numbers at hand so you can easily make any international phone calls: 0 800 0122 222- MCI 06 person to person w/operator 0 800 0114 114- AT&T and collect calls 116- International Operator Service 0 800 0130 123- SPRINT 124- Information

18. A general misconception is that a little "tip" to public officials might help to accelerate

certain bureaucratic procedures. That might be true in other countries, but in Costa Rica it is considered a bribe and can cause you a lot of trouble.

19. Things happen at a different pace in Costa Rica. Our rhythm of life is certainly slower than yours, and that really drives some people mad. But getting mad does not speed things up. If any situation where you find yourself slowed down for reasons beyond your control, relax and try not to get stressed. Patience and understanding are much appreciated by locals and that will sure help solve any problem.

20. When walking in the city, please be very careful as you cross the streets. On paper, pedestrians have priority in the corners and crossroads, but that is rarely respected in real life.

21. In case of missing luggage, you must fill out a claim form with the airline and authorize "BAT Travel/Foto Verde Tours" (through a signed note) to retrieve your baggage when it arrives to the country, for that takes a few days sometimes. In this case it is absolutely necessary for us to have a copy of the original passport of the person whose luggage is missing. Transportation of the baggage to the location where you would be must be arranged directly between you and the airline. If they agree to pay us for the transfer, we will be more than happy to deliver your bags.

22. Remember to re-confirm your departure flights at least 72 hours before. If you give us your flight number and confirmation, we will be happy to do it for you.

23. If you lose any of our vouchers, please let us know immediately and we will fax or send a replacement.

24. Costa Rica is famous for some crafts and other products you might like to try during your trip, or perhaps to buy to take back home for yourselves or as gifts for family and friends. The very famous Salsa Lizano is a natural mixture of vegetables and spices, totally traditional and with a deliciously mild flavor. Costa Rican coffee is well known as one of world's best. If interested in really good coffee, two brands are the best: Rey Tarrazu (in a black bag in orchid painting in the front) or Britt (in red or green bags). The first is better and curiously, cheaper. Local rum (Centenario) is tasty, though the widely available Nicaraguan-made Flor de Cana is better. Costa Rican cigars are also quite good. Locally made guava jelly is easily transportable and will make an exotic addition to your pantry back home.

ARRIVING

The Juan Santamaría International Airport can be a little disorganized at times. No one that is

not an airport official or a traveler is authorized to be inside the terminal. That's why our representatives or other service providers you might have contracted directly will be waiting for you outside the airport, by the Arrivals gate. After landing at the Juan Santamaría International Airport, you will have to retrieve your luggage and then go through customs and immigration. If there is any problem with your luggage, please make sure you present a claim with the airline representatives you will find in the area. At this point, if you have any missing luggage, you must talk with a representative from your airline and ask for a claim form. Please notify us via our representative or call us when you get to your hotel in order to coordinate the luggage retrieving process.

If your bags are not too many, it is better if you handle them yourselves. On the way out, you must show your baggage tickets to an airport officer and then you will be out. This part of the airport is rather messy and usually crowded. To help our guide or driver to find you, please take the right exit when going out. If you are to be picked up by us, our representative will be out there with a sign in hand; look for your name and Foto Verde Tours written on it. Once you find him, he will either take you to our private van for the ride to San Jose downtown or give you the necessary vouchers and traveling information, depending on your case.

If you are making your own arrival plans, your traveling package will be given to you when you meet your guide or driver later on the trip or will be waiting for you at your rental car counter.

WHAT TO BRING & WHAT TO WEAR

Following you will find a list of some items you might need while in Costa Rica. This is not a definitive list and you might add anything else you consider convenient or useful.

1. Water bottle or jug: That you can keep refilling, especially for your hikes. Bottled water is available everywhere in the country.
2. Binoculars: If taking a break from photography, have some binoculars handy for wildlife spotting or landscape observation.
3. Flashlight: Power outages happen sometimes, and flashlights are a great assistance. To help you change a tire or just to walk around at night, always keep one with you. In addition, a headlamp is a great help for nocturnal macro photography, to find subjects, keep yourself safe, as an image light source, and as a focusing aid.
4. Sunglasses and hats: To protect yourselves at the beach or sunny areas.

