

## Welcome to Costa Rica's North Pacific Coast

Costa Rica has become one of the most desirable travel destinations on Earth. Its climate, topography, friendly people, environmental sensitivity, and welcoming traditions create a memorable experience for most foreign travelers. Visitors often return a number of times, and an increasing number become investors and residents in order to live the Costa Rican experience. This is particularly true for visitors to Guanacaste Province, home of Tamarindo, Flamingo, and the unspoiled beaches of Costa Rica's northern Pacific coast. Whether you are a first time Costa Rica visitor or a veteran, there are smart travel moves to keep in mind.

### Prepare

A valid passport is required to enter the country. Once you pass through Immigration you are permitted to travel with a photocopy of your passport that shows your photo, passport number and entry stamp. When traveling with both, keep the passport and copy in separate locations on your person.

As a tourist, you are permitted to remain in Costa Rica for 90 days from the date of your last entry. It was stamped in your passport when you passed through Immigration. Your most recent entry date stamp will be checked as you leave the country and, if you have overstayed your 90 days, you can be prevented from re-entering for a long time. You must leave Costa Rica on or before your 90th day in the country and not return for 3 days. After 3 days, you can re-enter and are welcome to stay for another 90 days.

There are strict protocols about bringing food, plant matter, animals, cash or cash equivalents, and goods destined for commercial activity into Costa Rica. All such items are to be declared at Immigration and could be seized, if not properly documented. It is possible to bring a family pet with you, but this requires advance preparation in your home country. Consult with your veterinarian and the nearest Costa Rican embassy or consulate a couple of months before your trip.

If you have any concerns about restrictions for traveling to Costa Rica from your home (or any other country), please check with the nearest, official Costa Rican representative for information.

### Entry Points

Numerous airlines provide links to Costa Rica from many international cities. It is also possible to arrive at land border crossings with Nicaragua and Panama. Most tourists arrive by air at San Jose, the national capital in the Central Valley, or at Liberia, a new destination in the northwest province of Guanacaste. Its proximity to the northern Pacific Ocean beaches has made the Liberia connection very popular with tourists from North America. Several scheduled and charter airlines provide flights each day from departure cities in the USA and Canada. If you are looking for

flights on the internet, the 3-letter international airport code for Liberia is "LIR" and for San Jose it is "SJO".

## Ground Transport

Upon arrival, you will have many options for ground transportation to your accommodation and throughout Costa Rica.

## Rental Cars

You can rent cars in many locations and at both international airports. You can usually reserve a car on-line before leaving for Costa Rica. For travel in Guanacaste, it is recommended that you rent a mid-size (or larger) 4-wheel drive vehicle. Many of the roads can be rough or are simply dirt and can become a challenge, particularly the months when it rains (see weather). Unless you prefer a manual transmission, request an automatic. Call the rental location directly in Costa Rica to confirm the request for an automatic transmission.

You must have a valid driver's license and a credit card to rent a vehicle. The current standard security deposit is \$1500.00 (USD), which will be posted to your account as a "hold" until you return the vehicle. Be sure to have this much available credit on a card before you arrive. Unless your credit card provides complete insurance coverage, take the insurance from the rental company.

Do not rent the cheapest car (tiny compact) and expect to drive it across the entire country. You will regret it.

## Taxis

You can take taxis throughout the country. Your accommodation may also arrange a taxi driver to meet you at the airport when you arrive. If you are not sure you will need a rental car for the entire time, you can take a taxi to your vacation condo or hotel and rent one later near where you are staying. Negotiate the cost of trips from the airports in advance. You can also hire a taxi driver by the day for side trips. Simply negotiate a fee for the day before you leave on the side trip. Also, confirm if gasoline costs will be charged in addition to the fee. With the rise in gasoline prices, this is increasingly common.

In the bigger cities, short trips can be charged by the meter or negotiated in advance. Make sure whether the meter is working before getting into a cab and starting your trip. Rates have been recently raised, but should be posted in each cab.

## Buses

Costa Rica has an extensive bus system that services not only the metropolitan areas, but travels to most sections of the country. Fares are relatively cheap. There

is a point-to-point minivan system called Interbus that can be very convenient for side trips taking longer than one day. It can be ordered by telephone. Ask your vacation rental service or accommodation for assistance.

Do not hitchhike, nor pick up hitchhikers if you are driving.

