

THE OFFICIAL EXPAT'S

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MOVING TO  
**COSTA RICA**

FACTS  
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50 FUN AND USEFUL FACTS ABOUT  
MOVING TO COSTA RICA

**50 Fun and Useful  
Facts about Moving to  
Costa Rica**

By

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# **50 Fun and Useful Facts about Moving to Costa Rica**

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Costa Rica welcomes expats!

People from all over the world choose to move this Central American nation and make it their new home. In fact, retirees, surfers, young families, and those who just desire a simpler, sunny life by the beach move to Costa Rica by the thousands – and Ticos generally welcome them with open arms.

Here are 50 facts about moving to Costa Rica to get you started.





## 50 Fun and Interesting Facts about moving to Costa Rica

1. Every year, about 2.5 million tourists and visitors touch down in Costa Rica, the beautiful tropical Central American nation, many of them from the U.S. and Canada.
2. About 30,000-50,000 North American expats and retirees now live in Costa Rica.
3. Costa Rica welcomes expats! People from all over the world choose to move there and make it their new home. Retirees, surfers, young families, and those who just desire the simple, beachside life move there every year by the thousands – and Costa Ricans generally welcome them with open arms.
4. If you're going to move to Costa Rica, one of the biggest decisions you'll make is where to live. While Costa Rica is typically divided into five regions: Central Valley, Gold Coast, Arenal, Southern Zone, and Central Pacific, the expat communities are strongest in the Central Valley, Gold Coast, and a little in the Southern Zone. Towns like Jacó, Tamarindo, Dominical, Uvita, Ojochal, Escazu, Atenas, Grecia, and Puerto Viejo are most popular with expats.
5. A common saying among locals is "pura vida," which means "pure life." Everywhere you go in Costa Rica you will be welcomed with a smile by the locals, and they will truly make you feel at home in their country.
6. Costa Rican citizens are called "Ticos" because of their affinity for adding -ico on the end of some words. Women are called "Ticas."

7. The World Database of Happiness ranks Costa Rica as the #1 happiest nation on earth out of 148 countries. (The United States ranks no. 20, by the way.)

8. You must present a round trip ticket or proof of travel to another country upon entry. Visiting passports must be valid for at least six months after the date of departure from the country. Also, make sure your passport is in good physical condition – they will not honor if it is too damaged.

9. Is it safe to drink the water in Costa Rica? The water is potable in most of the country. Tourists are safe using the water to brush their teeth, take a shower, etc. However, I recommend using bottled water to consume, especially in rural or coastal areas.

10. One of the best benefits about Costa Rica is its close proximity to the United States and Canada. San José is only a 2-hour flight from Miami and 3 1/2 hours from New York, and there are more and more nonstop, cheap, and direct flights all the time.

11. Costa Rica has a modern and highly rated healthcare system, even more highly ranked than the United States. Costa Rican citizens enjoy universal healthcare insurance and have a life expectancy of 77 years, one of the highest in the world.

12. They don't have summers and winter seasons like in the U.S., but a dry season (high season) that runs December-April and a rainy season (low season) that runs May through November. It's far more crowded with tourists during the high season, and costs for hotels, apartments, etc. also skyrocket for a few months.

13. The #1 Google search term about moving to Costa Rica is “Where is the best place to visit in Costa Rica?” There are so many wonderful places to visit in Costa Rica, that’s impossible to answer! Some of the top destinations and points of interest include San José, the capital, Jacó Beach, Santa Teresa, Malpais, Montezuma, Arenal Volcano, Monteverde and Santa Elena, Tamarindo and Guanacaste, Manuel Antonio, Puerto Viejo on the Caribbean side of the country, and the many incredible national parks that dot the country.

14. Costa Rica has not one but two gorgeous coastlines, with more than 800 miles of shoreline and tropical beaches between the Pacific and Caribbean sides of the country.

15. It also has the most diverse wildlife on the planet. There are over 130 species of fish, 220 of reptiles, 1,000 butterflies, 9,000 plants, 20,000 species of spiders and 34,000 species of insects in Costa Rica. That represents 5% of the world’s biodiversity even though it is just about .03% of the earth’s total landmass.

16. These days, U.S. dollars are widely accepted in almost all areas that foster tourism in Costa Rica, including hotels, restaurants, airports, etc. ATMs usually give you the option to take out U.S. dollars, which you can then spend and receive local colones as change.

17. The government makes it easy for foreigners to do business in Costa Rica, in part because they want more jobs created for Ticos. You don’t even have to be a resident of the country – you can start a business on a tourist visa.

