



## Costa Rica, Nicaragua & Panama

tree frogs won't be the only red-eyed species around!

Tourcode: **SCO**

Groepsgrootte: **2-24**

Aantal dagen: **23**

### Reisbeschrijving

#### Monteverde Cloudforest

On day 3 we'll enter the Monteverde Cloudforest, an outstanding wildlife sanctuary for over 400 bird species including the **Resplendent Quetzal**, the ancient Mayan holy bird, over 100 species of mammal, 120 species of amphibian and reptile, and 2,500 species of plant including 400 species of orchid. Their whites, lilacs, and yellows contrast marvelously with the emerald green forest! You can visit the Monteverde Butterfly Garden, the **Hummingbird Gallery**, go horse-riding, mountain-biking, on a 'treetop adventures' session or a photographic trip.

#### Nicaragua

We then continue by bus to neighboring Nicaragua. You stay the night in the picturesque city of Granada full of life and colour, especially the many markets and squares. You can take a trip to the colonial city of Masaya and its name sake National Park, where you can visit its active volcano. Then we continue on to Rincón de la Vieja and a whole new ecosystem including **morpho butterflies**, tapir, three kinds of monkeys, geysers, bubbling mud pots and mineral hot springs. Our hacienda is near beautiful waterfalls. Three rivers run through the property - the Blanco, Colorado and Negro - and **can be explored on foot or horseback**.

#### Red lava

Day 10 sees us at La Fortuna de Arenal / La Fortuna de San Carlos after a spectacular drive through mountains and quaint villages. The **Arenal Volcano National Park** has the country's most active crater. Red lava often streams from an almost-perfect cone which soars a mile above sea level. You might visit **Tabacon Hot Springs**, which has hot volcanic stream channeled into five pools of varying temperature, or see the spectacular La Fortuna waterfall on the edge of the rain-forest, or visit the Caño Negro Wetlands.

#### Manuel Antonio National Park

Day 12 we continue on to the spectacular beach resort of Quepos, from here you are able to explore the magnificent Manuel Antonio National Park. This park is famed for its white **sandy beaches**, offshore islands, monkeys and sloths.

We'll stay until Day 14, when we move to Dominical on the Pacific coast, best known for its turquoise-green waters, coffee-coloured beaches and fiery sunsets. It features mountains and coves, beach palms and mangroves. You can go **dolphin and whale watching**, visit **Corcovado National Park** to see red-eyed tree frogs, or visit Caño Island.

#### Panama

Then we head to Panama and the coffee producing region of Boquete, sitting at 1060



metres it offers a beautiful base for hiking in the surrounding mountains. Whilst here you can take advantage of the many tours available such as visiting the hot springs, rock climbing, **canopy tours** as well as enjoying the numerous restaurants. Then we head off by boat over to the archipelago Bocas Toro to stay on the **coco palm covered island** of Isla Colón. Here you can take advantage of the abundance of wonderful dive and snorkeling locations or laze the day away in a hammock.

## Coconut trees and spectacular reefs

Day 19 takes us to Cahuita, a tropical Caribbean resort where we'll chill out. Coconut trees litter a shore lapped by waters that barely conceal spectacular reefs. **Bob Marley's music** is compulsory listening, and dreadlocks abound. But, if you want to meet the true natives, we can arrange a tour of the Indian reservation at Bri Bri.

## Cahuita National Park

Inland the lush Cahuita National Park's tropical forest shelters raccoons, opossums, porcupines and capuchin monkeys, and its marshes green iguanas, **gigantic blue crabs**, frigate birds, green ibis and blue heron. If you love nature there's a reserve at Hitoy-Cerere, an orchid farm, and 'Aviarios del Caribe'.

If you need exercise, you can horse-ride to a jungle waterfall, raft on the Reventazon or Pacuare, boat on the Tortuguero canals, dive on the reefs, surf, or tree-climb.

Day 21 sees us return to San José, with time to drown our sorrows before departing on the following day.

## Routekaart





## Uitgebreide reisbeschrijving

### Welkom

#### Welcome to Shoestring!

Shoestring is looking forward to welcoming you on one of our unforgettable journeys. Be well prepared, get informed about your destination and make sure you know which vaccinations or other medication you require. During the trip, be flexible and don't feel obliged to always stay with the group. Your guide will advise and assist you, but remember that he or she will have a lot on their mind to ensure that everything is running smoothly. We hope you have a fantastic time in this beautiful destination.

#### Before you travel

If your trip is unexpectedly cancelled, we will let you know at least three weeks prior to departure. Cancellations are very rare though, so go ahead and prepare yourself for your trip.

### Moeilijkheidsgraad Informatie

#### This holiday is classified as Category B

The difficulty of our travels varies greatly. Added to this is the fact that travel difficulty is a very personal perception. To give an impression of the difficulty of a particular holiday we have developed a classification system.