## Seasons/Weather

Costa Rica has two basic seasons with some variations:

### Dry/High Season

This starts in late November and lasts through April. Days are usually dry and sunny. It is also the season of flowering trees in multiple colors all over the country. This is the most popular season, because it corresponds to North American winter. Reservations need to be made well in advance and expect travel-related prices to be more expensive. The highest prices for anything needed by tourists will be charged during the weeks of Christmas, New Years and Easter. These are traditional holiday periods for Costa Ricans, as well, and demand for beach locations, for example, is at its highest. These weeks are when people from San Jose make a special effort to go to the beach for a vacation. The children are out of school for 6 weeks and most government offices are closed for a month after December 15th.

### Special Features of Dry Season:

Dec-Feb is "Fiesta Season", which means rodeos and carnivals are held in rural cities. The national rodeo is held in Santa Cruz, Guanacaste in January.

February is the windiest month at the beach. The prevailing easterly winds come down the central mountains and blow out to the Pacific. There can be days when it is somewhat more difficult to enjoy the beach, because of blowing sand. On some beaches you can rent chairs or simply enjoy calmer conditions around a pool.

April is the hottest month of the year as the dry season peaks before the rains in May.

### Wet/Low/Mid Season

The season (of many names) starts in May and runs into November. Rain may come daily during the afternoon, but the sunny mornings and temperate evenings are very welcome. It is also the period when Costa Rica makes a magical transition to a completely lush, green paradise. Roads can be muddy, potholes more numerous, and a 4-wheel vehicle is strongly recommended. Most rates for tourist services and activities are reduced, making this the bargain season.

Veranillo ("Little Summer") occurs in July and August when the weather dries up for a few weeks. Schools are out for 3 weeks and Costa Ricans take long weekends at

the beach. North American families with children are more noticeable during Veranillo, as it corresponds to summer vacation there, too.

In later September and all of October, the rains come in earnest. It can be cloudy for days at a time. The weather is the mildest of the year and Costa Ricans consider it "winter". It can be 60 degrees in San Jose at night and you will see people in gloves, scarves and heavy coats. The beach is always warmer, but it is the coolest part of the year there, too.

## Money

### Cash

The Costa Rican "Colon" and the US Dollar are used interchangeably in Costa Rica. If you travel with cash in US Dollars, there is no need to exchange money in advance, or at currency exchanges. Each vendor will take them and convert them at each transaction. Your change everywhere will almost always be in colones and you will accumulate them quickly after arrival. It is wise to travel within Costa Rica with both currencies, just in case a small vendor wants colones.

There is a strong reluctance to accept anything larger than a US \$20, because of the existence of counterfeit US currency around the world. Do not bring damaged or soiled bills either. If you are traveling with any other national currency, only exchange it at banks, your hotel or reputable currency exchanges, such as those at airports. To exchange your money you must show your passport or the photocopy.

The best rates with no fees are usually found at the national (government-backed) banks. The hours for the two national banks (Banco Nacional and Banco Costa Rica) are Monday through Friday from 9 am to 3 PM, 4PM, or 5 PM, depending upon location. They both have branches and ATMs throughout the country. All banks are usually closed on weekends.

If you want exchange currency at a bank, be prepared for the possibility of long lines, especially on Monday. Costa Rica is organized so that a wide number of public payments (utilities, taxes, deposits) are handled by the national banks, so people are frequently there – and with many things to complete. The best times are usually mid-afternoon on mid-week days.

The exchange rate as we begin October 2006, is surpassing 520 Colones to the US Dollar. The government is going to allow the Colon to "float" soon, so exchange rates will fluctuate, perhaps daily. Most business establishments will have the exchange rate posted.

### Credit Cards/ATMs

ATM's (Cirrus, Star, Plus, etc.) are available variously accepting Visa, Master Card, Amex, some US bank cards, and a few foreign credit cards. Always confirm that you

got the correct amount. When using an ATM, make sure it is in a well-lit area. Do not count your money until you are in a safe place.

AMEX, VISA and Master Card credit/debit cards can be used in retail establishments, restaurants, hotels, and gas stations, with VISA being the most widely accepted. When paying at a gas station with a credit card, always follow the attendant and observe the swiping of your card. Recently, unscrupulous attendants have swiped some cards more than once without the cardholder being aware – until it is too late.

## Checks

Foreign checks are very reluctantly accepted because Costa Rican banks put a “hold” on the funds for up to 5 weeks, while they physically send them out of the country to clear. This includes traveler’s checks. You can exchange traveler’s check for cash at a bank, or perhaps at your accommodation, more easily than at most business establishments.