18. A standard 90-day tourist visa allows you to buy an existing business, like a hotel or B&B, or to build your own.



19. But the vast majority of expats that live in Costa Rica and work in-country find jobs in these fields:

- Teaching
- Teaching English
- Tourism
- Booking for tourism
- Blogging, books, websites, and other online content
- Retreats
- Selling real estate
- Working for a U.S. or international company in Costa Rica

20. Work visa can be a little difficult to qualify for. You must first prove that you are filling a position that a Costa Rican is not qualified for or incapable of doing, and an employer must sponsor you.

21. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter Costa Rica, only a valid U.S. passport (make sure it is still good for at least six months after your trip) and proof of a plane ticket to exit the country. Residents of the U.S., Canada, Australia, France, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Brazil, Mexico, and many other countries do not need a visa, and can enter and stay for 90 days as a tourist.

22. Is it best to fly into the Liberia or San José airport? Both airports are great and offer many unique advantages depending on where you plan on visiting. The majority of travelers still fly into SJO – San José’s International airport – because of its central location and accessibility to the east or west coast. But more and more vacationers fly directly into Liberia airport, in the northwest corner of the country in Guanacaste Province, which is where popular Tamarindo is located.

23. Earthquakes are common in Costa Rica, as they may get 2-40 per month depending on the movement of tectonic plates! While almost all of them are small, they did have a 7.6 quake recently.

24. It's important to understand that there's a big difference between citizenship and residency in Costa Rica. Most people from North America/Europe will not qualify for citizenship. However, for those wanting to live the normal expat lifestyle in Costa Rica, having residency is sufficient under the law.

25. You can keep your United States or Canadian citizenship when you move to Costa Rica, so you don't have to renounce your home country or give up all the benefits of possibilities of living there again.

26. Costa Rica has gone to great lengths to modernize and improve their infrastructure in the past decades. There are efficient international airports, paved highways connecting the country, and modern amenities in the capital of San José, as well as any popular touristy area.

27. Costa Rica offers a host of options when it comes to safely parking and managing your money. These include:

- 1 central bank (Banco Central de Costa Rica)
- 3 state-owned commercial banks
- 12 private commercial banks
- 9 private finance companies
- 28 savings and loans cooperatives

28. Unfortunately, credit card transactions are more susceptible to theft in Costa Rica. So when signing your receipt, cross out a block of 4-8 numbers on your receipt and request a copy.

29. The amazing thing about buying real estate in Costa Rica is that foreigners and locals have exactly the same rights and follow the same laws as Ticos. In fact, property ownership is protected by the Costa Rican constitution. You don't even need to live in Costa Rica to buy property or own land – you can buy and own outright with a tourist visa.

30. You'll find properties listed for as low as less than \$100,000 USD in Costa Rica, and as high as \$6 million or more. Over the last few years, 80% of Costa Rican property sales were for \$200,000 and up, but prices are generally still more affordable than for comparable houses in the United States.

31. For those looking to rent an apartment or house, accommodations in Costa Rica can range from \$400 to \$900 for a simple apartment, \$700 to \$1,800 or more of a small house, and upwards of \$2 or even \$3k per month for larger homes, private villas, or luxury condos.

32. It's almost always better to buy (or even rent) a car in Costa Rica rather than importing your own car because of the sky-high import taxes.

33. The tax for importing vehicles into Costa Rica is 52.29% for models that have been released in the last three years. But in Costa Rica, a car is considered new for tax purposes for up to three years after it was placed on the lot for sale, no matter what its mileage or condition.

34. As a visiting foreigner, you are permitted to drive in Costa Rica using a valid license from your home country for the duration of your

entry stamp. If your passport entry stamp reads 90 days, you may legally drive on your foreign license for that time period, after which you must either leave the country to renew your entry stamp or obtain a Costa Rican driver's license.

35. If you are getting a first-time license in Costa Rica, the requirements are as follows:

- Be over age 18
- Have passed a basic course
- Have passed a driving test
- Have a current digital medical record
- Passport
- You can find out more information at:  
<https://www.csv.go.cr/>

36. If you want to bring your mobile phone to Costa Rica and use it there without incurring expensive roaming charges, you can easily purchase a prepaid SIM card in Costa Rica. But you must have an unblocked cellular phone (you can get them unlocked simply by going to your carrier's website and requesting it.)

37. If you're coming from the U.S. or abroad and want to have a good plan for phone and mobile Internet use in Costa Rica, you might want to check out Project Fi by Google. It's Google's own smartphone plan that taps into the best available network in about 135 countries around the world. So all you have to do is turn on your phone when you step off the plane in Costa Rica or anywhere else it works and your phone will automatically pick up the network, sign on, and be available for you to use.