**Category A:** Light travel, possible for anyone. Short distances, good hotels, and slow travelling speed.

**Category B:** Feasible for anyone who prepares for the trip. Sometimes longer distances, good hotels or camping facilities, some adventure nights, average travelling speed.

**Category C:** Feasible for anyone who prepares well and is flexible, but some parts of the journey are difficult, distances may be long or require a day's walk, there may be some basic facilities.

**Category D:** Reasonably difficult trip because of long travel distances, often primitive facilities or tents, long walks.

**Category E:** Difficult trip. The traveller knows him/herself and is well prepared, he or she realises that the holiday can be demanding.

The trip to Costa Rica is a **Category B** holiday. Any reasonably healthy individual can make it. During summer, the trip is considerably more difficult than the rest of the year. Although in the cities we stay in simple medium-priced hotels, you have to remember that you are travelling in a developing country with much lower living standards than you are used to at home. In addition, roads may be temporarily blocked because of the weather or owing to their state of repair, in which case a detour is unavoidable. Some journeys are very long. A flexible and positive attitude is just as important as a good physical condition.

#### Nature of the trip

Columbus named his discovery 'Rich Coast', which could not have been better chosen. This small country in the New World comprises a unique combination of rugged mountain peaks, active volcanoes, rainforests, tropical beaches and rich flora and fauna. Hummingbirds and brightly coloured tree frogs share the dense forests with jaguars,



caimans and tapirs. We will be travelling at a relaxed pace and there will be numerous opportunities to set out on your own.

## Wat is inclusief

Accommodation in hotels; transportation with AC (mini) bus only for transfers from hotel to hotel; boat transfers in Bocas del Toro; English speaking tour leader.

## Wat is exclusief

International flights, all meals; tips; visas; optional excursions; all entrance fees; border expenses; airport transfers; booking fee; travel insurance.

## Let op

♦ You will generally travel with other UK clients. However, if less than 6 people book the tour on the UK website then your group may be combined with a Dutch, German, Italian or Spanish group. Your tour would still be conducted in English.

## Dag-tot-dag schema

|     | Vervoer | Route                            | Overnachting            |
|-----|---------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1.  |         | San José                         | San José                |
| 2.  |         | San José                         | San José                |
| 3.  |         | Monteverde Cloud Forest          | Monteverde Cloud Forest |
| 4.  |         |                                  |                         |
| 5.  |         | Granada                          | Granada                 |
| 6.  |         | Granada                          | Granada                 |
| 7.  |         | Granada                          | Granada                 |
| 8.  |         | Rincon de la Vieja               | Rincon de la Vieja      |
| 9.  |         | Rincon de la Vieja               | Rincon de la Vieja      |
| 10. |         | La Fortuna                       | La Fortuna              |
| 11. |         | La Fortuna                       | La Fortuna              |
| 12. |         | Quepos                           | Quepos                  |
| 13. |         | Quepos                           | Quepos                  |
| 14. |         | Manuel Antonio - Playa Dominical | Playa Dominical         |
| 15. |         | Playa Dominical                  | Playa Dominical         |
| 16. |         | Playa Dominical - Boquete        | Boquete                 |
| 17. |         | Boquete - Bocas del Toro         | Bocas del Toro          |
| 18. |         | Boquete - Bocas del Toro         | Bocas del Toro          |
| 19. |         | Cahuita                          | Cahuita                 |
| 20. |         | Cahuita                          | Cahuita                 |
| 21. |         | San Jose                         | San Jose                |
| 22. |         | San Jose                         | End of tour             |

## Dag-tot-dag schema

### Dag 1: San José



Our holiday commences in San José in Costa Rica. The city is in a beautiful green valley, encircled by volcanoes. We will stay in an attractive, classic hotel, just a few hundred meters from the central plaza.

## ***Dag 2: San José***

Today is scheduled as a free day. The small pleasant capital offers shopping streets and markets. Those who are interested may embark on a city tour, accompanied by our guide. Visit the Gold Museum or National Museum, or treat yourself to a coffee in a coffeehouse, a favourite pastime of the friendly locals. Book a day-tour to the nearby Poas or Irazu volcanoes; their summits are usually hidden above the clouds.