## Taxes

There is a 13% sales tax on most services and goods. There is also an extra 3% tourist tax on hotel bills. These taxes should be clearly identified on any bill.

When you leave Costa Rica, there is a departure tax of U.S. \$26. (Note: This may increase at random intervals.) This can be paid at the airport, but be sure to go early to get into line. Cash or your VISA card will be accepted at the airport. Recently, the procedure has been made more flexible. You can also pay at certain banks a few days before departure, if that is more convenient.

## Tipping

In general, if someone provides a special or superior service, they deserve a tip. The average Costa Rican worker, bag handler, bell hop, and maid are all probably working for less than \$2 per hour, including benefits. Making a living can depend on tips earned by providing good service. Please encourage them appropriately.

Restaurants automatically add a 10% service charge. Read your bill before leaving a tip. It should already be identified, along with the tax. If you receive unusually good service or are especially pleased with your server, you might feel good about slipping them another 5%. The good karma will follow you.

Tour guides are tipped anywhere from \$3 to \$20 depending on the tour and quality of service provided. Hotel maids and tour drivers are also sometimes left a tip, if service is satisfactory.

Porters and bellhops get \$1 per bag.

Time

Time Zone

Costa Rica is the same longitude as Chicago, so it is in Central Standard Time for the entire year. When Daylight Savings time goes into affect, Costa Rica does not follow, so it is in Mountain Daylight Time during those months. This changes flight schedules into the country from North America.

Sunrise/Sunset

Costa Rica is at approximately 10 degrees north latitude, which means the number hours of day and night do not vary as much as more northerly zones over the course of the year. Most laborers are working by 6AM, because it always starts getting light around 5AM.

Packing/Luggage

Packing for a trip to Costa Rica is very similar to preparing to visit any other tropical climate. Cooler temperatures do prevail at higher elevations (San Jose), but the differential with the beach or valley rainforests is barely more than 10 degrees most of the time. Bring clothes and accessories that are appropriate to the season and region you plan to visit:

Lightweight fabrics which are cool to wear or will dry quickly, if you are caught in a shower.

Rain gear in wet season.

Sturdy shoes and sandals for walking on rough terrain to get to a beach or surfing location. Hiking boots may be in order for volcano visits or rainforest treks.

Casual wear (shorts, t-shirts, tank tops) for most of the time.

Nicer shirts, blouses, sandals and slacks for evenings at nicer restaurants, parties, or days in San Jose.

Sun protection in the form of hats, sunglasses, and sun block. You will burn your skin in 20 minutes on the first day, if you do not come prepared.

Insect repellents in sprays, lotions or creams.

Electrical devices (hair blowers, shavers, toothbrushes) will work here, if they operate on 110 volts.

DO NOT BRING expensive jewelry or sentimental personal items that will draw the attention of petty thieves. Keep your jewelry securely on your person or in a safe at your accommodation at all times.

Laundry: Most vacation rental units come with a washer and dryer or access to common facilities. If not, ask your accommodation to connect you with a personal laundry service. Do not bring anything you will need to dry clean while traveling, unless you will be in San Jose for a few days or staying at a 5-star resort. Dry cleaners are not available anywhere else.

## Health Issues

Costa Rica has excellent health care and sanitary standards are high. Hospitals and private clinics are similar in quality to those in the United States, but not as expensive. Some foreign health insurers have participating providers in Costa Rica. You may want to confirm with yours before you leave. Costa Rica's socialized medicine and public education has served to effectively control those illnesses and diseases that typically affect tropical countries.

Vaccinations are not required, nor are they considered necessary. If you are current with the prevailing preventative medical practice on your home country, you will likely be fine in Costa Rica.

Costa Rica can have seasonal outbreaks of Dengue Fever, which can be spread by mosquitoes. It is similar to a bad cold or flu and is treatable, but can be more serious, if you are infected more than once. While this may be unlikely in the case of tourists, it is best to be informed. There are active abatement programs and widespread public information efforts. Please look for descriptions of symptoms and wear insect repellents in mosquito-infested areas.

Be sure to bring with you a medical history if you have any health condition that would require special attention or consideration in the event of illness or accident. Costa Rica does use a 911 emergency call system that uses bilingual operators.