5. Sun block lotion: Protection factor will depend on your skin type and sensibility, but that can save the day from the discomfort of sunburns. Note that the sun is strong here in Costa Rica, particularly at higher elevations and even on cloudy days.
6. First aid kit: containing basic things such as anti-histamines, anti-inflammatories, Dramamine or other motion sickness pills or patches, analgesics, band aids, gauze, antiseptic, and medication for diarrhea (e.g., Immodium, Pepto-Bismol and Lomotil).
7. Alarm clock (or an alarm on your watch or mobile phone): A great help to wake up early for photography as most of the lodges do not offer wake up service.
8. Comfortable shoes: For hikes, tennis shoes with good traction soles or hiking boots. "Tevas" or other sandals are ideal for the beach. Bring a pair of old shoes you wouldn't mind throwing away after horseback rides or muddy hiking conditions, for they can get really dirty and smelly.
9. Comfortable clothing: Except for the highlands, the temperature is rather warm in most of Costa Rica's locations. Hot temperatures and high humidity make T-shirts and shorts advisable, but breathable long sleeves and long pants are a great option for spending time in the forest. A pair of blue jeans and a jacket will be a good idea for your time in the capital area. If you are traveling to highland areas, a polartec jacket or sweatshirt will be nice for the chilly evenings. Same advice for the shoes is applicable for clothing: some old pants you don't mind throwing away after horseback rides or muddy terrain hikes. Some hotels on your Foto Verde Tours itinerary will offer laundry service, and prices are normally quite reasonable.
10. Mosquito repellent: Contrary to popular belief, the mosquito situation can be much worse at your latitudes during certain times of the year than what it is here year around. However, is better to be prepared, so please pack your favorite repellent. We prefer botanical solutions, as repellants heavy on DEET have been known to melt plastic, and a shutter release button fused to your camera body would spell bad news for your photography.
11. Rain gear: In Costa Rica we can expect unexpected rains at any time! Usually they happen in the late afternoon or in the evening, but it is always a good idea to have rain gear handy, both for yourself and your photo gear. Kitchen garbage bags are a cheap and quick way to cover up gear.
12. Swimwear: It might be difficult down here to find the one you like or the one that fits!

SAFETY

In general, Costa Rica is a very safe country. For years, the warm smiles and pleasant attitudes of the locals have been one of the tourists' best memories of Costa Rica. However, we are not immune to the social and economic problems affecting the general area of Latin America. As in many areas with tourism, thieves have become quite creative and adept at pickpocketing and lifting items from rental cars. Cameras and portable computer equipment, as in any part of the world, are particularly attractive items for the agile thief. The purpose of this section is not to scare you or to give the wrong impression about Costa Rica. As a matter of fact, you will find that the list of suggestions below is not very different from anything you would normally do at home or when traveling to other parts of the world. In order to enjoy an incident-free trip and to get the most out of what Costa Rica has to offer, please review this section carefully and if you have questions or doubts, please contact us.

HEALTH

1. Please make us aware of any relevant medical conditions or health issues before departing for Costa Rica. There are spaces for this information on our traveler info form, which we will ask you to fill out as your private tour or workshop tour start date draws near.
2. Although Foto Verde will pass along health and dietary information to our service providers, it is best to inform hotel staff about allergies or diet problems you might have upon arrival.
3. Please provide us with an emergency contact not traveling with you -- a name and address, phone number, and e-mail address of a person we can contact in case of an emergency. Again, there is a field for this information on our traveler info form, which we will ask you to fill out as your private tour or workshop tour start date draws near.
4. Please verify if your health insurance covers overseas eventualities. We have a contract with a local hospital that deals directly with companies such as Medicare, Blue Cross-Blue Shield and others, and it might be a good idea to see if coverage is compatible.
5. If any of you needs to be taken to a hospital while in Costa Rica, we will help to establish the contacts with the emergency rooms and specialists and to procure transportation if necessary. We will also help with the documentation you might need to present the proper insurance claim.
6. Water is safe to drink in most of the country, especially in the hotels and restaurants. The

same for the ice. Salads, fresh fruit plates, and juices are also OK. Nonetheless, if you have a sensitive stomach, you may want to be more cautious. Bottled water is available in most stores and hotels throughout the country.

7. Although water is potable and food is safe to eat, sometimes the change in diet might upset some people's stomachs, causing the infamous "travelers diarrhea." In case of diarrhea, the best you can do is to let it go naturally, for your body can get rid of whatever is upsetting it in the fastest way. If the problem persists for more than 24 hours, is time to start taking medication. Usually, Pepto-Bismol, Imodium D or Lomotil and a soft diet are enough to control the problem. If diarrhea is accompanied with fever or severe nausea, it is best to see a doctor.

8. Malaria and dengue fever do exist in Costa Rica, although they are not a serious problem as in other Latin American destinations. The case of any tourist infected with these or other tropical diseases is seldom seen, and our itineraries do not take you close to the so-called "Malaria areas" in Costa Rica. It is your decision whether or not to take any shots or malaria medication. Please consult your doctor, and see the Foto Verde Tours website's FAQ section for more information.