## ***Dag 3 - 4: Monteverde Cloud Forest***

Today we travel with our own bus to the world-famous nature reserve, the Monteverde Cloud Forest. Just the trip to 'the green mountain' is an adventure and you'll be rewarded with breathtaking views. We shall stay two nights in a good hotel with an excellent restaurant and large garden. The entrance to the reserve is close by, just as the butterfly garden and a beautiful hummingbird gallery. Besides walking through the reserve, you can enjoy other activities: visiting the frog garden, horse riding or walking the suspension bridges built high above the cloud forest. This is an amazing opportunity to explore the roof of the forest in a very special manner. A hike in the cloud forest is also an enchanting experience you will never forget. The variety of dramatic microclimates, an extremely short distance from each other is extraordinary. Usually, a one-day hike provides alternating fog, sunshine and rain with an average temperature of 18 degrees. Another special feature of the cloud forest is the kaleidoscope of greens. Due to the high atmospheric humidity, the giant trees are covered with an abundance of bromelia's, orchids, ferns, hart's horns and mosses. It is also the home of the beautiful yet shy, red green feathered, quetzal

## ***Dag 5 - 7: Granada***

Today we travel by bus and cross over the border to Nicaragua we will travel along the bank of the Lake of Nicaragua overlooking two impressive volcanoes, before reaching the beautiful colonial city of Granada. We will stay three nights in an atmospheric colonial hotel with pool. The rooms have air conditioning which will come in handy as Granada is warmer than Costa Rica, with noon temperatures nearly always above thirty degrees. Granada is one of the most beautiful and old cities of Central-America, with an impressive story. It lies on the banks of Lake Nicaragua. In the center, scores of beautiful buildings stand in colonial style around the central square with its imposing cathedral. The cities market is lively and colorful and definitely warrants a visit. You can take an optional excursion city of Masaya and the Masaya National Park, where you can pay a visit to an active volcano. You can opt to see Catarina from which you will have a brilliant view over the Laguna, the Apoyo and the city of Granada. You can also visit the nearby capital Managua, where you can visit the historical and the new cathedral, the National Museum and the colossal statue of Sandino. It is also nice option to take a boat trip on Lake Nicaragua.

## ***Dag 8 - 9: Rincon de la Vieja***

Today we head back to Costa Rica driving along an impressive landscape to Guanacaste



province, where we arrive by the end of the afternoon. We shall stay two nights here in a pleasant lodge. The jungle around the lodge contains beautiful waterfalls. Rincón de la Vieja National Park is a must for adventurers and nature-lovers. This tropical mountain forest is crowded with exotic birds and animals. You can take wonderful (optional) hikes in the nature reserve. You can cross the jungle on foot or by horse, along waterfalls while looking for sulphur springs and bubbling mud pools. An extremely special way to traverse the forest is by taking the Canopy Tour, in which you swing from platform to platform like Tarzan! Real go-getters can hike to the crater of Rincón volcano; weather permitting, accompanied by a local guide.

## **Dag 10 - 11: La Fortuna**

We proceed to one of the world's most active volcanoes, Arenal. In the evening, when the sky is clear and with a little bit of luck, the red glowing lava descending from the 1633 metre high summit, provides an awesome spectacle. You will stay the night in La Fortuna village, in an lovely hotel with swimming pool and views of the Arenal. We spend two nights here. Upon arrival on day 10, weather permitting; we can take a walk to a nearby waterfall for a refreshing swim. Or you can hire a horse to explore the surroundings. In the evening, it is possible to visit the hot water springs around the Arenal.

We offer the opportunity on day 11 to join an (optional) excursion to the beautiful Caño Negro Reserve, a watery area abundant with birds, caimans, turtles, monkeys and reptiles. A special local is the Jesus Christ Lizard, which is able to run over water.

## **Dag 12 - 13: Quepos**

Today we drive along the coast to one of the most beautiful beaches of Costa Rica, where you two nights sleep in a small hotel in the neighborhood of the pleasant city Quepos. You will discover an array of different restaurants here and there is the possibility to go snorkelling. Quepos is a great base to discover the Manuel Antonio National Park. Manuel Antonio National Park is a 682-hectare national park with beaches, offshore islands, lush rainforest with good trails, as well as close-up encounters with monkeys, sloths and lots of birds. Between sleeping on the beach, you can explore the park's network of wide trails, which lead into a maze of humid tropical forest. Manuel Antonio National Park with its tropical jungle, white sandy beaches and blue-green waters offers a splendid combination of nature and beach fun.

## **Dag 14 - 15: Manuel Antonio - Playa Dominical**

We will stay two nights in a wonderful hotel in the surfing town of Dominical where you can meet relaxed 'surf dudes' on the beach, carrying a board under one arm. We will stay in comfortable small bungalows in tropical surroundings with many native plants. Watching the waves at Dominical's coast, you may occasionally spot dolphins or whales. The coast is still unspoiled and has superb palm beaches, tropical rainforests and mangrove forests. A short distance away is the National Park of Marino Ballena, an educative centre and breeding ground for turtles.