## Driving

You need a valid driver's license before operating any motorized vehicle in Costa Rica. This does include ATVs, but some vendors allow teenagers over 14 to drive one with a parent riding in it, as well. Please note that it is illegal to drive any vehicle on the beaches and enforcement is increasing.

You should always carry your license and passport with you, while driving.

Costa Rica has very tough driving laws, especially concerning wearing your seatbelt or operating a vehicle while intoxicated. Speed traps are also set regularly on main highways. Oncoming drivers will typically warn you of speed traps by flashing their lights. If you are caught in one, please follow the policeman's directions to pull over

and provide your IDs. The officer will explain the infraction and methods of resolving the fine.

**WARNING!** Costa Rica has one of the highest accident rates in the world; drivers can be very aggressive, or inordinately slow - so be prepared to avoid a collision at all times.

Night time driving is particularly risky. Many trucks and farm vehicles have few or no lights. People often gather on the edge of the road to chat with neighbors. Bicyclists do not routinely wear bright or reflective clothing. Farm animals often wander loose in the countryside and can suddenly appear on the road without warning. Buses stop right on the highway to pick up or drop passengers. Potholes are a constant hazard in the rural areas.

If you need to stop suddenly (night or day) put on your flashers immediately (if you can) as you slow down to warn drivers who are following you. Do the same if you are already stopped and are the last vehicle at the end of a line of traffic.

Fuel prices have kept pace with the rest of the world. Currently it is approximately \$1.00 per liter or approximately \$3.50 per gallon. Filling the tank can easily total \$70.00.

## Beaches

The beaches of Costa Rica are truly wonderful and will provide great times and memories for all who experience them – as long as you are an informed beachgoer. There are risks in anything involving swimming or the ocean, and it is best to be aware before you begin.

**Lifeguards:** Costa Rica's beaches generally lack the services of lifeguards around the country. Some of the most popular, like Tamarindo, are staffed in high season, but it is best to not expect immediate assistance as you plan a beach excursion.

**Rip Tides:** Of the 200 people that drown in Costa Rica every year about 90% are caused by currents also called rip tides. They pull the swimmer out into the sea and can occur in shallow water. Most of the deaths are caused because of exhaustion by the swimmer trying to fight the tide. Remember the tide will only pull you out but not under! If you are caught, just float with the tide or try to swim parallel to the coast line and not towards the coast. Suddenly the tide will disappear and you can swim back at a 45 degree angle to the coast. It will not carry you out for miles! Some of the most beautiful Beaches of Costa Rica, like Playa Bonita in the Cahuita National Park are famous for its Rip Tides, as well as Playa Dominical, Playa Barranca, and Playa Espadilla near Manuel Antonio.

**Low-risk Beaches:** Beaches ideal for families with small children or bad swimmers can be found in bays or Bahías, like the Golfo de Papagayo, Bahía Potrero or la Isla Tortuga. Some of these beaches have no waves or currents at all.

Pollution/Cleanliness: Costa Rica has a very active "Blue Flag" program. If a beach has a Blue Flag, it has passed a series of reviews for water pollution, litter, and regular oversight. Most communities near popular tourist beaches work hard to retain their Blue Flags and have committees for beach management. As you travel, you may want to stay aware of local news about the beaches and their condition. See our link to The Beach Times for weekly news about Costa Rica's North Pacific Coast and beaches.

"No See Ems" – These tiny insects can be in the dry sand, especially on remote or primitive beaches with few human visitors. They exist throughout the Caribbean and Central American Coasts. They are as small as the sand grains. You will know you were bitten, because you will have very itchy bumps, usually on your feet and ankles for a couple of days. Do not scratch them! Just put an anti-itch cream on them until the discomfort subsides.

To minimize the risk of being bitten, use a beach blanket, large towel, or mat to sit on while at the beach, particularly if you find that remote, private spot where clothes and cares may seem unnecessary. "No See Ems" are not particular about where they bite you.

#### Radio/TV

Costa Rica has a wide range of radio stations which can be heard throughout the country, because it is only as large as West Virginia. Scan the FM band for your favorite. "Smooth Jazz" is available on 95.5FM.

There are cable and satellite television services. Your accommodation will have at least one. Most cable services have at least one local network station from the US, as well as a wide variety of English language programming.

#### Telephone

Telephones: Direct dial to most countries is available. You may also use telephone credits cards through the appropriate operators including ATT, MCI, Sprint, and Bell Canada or simply dial the access code to your carrier and then the number.