9. Venemous snakes and other animals and insects are found in Costa Rica. They are seldom seen, but they are part of the evolutionary arms race that is particularly accelerated in the tropics and that provides us with the stunning biodiversity that excites us as photographers and naturalists. So, it is always advisable to watch where you're stepping when on the trail.

VALUABLES

1. Keep a list of your documents and valuables including your credit card numbers, date of issue, and expiration date. This information is necessary to cancel the cards if you lose them.

2. Your passport and airline tickets must always be kept in a safe place. Usually, the hotels' rooms are considered safe enough, but you can inquire about safe deposit boxes. Do not walk around the capital city with them.

3. Never give your passport to anyone you don't know. You will have to show it when cashing travelers cheques and at the airport.

4. A photocopy of your passport is a good idea, so you can use it instead of your actual passport when checking in to your hotels, thus minimizing the chances of misplacing this important document.

5. Do not venture in the capital city by yourself without consulting first with your hotel's front desk staff. As in any major city, some areas are safer than others. The hotel's front desk staff can always assist you with getting a taxi or giving you directions.

6. Fine jewelry and other expensive or meaningful items are not necessary on a trip to Costa Rica. It is best if you leave these items at home.

DRIVING AROUND (if you are renting a car)

1. Car rental companies do not have full cover insurance in Costa Rica. There is a collision (CDW) insurance with a deductible ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,500 US dollars that is charged to your credit card when you pick up your car, and cancelled upon return (deposit). Most of the time the vehicles are returned without any inconveniences, but it is a good idea to take good care of the car so you don't have to pay any extra charges.

2. Some credit cards have insurance for car rental services in foreign countries, so you can decline local insurance. There are also optional insurances that are offered. Please check with your credit card company.

3. Check the vehicle with the car rental's counter to verify that pre-existing damage and scratches are properly recorded in your rental contract.

4. It might be a good idea to have more than one driver signing the contract. Switching drivers is particularly convenient especially during long drives. This has an additional cost of a few dollars per day per extra driver but may be worth the extra cost depending on your itinerary.

5. In Costa Rica, we drive on the right-hand side of the road, US-style. Our local traffic laws and regulations are basically the same as yours. Be careful, drive slowly, and always use seat belts for your safety and to avoid fines.

6. Traffic police have checkpoints along many major roads, and it is quite normal to be stopped without any apparent reason. The police are simply verifying that the vehicle's documentation is in order and looking for drunk drivers. Show them the car papers and contract and your driver's license. There should be no problem, but if you are going to be ticketed, do not try to bribe the police. There are always a few corrupted cops that might accept your money to let you go, but most of our police are very honest and bribing them can get you deep into trouble. Accept the ticket and inform the car rental company as soon as possible upon arrival at your next lodging stop.

7. As in any other country, some drivers are reckless and drive very fast; taxi, bus, and truck drivers are notorious for their creative driving. Please drive defensively.
8. Some of the roads you will be driving on are not paved. Always drive slowly on gravel or dirt roads. Remember that braking distance is increased in these conditions.
9. Costa Rica is a country with many mountains. Many roads are steep and twisty. Always use a low gear when going steeply downhill, even with automatic transmission, which can be shifted on the fly and without clutch, as it saves the brakes and gives you more control of the vehicle.
10. If your car has a four-wheel-drive, please remember that this type of vehicle responds differently to certain driving conditions than an automobile. Keep in mind that the center of gravity in these vehicles may be higher than those of your own car. Reduce speed on curves, and drive slowly to enjoy our beautiful scenery.
11. Always lock your car when you park it anywhere. Just as a precaution, do not leave anything inside when leaving it alone or in a hotel's parking lot overnight. This is in order to reduce the probability of theft and having to pay for damages.
12. If the car has a stereo with a removable cover, remove it and drop it into your luggage. Rental car companies hold you liable for damages and theft.
13. When stopping in a restaurant along the road, please keep an eye on your car. Given the value of your photographic equipment, we recommend stopping only at open-air restaurants where you can park right next to your table. If you wish to take your camera backpack into a restaurant with you, secure it by passing the straps under your chair legs as you eat and never leave your things unattended while using the restroom.
14. Going from one place to another, please use the instructions and map sections provided in your day-by-day schedule. They have the routes highlighted in blue and contain important references and instructions about "how to get there."
15. If anything goes wrong with your car, do not try to fix it yourself. Call the car rental company immediately for instructions. It pains us to say this because Costa Ricans are known for being exceedingly generous and helpful, but be wary of Good Samaritans. Tourist scams have increased in their creativity, and the best recommendation when you have car trouble is to continue on to a well-lit and busy place (such as a restaurant or gas station) whenever possible.