You can sign up for an optional excursion to Corcovado on the Osa peninsula, a national park with an area of 54.500 ha. For rugged nature-lovers and adventurers, Corcovado is the best choice in Costa Rica. It is one of the world's most complex tropical rainforests. In the park, you may, with some luck, encounter a tapir or jaguar. The red blue macaws are very impressive. In the seventies, scientists realized that the reserve was one the world's most diverse and complex tropical rainforests. Nowadays, its main purpose is to



help develop new medicines. In the park about 500 tree species exist, over 140 different mammals, including the tapir and 5 big cats, 367 birds, and an incredible variety of insects.

A fun day-excursion brings us from Dominical to Isla del Caño. This small deserted island is a nature reserve. The island is scarcely visited and those who do are mainly interested in snorkelling and diving over the coral reefs around the island.

### **Dag 16: Playa Dominical - Boquete**

Today we will cross the border into Panama and travel to the small village of Boquete, set in the highlands of the province Chiriqui 1060 m above sea level. The climate is alot cooler here allowing flowers, vegetables, coffee and citrus fruit to grown. On the steep slopes, the "Gnobe-Bugle" Indians live, better known as the Guyami that work on the coffee plantations. In the mountains of Boquete, you can take beautiful unforgettable walks.

### **Dag 17: Boquete - Bocas del Toro**

Today we will drive to Chiriquí Grandee where we will board a boat to take us over to the resort of Bocas Toro on the island Isla Colón. We will spend two days enjoying magnificent snorkelling, boat tours, scuba diving, swimming, waterskiing or kayaking. There is also the option of hiring bicycles to enjoy this magnificent island. Bocas del Toro is the most important village of the island. It is a typical Caribbean island with wooden huts on stilts. Bocas has kept its original Caribbean atmosphere and has changed very little over the years. The local food have definite Jamaican influences and many meals are prepared with coconut milk! The local population are friendly and speak English and are always ready to help and answer questions.

### **Dag 18: Boquete - Bocas del Toro**

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### **Dag 19 - 20: Cahuita**

We head back today to Costa Rica to the Caribbean reggae town, Cahuita, where we stay in a nice jungle lodge, close to the beach. Cahuita is completely different to the rest of the country. It is a very relaxed environment and the locals are easy-going. There is a choice of fun bars featuring reggae music and restaurants. I f you take a hike in Cahuita National Park, you should spot many species such as sloths pacas, racoons and toucans. Beach-lovers will appreciate the wonderful bay with white sand. When the weather is clear, surfing or snorkelling on the coral reef is a must. Diving tours out to the reef can also be arranged.

### **Dag 21: San Jose**

Today we travel back to San José for one final night.

It is the last day of your tour but rather than being about 'Goodbye' your thought should be 'Go further'!

Visit your personal 'my.shoestring' page on our website. 'my.shoestring' is the perfect way to make contact with other travellers before and after your trip. You can read and create journals from trips and upload your photos onto the photo gallery. Visit my shoestring today.



When booking your tour, please check to see whether you need any post-tour nights, bearing in mind that accommodation for the night of the final day of the tour (day 22) is not included.

## **Dag 22: San Jose**

The tour can be lengthened with a four day tour to Parque Nacional Tortuguero, one of the most important breeding spots for sea turtles in the world.

You will say goodbye to your travel companions in Cahuita on day 21, who will travel back to San José. Then you will have an overnight in a little place called Guapiles, in a hotel with a beautiful tropical garden where you can stretch your legs and relax. The next day, after breakfast (included), you'll be picked up by the local English speaking guide. The bus will bring you to a small harbour from which your journey continues to one of the most impressive national parks of Costa Rica on the Caribbean coast: Tortuguero. Besides turtles (tortugas), which will enter the beach to lay their eggs between June and October, you can spot monkeys, alligators, parrots, toucans, and many other tropical birds while sailing the pretty small jungle canals in little boats. The specialised English speaking tour guides, all meals, transport by air-conditioned bus, boat, and the tour through the canals of Tortuguero are all included in the price of the tour. The three overnights are in a fancy lodge. Spacious rooms with a fan, private bathroom with hot water, a swimming pool, bar and restaurant are available. Optional evening excursions are possible to observe the sea turtles; these tours are not included in the price. On the last day (day 25) the journey will go back through the Braulio Carillo rainforest to San José for a last overnight before you travel back home.

If you want to book this tour to Tortuguero as a lengthening to your normal tour, please do so while making your booking. The additional costs are 389 pounds per person. If you book by yourself, a single room supplement will be charged if no one is available from the group to share a room with. Of course you can choose for a single room yourself. The additional cost will be 89 pounds per person.