AT&T operator by dialing 0-800-011-4114, MCI by calling 0-800-012-2222, Sprint by dialing 0-800-013-0123, Canada Bell by dialing 0-800-015-1161, British Telecom by dialing 0-800-044-1044

To make a collect call from any phone, dial 09, the international access code of the country being called, and then the number. If you ever need an English-speaking operator, simply dial 116.

Making international calls from pay phones is possible with calling cards that are sold in stores. There are two types of cards, so be sure to buy one for international calls.

Rental car companies now offer rental cell phones for the duration of your trip. This may be a wise investment, particularly if you plan to venture into remote locations.

### Electricity

Standard current is 110 volts, 60 Hertz. It is the same as in the US and you will find the same wall outlets. Sometimes outlets only have 2 slots w/o the 3rd 'ground' receptacle, so an adapter can be handy.

### Water

Unlike most Latin American countries, Costa Rica has a reputation for good clean drinking water. Most tap water is pure. Salads are safe in most restaurants because crops are grown with clean irrigated water. In rural areas, you may want to play it completely safe and stick with cooked vegetables as side dishes. Even though the water quality is good, you still may want to drink the readily available, relatively inexpensive, bottled water.

### Food

The main Costa Rican dish is rice and beans which can be eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Costa Ricans enjoy a lot of meat, mostly beef, chicken, and pork. Costa Rica is not known for an exotic cuisine, just very stable, satisfying fare.

At breakfast, a "typical" Costa Rican meal you will find at a restaurant will include eggs prepared to your liking, rice and beans, plantains, perhaps bread and/or fruit, and coffee.

The coffee is delicious and very high-octane, so be careful if you are sensitive to caffeine. If you find that you have trouble falling asleep at night, cut back on your coffee consumption during the day. If you adjust to the coffee in Costa Rica, be ready for a little caffeine withdrawal when you return home.

At lunch or dinner, a "casado" is a typical meal. Casado means "married" and the name implies the entree is "married" to the rest of the dish. You can have casados with beef, pork, chicken, fish, seafood, etc, etc. The other parts of this plate include rice, beans, salad, plantains or another vegetable.

Of course, as a major international travel destination, Costa Rica's larger cities and resorts have many restaurants serving a variety of cuisines. San Jose, in particular, has evolved great restaurants in its more fashionable areas like Escazu and the emerging areas around Santa Ana. Ask at your accommodation for

recommendations in whatever area you visit. There is good sushi in San Jose. Email us and we will tell you where.....

## Culture/Customs

The Costa Rican people are affectionately known as "Ticos" (male) or "Ticas" (female). They are very generous, welcoming people. As with any country, the residents of the cities and the tourist zones have a cosmopolitan attitude and are curious about visitors. More traditional attitudes prevail in some of the provincial towns and a certain degree of "standoffishness" may be felt.

Language: South American Spanish is the primary language of Costa Rica, but is used interchangeably with European Spanish. Pronunciations can be mixed, so listen carefully, if you are a Spanish-speaker. English is spoken in many areas, especially those visited by tourists.

Education: Costa Ricans value education very highly and the country has a 98% literacy rate. There has been a recent emphasis on teaching English as a second language and now high school students cannot graduate without passing a verbal English test.

Family: Mothers are regarded as the leading family figures. Mother's Day is a national holiday and everyone gets off work. Grandparents and the elderly are also highly respected.

Pastimes: 1) "Football" (soccer): Most activity stops when the Costa Rican football team is on television. 2) Fiestas (rodeos): In fiesta season, most regular activity ceases in each town that holds one. The banks even close on a spot basis. 3) Politics: The Costa Rican people are quite proud of their democracy. It has been independent since 1821. They last had a civil war in 1948; the resolution of which led to the abolition of the national military. They now only have national police and coast guard.

Dancing: Costa Ricans love to dance! Males typically lead the dance...if you want to woo a "tica", you would be wise to take a couple of salsa lessons first.

Women: Although it is safe for women to travel in Costa Rica, some locals are unaccustomed to seeing women traveling alone. Males will see unaccompanied females as not spoken for and will traditionally "hiss" and express compliments. (This can happen anywhere in the world.) It is just a macho cultural thing and appropriate to ignore if unwelcome.

Dress: Costa Rican men are rarely seen in shorts or bright colors. Men in shorts are not seen as serious, particularly in business dealings. Men are also quite modest when it comes to swimming attire, as well. Women, on the other hand, may dress (and swim) with a little more style and daring.