38. The state-run health system is called the Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social, or CCSS. However, you'll almost always hear it referred to as, "la Caja" or just "Caja."

39. It includes medical care in any of the 30 hospitals and 250 clinics throughout Costa Rica in this government-sponsored network.

40. All citizens and legal residents to Costa Rica get access to Caja. Each member is required to pay a small monthly fee into Caja based on their individual income. Tourists are eligible and should ensure they have adequate health insurance. However, tourists won't be turned away from Caja medical facilities in case of emergencies.

41. But for those expats who plan on retiring or living in Costa Rica, it probably is worth it to establish residency, and therefore get access to low-cost medical care through Caja. In fact, if you're going to be a legal resident of Costa Rica, paying into Caja is REQUIRED – you can't get any form of residency without proof of existing Caja coverage.

42. Although some websites, guidebooks, and even doctors advise you to prepare for tropical diseases like Malaria, you really don't need to worry about that in Costa Rica. The exception is if you're planning on doing a lot of jungle trekking in Limón Province, which is the only place Malaria is prevalent. If you're planning to be in that area, it can't hurt to bring a supply of anti-malarial drugs, insect repellent, and long-sleeved, bright garments.

43. However, dengue and even the lesser-known chikungunya are a serious threat, especially in the months of the rainy season. In fact, the Costa Rican Health Ministry reported in early 2016 that positive tests for both viruses were up 600% compared to just the previous year. Zika is also a concern.

44. You should be able to live modestly for a minimum of about \$1,500 a month in Costa Rica, or \$50 a day. However, Costa Rica shouldn't be considered a "cheap" country to live in. A decent local standard of living for a single person is at about \$1,500 to \$2,000 a month. That is very possible, but if you add eating meals out at restaurants, drinking out or other entertainment, activities and side trips, I'd say you'd be far more comfortable at \$2,500 - \$3,500. Likewise, a retired couple can live comfortably for about \$2,500 to \$3,500 a month for two people including the cost of housing, food, transportation, medical care (that can vary greatly), and entertainment.

45. So, you want to bring your dog down to Costa Rica? That's definitely possible but there is a little bit of paperwork and a visit to a veterinarian or two involved. If you're from the U.S., one of the best resources you'll find that spells out all of the procedures is the United States embassy to Costa Rica's website:

<https://cr.usembassy.gov/embassy/sanjose/sections-offices/animal-and-plant-health-inspection-service/want-bring-dogcat-costa-rica/>

46. Costa Rica is one of the top coffee growers in the world, producing 56.438 ounces of coffee per hectare, the highest crop harvest of coffee beans anywhere on the globe. The climate is also perfect for growing cocoa and producing chocolate.

47. Rainfall varies greatly depending on the region of the country. Guanacaste, the northwestern province in Costa Rica and home to popular hotspots like Tamarindo, is the driest region in the country. The Caribbean region of the country is the wettest part of Costa Rica with an average annual rainfall of 3.5 meters (11.5 feet).



48. Can foreigners own real estate on the beach? Here's how it works:

- No one can own property within 50 meters of the ocean (measured horizontally from the high tide line), which is public domain and protected by the Costa Rican government
- Property located past those first 50 meters but within 200 meters from the median high tide mark is in the Maritime Terrestrial Zone and called Concession property
- You can develop Concession property, but it requires a special grant from the local municipality. But non-resident foreigners can own up to 49% of leased beach property, but the remaining 51% must be owned by a Costa Rican citizen, resident, or corporation

49. Shipping your worldly goods down to Costa Rica can be a very expensive process. A shipping container coming from the United States, usually measuring 20 or 40 feet in length, runs \$6,000-\$15,000, including taxes and delivery. The process can take up to two months for U.S. shipments. Remember that the same amount of money could easily furnish a big house two or three times over in Costa Rica!

50. Is Costa Rica safe? Costa Rica can be considered a safe country, but it's important to use common sense and act responsibly at all times, just like you would in your home country. However, petty burglaries and break-ins to cars, apartments, etc. can be common so always use a safe and double lock doors and windows. Avoid walking around late at night, don't flash money or jewelry in public, and be careful about where you go in the cities.

## PURCHASE THE HANDBOOK

After seeing how cool Costa Rica is, perhaps you'd like to purchase the full handbook to discover even more information about moving to Costa Rica.

Go to <http://www.crexpats.com/shop.html>



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If you have any other questions or want more travel advice, info on Costa Rica, or tips on how to work from the beach, you can contact me via email at [hi@NormSchriever.com](mailto:hi@NormSchriever.com).