## **Landinformatie Nicaragua**

### **Achtergrondinformatie**

#### **Communications**

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

### **Praktische informatie**

#### **Info for people at home**

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

## **Landinformatie Costa Rica**



## Achtergrondinformatie

### Celebrations and festivals

Public holidays: Because we will be travelling in a Christian country, so Christmas, Three Kings Day (January 6) and Easter are celebrated across the country. During the Holy Week (Semana Santa) almost everything will be closed in Costa Rica. The days between Christmas and New Year are considered an unofficial holiday, especially in San José. Then there are the festivals honouring the patron saints. San José's festival (Saint Joseph) is on March 19 and the day of the Virgin de Los Angeles (Costa Rica's patron saint) is on August 2. Día de Juan Santamaria on April 11 commemorates the national hero and Día de la Raza (Columbus Day) on October 12, is a national holiday all over Central America.

### Communications

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

### Cultural differences and habits

The cultural differences between Europe and Central America are huge, one could write a very large book on the subject. Below you will find some useful hints that we have picked up along the way to make your stay more pleasant and enable you to get along with the local inhabitants.

**Bargaining:** Bargaining in Costa Rica is only customary when buying souvenirs or objects of art. In markets and shops food is bought at fixed prices.

**Politeness:** Politeness plays an important role in communication all over Central America. **When addressing somebody, in a shop or bus, say hello first. A simple "buenos días" or "buenas tardes", accompanied by a smile, works miracles.** Likewise, a greeting will gain a return greeting, then, the actual interaction begins. Upon entering a communal space, such as a restaurant or waiting room, it is also very polite to say hello to everybody present.

**Clothing:** Make sure you look well dressed and clean. This is an important issue to the people of Central America. Even poor people do their utmost to look well kept. As you seem to have the money to travel all the way from Europe to Central America, you are bound to be a rich person in the locals' eyes. You will gain respect if you dress properly. Of course, this does not imply you have to wear your best Armani outfit when wandering the streets. Best leave jewels and valuables at home. Do not put on revealing clothes, as it is not always appreciated. Shorts are allowed, for men and women, but only on beaches and in some coastal resorts. Bathing clothes are only allowed in swimming pools and on beaches. Many local women wear a T-shirt on top of their bathing suit (in order to avoid male attention). Dress properly when visiting churches, out of respect for the locals and their culture.

**Macho behaviour:** The myth that characterizes men as being strong and women as fragile and dependent has not been dispelled in Central America. Macho attitude and male pride are widely evident. Here men still whistle to attract the attention of a woman. Solo women travellers tend to receive plenty of (unwanted) attention. If you do not like



this, it is best to ignore them. Minimise the problem by dressing conservatively. Carrying a wedding ring may help. Avoid dark places and lonely beaches if you travel by yourself. Of course, there are more than sufficient 'normal' men around.

In general: Be constantly aware of the fact that you are a guest in a country, which has a different etiquette. They do not behave differently, you do.

## Food and drinks

Costa Rican food is quite unpretentious. There are plenty of restaurants, but you might want to visit a small 'soda' (restaurant with local dishes). Preferably visit busy restaurants or eating-houses. They are busy for good reason and therefore guarantee a faster turnover rate of the food prepared. Wash your hands thoroughly before dinner.

Breakfast (desayuno): You will most likely be served a solid breakfast including tortillas or bread, eggs (huevos) prepared by choice with bacon or sausages and bean sauce (frijoles). Typically Costa Rican is the so-called 'gallo pinto', a mixture of rice and beans, possibly served with eggs. If this is too much for you, you may opt for toast, jam and sweet rolls. An absolute must is Costa Rican coffee as Costa Rica produces the world's best coffee beans. Furthermore, fresh fruit juices (fresco natural) with milk (leche) or water (agua) are always available.

Lunch (almuerzo), dinner (cena) and snacks: For Costa Ricans lunch is the most important meal of the day. However, this is not the case for visitors being on the road a lot of the time. Meat (carne), fish (pescado) or chicken (pollo) form the main part of the meal and come in larger quantities than Europeans are accustomed to, particularly in the pricier tourist restaurants. Delicious salads usually feature on the menu. Casado is a very complete dish including rice, beans, salad and meat, fish or chicken by choice. Most dishes are not terribly spicy. You'll find bottles containing local variations of Tabasco on your table. In the pricier restaurants in the cities you can treat yourself to excellent fish (especially ceviche, fish marinated in lemon). City restaurants offer pastas, pizzas and Chinese food as well.

Fruit: Availability depends on the season: oranges, bananas and pineapples are most popular, but also more exotic fruits. To name a few: Chirimoy, carambola, granadilla (a passion fruit), guave, guayaba, cas (some sort of pomegranate) and papaya. The jugos naturales or fruit juices made from these fruits is delicious.

Drink: Costa Rican drinking water, especially in the Central Valley, has an acceptable quality. Outside the region hotels often use filtering installations to purify water for drinking. If you don't want to run any risk, you are best to buy bottled water, on sale practically everywhere. Generally, meals are accompanied by beer. However, wine is available almost everywhere. Beer is for sale in all sorts and sizes. Stronger brews include rum, gin and the local guaro (firewater). Fresh fruit juices are available, everywhere.