Other Central Americans: Nicaraguans are present in large numbers in Costa Rica. They perform many of the manual tasks, particularly in construction. Nicaragua is a more undeveloped country and its people are looking for work in countries like Costa Rica.

## Adult Issues

Costa Rica has a very unique public posture toward physical intimacy. It is a predominantly Catholic country with active programs that educate its people on safer practices and family planning. In spite of the general sense of modesty you will perceive, you will likely see (in the course of your stay) more than one billboard about illegality of being intimate with minors.

Individual intimacy in exchange for money is legal for anyone of legal age (18 years). Each Costa Rican citizen has a "cedula", or ID, that states their age. To get into a bar you must be of legal age, so anyone you might meet in a bar should have the cedula and be of legal age. If you are seeking someone, it is very unwise to pick up anyone without a cedula or someone who looks obviously younger than the age on the cedula they are carrying.

Any intimacy with anyone under the age of 18 is considered a very serious offense and public notices of the consequences are posted throughout the country. Private tours and vacations organized for this purpose, particularly with minors, run a very high risk of arrest and imprisonment, if discovered or exposed by a disgruntled participant. Providing someone for intimacy of any age is illegal.

As in any country, there are the common sense dangers of seeking intimacy with strangers. It potentially exposes you to serious diseases and/or crimes such as robbery.

## Security

Costa Rica is truly a wonderful place to visit, but all wise and seasoned travelers know that whether you are at home or abroad, there are always common sense precautions you can take to insure your safety and well-being. Do not be discouraged by the need to review security in our travel tips. Much of it is advice needed by any international traveler going to most countries in the world. Tourists are often quite noticeable and, unfortunately, can become targets.

## Personal Space

Always be alert to what is going on around you. Never go for a stroll alone, or as a couple, at night on the beach or in the wilderness. Always move in a large group or stay within easy sight of other people at night.

If you carry a purse or backpack, keep it close and secured to your body, tucked under your arm. Never carry a wallet in your back pocket. If there is a sudden commotion in a restaurant, bar, or store, make sure your purse or backpack is firmly in hand. It could be a planned distraction (caused by the release of an iguana, for example) to draw attention away from persons taking your possessions.

If faced with the choice of giving up your possessions as opposed to confronting a hostile person, your objects are not worth as much as your life or health

## Driving

Drive with doors locked and seat belt on. Look for a visible public area (service station), hopefully with other people present, if 1) your vehicle is bumped from behind, 2) if you think you are being followed, 3) if you are lost and or need assistance, 4) if someone tries to tell you there is something wrong with your car, or 5) if someone is trying to get you to stop by flashing their headlights. Only the police will try to stop you with flashing lights and those will be red or blue.

If you are stopped in heavy traffic, particularly in or near San Jose, watch the ground next to your car through the rear view mirrors. Someone may be on the ground letting the air out of your tires. If someone suspicious approaches your car while stopped at a light or stop sign, sound your horn until they leave.

Always keep your doors and windows closed and locked, especially while parked. Don't leave anything that even looks potentially valuable in the car, ever. Never leave your keys in the car, even for a moment. Always park in well-lit areas.

## Valuables/Papers:

Leave your suitcases in your hotel; take only what you need when you go out and keep a close eye on your possessions. Keep your passport in the safe at your accommodation and carry a copy with you, a laminated copy would be fine; the copy should include your photo, passport number, and entry stamp.

LASTLY: Ticos are arguably the friendliest people in the world. They are family-oriented and physically affectionate -but only when they get to know you! With strangers, although they are more than kind with directions, advice and such, they do not touch. Even your handshake is accepted timidly. Therefore: if you are approached on the street by an overly friendly stranger who wants to shake your hand, put his arm around you or get physical, be cautious! If you are not getting tagged for a cigarette or money, you are possibly being distracted so an accomplice can snatch your valuables.

Bottom-line: Be aware - but do not be paranoid. This is a great place where the vast majority of people are kind, generous, and helpful.

Enjoy Costa Rica and Return Often!

## Home Country Help

All foreign representatives are based in San Jose.

United States Embassy, in front Centro Comercial, on the road to Pavas, (506) 220-3939

Canadian Consulate: Oficentro Ejecutivo la Sabana, Edificio 5, (506) 296-4149

British Embassy: Paseo Colón between Calles 38 and 40, Centro San Jose, (506) 258-2025