## Landscape

Costa Rica covers 51,100 sq. km and is about nine times smaller than the UK. It borders both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean. The coastal plains are low, contrasting with the tall volcanic mountain ranges that lie between them. The country's **highest peak, Cerro Chirripó, has an altitude of 3,819 m. Costa Rica has two neighbours:** Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. A large part of Costa Rica has been



declared a protected reserve for good reason. Despite having been colonized by Spain, it was largely left to develop on its own due to its lack of treasures such as gold. For such a relatively small country, it is enormously diverse biologically and includes 200 species of mammals, 350 species of reptiles and amphibians, 850 bird species, 10.000 different plants and some 40.000 types of insect. Costa Rica has rainforests, cloud forests, active volcanoes, savannahs, mangrove forests, high mountains, palm beaches and coral reefs. Costa Rica is relatively sparsely populated and counts just four million inhabitants. Most **economic, cultural and political activities are confined to the capital, San José. The city is in the central highlands, surrounded by ever-present volcanoes. But as soon as you leave San José, you feel as if you are travelling back in time surrounded by peace and nature.** The eastern part of Costa Rica is mainly known for its banana plantations yet also houses the world's most important turtle breeding grounds in the Tortuguero National Park. The west side boasts the most stunning beaches and a chain of idyllic bays.

## Flora and fauna

Costa Rica's flora and fauna is abundant. The region is characterized by large differences in climate. A mountain range, consisting mainly of volcanoes, divides the country in two. The western coastal area has special flora, mainly semi-tropical rainforests due to the rainy season here. These largely unaffected forests are still home for special animal species such as poison-arrow frogs, jaguars and white-faced capuchin monkeys. The mountain chain is completely different, mainly rain and cloud forest. A notable example is the Monteverde Cloud Forest, home to the magnificent quetzal, a bird honoured by the Maya's. An extraordinary number of hummingbird species are seen here to. The eastern lowland was once a tropical jungle, but has become a plantation area. There are many beautiful spots, where howler monkeys wake you up in the morning. A special feature in this region is the Tortuguero National Park, where between July and October, green turtles come ashore in great numbers (arribadas) to lay their eggs.

## Population

Costa Rica's 4 million inhabitants (71 per sq. km.), called 'Tico's' or 'Tica's', are predominantly (95%) descended from Spaniards and, for the most part, Catholic. During colonization, European illnesses wiped out the larger part of the indigenous population. Less than two percent descend from Jamaican Negro slaves who were put to work on **banana plantations during the 19th century. They live mainly in Limón province along the Caribbean coast.** The original Indian population nowadays represents slightly more than one percent of the total population. Given the small cultural influence left by the Indians and the large European contribution, most visitors prefer Costa Rica for its nature and scenery rather than its culture.

## Religion

The larger part of the population is Roman-Catholic, introduced and enforced by the Spanish colonialists, who used religion as a control mechanism. Now 85% are Roman Catholic, and 15% Protestant.

## Weather and climate

Climate: Costa Rica enjoys a tropical climate and temperatures depend more on differences in height than the time of the year, varying between twenty degrees Celcius in the highlands up to thirty degrees at the coasts. The area bordering the Pacific Ocean



and the Central Valley has two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. The dry season (or summer) runs from the end of December through April, and the rainy season (or winter) runs from April through November. During the rainy season everything blossoms beautifully and the scenery is much greener. That is why the Costa Ricans call it the 'green season'. The mornings usually are very sunny, and are followed by cooling afternoon showers.

Best travelling time: You can visit Costa Rica throughout the year. The Caribbean region enjoys a more humid climate and showers occur throughout the year. However, this won't spoil your holiday.

## Praktische informatie

### Arrival information

On your first day in San José, take it easy. Take time to adapt and acclimatize. The change of climate and time difference can be quite challenging. Setting off to explore San José is like a smooth landing, the city being up to date in many aspects. Later on you will come across less developed regions. Let the country sink in, try to pick up some Spanish and have fun in central America.

### Electricity

Electricity is the same as in the United States: 110-125 volt, 60 hertz, with matching (plug) sockets, so you need an adaptor. There are power failures in Costa Rica so it is wise to bring along a pocket lamp.

### Health

Travellers to Central America who pay some attention to hygiene and skincare usually don't run into health problems. However, we would like you to pay attention to the following health advice.

Sunshine and heat: Sunburn is a frequent cause for health problems. Sunburn and sun/heat strokes are easier caught than you may think. You should therefore avoid the sun during the hottest hours of the day, always wear a hat and good sunglasses when you are walking, and use a good suntan lotion when sunbathing. The latter can best be brought along from home, where the choice of product is much larger and prices are lower. At high temperatures the body's need for water increases very rapidly, as does its need for salt. Make sure you drink enough when the heat is extreme and you will simply have to take it very easy during the hottest hours of the day. Make it a habit to treat wounds, however small, with something like iodine. Infections can occur and spread rapidly in the tropics, so take as much care as possible with scratches and insect bites.

Diarrhoea: Next to sunburn, the most common health problem is diarrhoea. Travellers are often hit by it after they have been on holiday for only a few days. In most cases, it is an utterly innocuous phenomenon caused by the change of diet, the heat or harmless bacteria, against which the body will soon develop its defences. The main risk is dehydration, especially in children. It occurs when the body loses more fluid, salt and sugars than it receives. The result is a feeling of listlessness and weakness. It can be prevented by drinking a solution of water and ORS. It is sold in bags at the pharmacies



and contains all the minerals and sugars that are evacuated with diarrhoea. Instead of this solution you can also take noncarbonated soft drinks or heavily salted broth. For many people, cola has a constipating effect in the first stages of diarrhoea. When the diarrhoea is accompanied by high fever, bloody defecation or strong qualms, it is sensible to consult a physician. When the diarrhoea lasts for more than a few days without the above-mentioned symptoms or when you have to travel, you may take Imodium or Diacure a couple of times. It is an opium-like preparation that stops the bowels completely for a number of hours.

**Insect bites:** Mosquitoes are hard to avoid in Central-America. However, the following advice may help reduce the likelihood of being bitten. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes tend to bite after sunset and before sunrise. In the evening, wear long trousers and a long-sleeved roll neck T-shirt that covers well. DEET or other preventive remedies are effective, but do not expect miracles.

**Prickly heat:** Prickly heat is an inflammation of the pores caused by excessive perspiration. It is common and innocent, but very annoying. The skin grows red and irritated in places. Places where skin touches skin, such as armpits and thighs, are particularly susceptible. The symptoms will decrease when you take a cold shower – without using soap – a few times a day and dry yourself off well. Talcum powder on the affected spots may also help. When it is hot and damp, do not sleep under a sheet but wear a cotton T-shirt. If it troubles you very much, the best thing to do is take an air-conditioned room for a couple of nights.

**Travellers' health kit:** A health kit for the tropics should contain adhesive bandages, bandages, cotton wool, scissors, thermometer, iodine, painkillers, malaria tablets, O.R.S.-packages (Oral Rehydration Solution), loperamide (against diarrhoea), sunscreen, pair of tweezers, insect-repellents such as DEET and a soothing ointment for persistent itching. If you are on medication, make sure you have a precise description available in English (no brand name, but composition and doses are important). Bring along a double quantity for the duration of travel and keep it separated from the other luggage.

**Medical passport:** If you are on prescription medicine, bring an extra supply and keep it separated. This way you will always have a spare stock. Ask your pharmacy to draw up a medical passport for you. This includes names of the substances and the exact composition of the medication that you use. Keep this document and your medication in your hand luggage. If you have a chronic illness, ask your GP for a written explanation of your disease and its treatment (in English).

**Vaccinations:** Please click on the following link for information regarding vaccinations and malaria requirements. Moreover, your needs depend on whether you have had previous vaccinations, whether you are allergic to certain medicine, if you are pregnant, your age, and so on. ALWAYS contact your GP or some other healthcare authority for advice. The complete vaccination package includes DTP, hepatitis A, and malaria. There are no compulsory vaccinations, except for those who have been to regions with yellow fever or cholera within two weeks before arrival in Costa Rica.

**Some additional recommendations for an enjoyable stay:** Allow your body and mind some time to adapt to the new time zone and location. Avoid stress; do not plan to do too much at once. At least take it easy on the first day. It is a good habit to get up early; in hot climates the morning temperature is often the most agreeable. Besides, the people in the countries you visit are also used to rising early. When you adapt to their rhythm you



will make the most of your trip. When you are well rested you are best able to deal with all the new impressions and will have the energy to undertake more activities.

## **Info for people at home**

Ensure that those at home know in which country you are and how long you are planning to stay away. You should fix a date when you will contact them. Making telephone calls from Costa Rica is no problem. You can make collect calls and Internet cafes are everywhere. Provide the people who will pick you up from the airport with your flight times and numbers. Shoestring will not provide flight and/or travel information, hotel names and telephone numbers to third parties. Any information on delays may be retrieved via the airport information number or Teletext.

### Contact person

In case of an emergency, it is important for us to have details of someone we can contact on your behalf. You have entered a name on the booking form. It is possible that this person is unavailable or on holiday during your trip. If so, enter a second person so that we are sure to be able to get in touch with somebody.

## **Luggage and clothing**

This tour leads us through tropical lowland as well as high mountainous areas, the latter enjoying a moderate climate, which may include cold nights. Therefore, bring along thin, cotton clothes. For the evening, a closed neck long-sleeved T-shirt or a thin cotton roll neck sweater is recommended to protect against mosquitoes. Also, bring along a jersey or sweater and a rain jacket. Nights in Costa Rica can be quite cold! Do not forget an umbrella as protection against rain and too much sun. Bring along a pair of good-quality, worn-in walking shoes and flip-flops or sandals. You should consider bringing along the following: sunglasses, sunscreen, toiletries, a traveller's health kit, a hat/scarf, a photo/film camera, spare batteries, a pocket knife, a lighter, a small stock of non-perishable snacks and sweets, an alarm clock, writing materials, books, passport, sufficient money, photocopies of your passport and travel insurance, your flight ticket(s), travel insurance-pass including alarm number, important addresses and a good travel guide, toilet paper, towel and a reading lamp. If you bring along electrical equipment, you will need an adaptor. During this trip, you won't need a mosquito net or sleeping bag. We prefer that you pack everything into a weekend bag or backpack, rather than a solid suitcase, which would take up too much space and can be hard to carry in some circumstances. A small backpack or shoulder bag comes in handy for hand luggage. Valuable papers are best kept in a thin cotton money belt, to be carried underneath your clothes. Take care to have an extra, clean set of clothes in your hand luggage, so that you can do without the other luggage for 48 hours, just in case it arrives later than you do. For example, make sure to put any important medication and a toothbrush etc in your hand luggage and that your luggage is not too heavy.

## **Money and currency**

The amount of pocket money we advise, is the minimum you spend on meals, drinks, optional excursions, entrance fees, local airport tax and tips. The amount of money you will finally be spending obviously depends on your personal habits. Therefore, souvenirs are not included. We suggest an amount of £150- £175 per week.

The examples of extra costs to be expected on this journey are only an indication and can



vary depending on your requirements.

## Photography

Good-quality film rolls can be bought everywhere in the larger cities. Check the best-before date and only buy from stores where the materials are kept in cold storage. The best thing to do, by the way, is to bring enough film from home. Never leave films or cameras in the locked-up coach. The quickly rising temperature will soon affect the quality of the photographic materials. Not all types of camera batteries are on sale. Therefore be sure to take batteries that will last the entire holiday. People do not always like being photographed. When in doubt you had better ask first. Sometimes they will say no, every now and then they will ask for money. At a number of sites you are not allowed to take photographs.

## Safety

In the cities sometimes pickpockets are at work. A simple method keeps them away from you: stash your big money and valuables underneath your clothing, in a non-visible manner. Keep some ready money apart, so that you do not have to search for it in the middle of the street. Carry your backpack on your stomach if it contains valuables. Also, carry your camera in front, tied to a solid belt. Take these precautions, especially when visiting markets. Few robberies occur, but when this happens, it is on desolate places you would normally avoid, such as dark, quiet alleys. Your luggage will be reasonably safe in your hotel rooms, however, do not leave money or valuables lying about. Put them in a locked bag or even better, keep them with you or hand it over to the staff of the hotel lobby to go in the safe.

## Time difference

In Costa Rica it is 6 hours earlier than in the UK (during summertime 7 hours).

## Tipping

Restaurant and hotel employees are not well paid. You may not have a ready solution for the country's poverty, but the least you can do is to tip the ones working for you. The guideline is (provided you are satisfied with the service) about £0.70 tip per room per day for hotel employees. The same amount goes for the bus drivers, hired by Shoestring, per person per day. A tip box is useful in this case, for which the passengers will take turns in administering, in consultation with the travel guide. Moreover, while the group is on the road, snacks can be purchased from this money. You do not need to tip taxi drivers. In general, the fare tourists are charged exceeds by far the amount locals pay. The travel guide also expects a tip by the end of the trip; provided she/he has done her/his job well. Our guideline is £18 per passenger for the entire trip.

The taxes you will encounter are:

Sales tax ( impuestos de ventas ) This is a 13% tax added to sales of goods.

Service tax. This is a 10% tax applicable only to restaurant bills. It corresponds to the tip to the waiter or waitress and is already added to the total. If not, this will be specified on the menu.

Approximate prices for moderate meals, dinner / lunch at hotels and restaurants in Costa Rica are mostly around \$ 10.00 per person. At lodges mostly a little bit higher. Taxes are



not included and consist of 23%;

- Service tax. This is a 10% tax applicable only to restaurant bills. It corresponds to the tip to the waiter or waitress.

- Sales tax. This is a 13% tax added to sales or goods.

Restaurant bills will add a 13% sales tax and a 10% service tax; total tax to be added will be 23% to the price listed on the menu.

## Landinformatie Panama

## Achtergrondinformatie

### Communications

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

## Praktische informatie

### Info for people at home

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

## Adresgegevens