Costa Rica

Country Orientation Guide

NOVA Southeastern University
Fischler School of Education and Human Services
Office of International Affairs
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# Table of Contents

*Welcome* .......................................................................................................................... 1  
NSU Emergency Contact ..................................................................................................... 4  
Passport Issues .................................................................................................................. 5  
Weather Information ......................................................................................................... 6  
Central Intelligence Agency*-The World Factbook* .......................................................... 6  
TSA Travel Tips .................................................................................................................. 7  
Useful Phone Numbers -- Sources of information include: ............................................ 8  
Lost & Found ....................................................................................................................... 8  
US Department of State - Tips for Traveling Abroad ....................................................... 9  
U.S. Customs Restrictions – What You Cannot Bring Back With You .............................10  
*Country Overview* ..........................................................................................................11  
Banking ...............................................................................................................................12  
Communication ................................................................................................................13  
Documents Needed ..........................................................................................................14  
Electricity ............................................................................................................................14  
Emergencies .......................................................................................................................14  
Holidays ...............................................................................................................................15  
Safety ..................................................................................................................................15  
Time Zone ..........................................................................................................................17  
Transportation ..................................................................................................................17  
Water ..................................................................................................................................18  
*Academic System* ............................................................................................................18  
Overview ...........................................................................................................................18  
Structure of School System ...............................................................................................18  
K-12 ....................................................................................................................................19  
Higher Education .............................................................................................................19  
Professor/Student Relationship .........................................................................................19  
Teacher Education ..........................................................................................................20  
*Etiquette* ..........................................................................................................................20  
Cultural Orientation .........................................................................................................20  
Business Practices ............................................................................................................20  
Protocol ...............................................................................................................................21  
Tipping ..................................................................................................................................21  
*References* .......................................................................................................................22
Welcome
Dear Colleagues,

Thank you very much for accepting to teach in Costa Rica!

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) at the Fischler School of Education and Human Services has prepared this country guide to provide you with basic and general information on the country you are about to visit.

This guide is intended to help you prepare for your trip. As you travel in the country, please let us know if you find that there are details that need to be added or changed so that we can keep our guides updated. Although we have tried to make it as comprehensive as possible, all of us know that our world moves very rapidly and changes happen everyday; however, we have tried our best to include all of the details you need to make sure you are comfortable in your new environment.

This information has been compiled with the help of the Office of Strategic Initiatives and Global Enterprises for Academic Development (SIGEAD), and the contribution from the OIA team members and our Field Associates and Regional Liaisons around the world. To all of them, and to you, thank you very much for helping these programs become as successful as they are today, and as a result, for making a difference in our students' lives, wherever they are located.

Have a wonderful experience and please be sure to meet with us upon your return so we can discuss your experience and solicit your input for future cohorts. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be any assistance to your prior to your departure, or while you are teaching.

Bon voyage!

Anthony DeNapoli, Dean of International Affairs

Alejandra Parra, Associate Dean of International Affairs
# NSU Emergency Contact

## Contact at the Office of International Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Cell</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Anthony DeNapoli, Dean</td>
<td>954-262-8733</td>
<td>954-661-6241</td>
<td><a href="mailto:denapoli@nova.edu">denapoli@nova.edu</a></td>
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<td>Dr. Liezette Abel-Ruffin, Caribbean Liaison</td>
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<td>954-629-1698</td>
<td><a href="mailto:abell@nova.edu">abell@nova.edu</a></td>
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## Travel Office Numbers

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<th>Travel Office 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>954-262-8888</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Travel Office (ONLY after contacting airline or hotel directly)-</th>
<th>1-800-809-8858</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a charge of $20 if you contact this number.</td>
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Passport Issues
A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer. A valid U.S. passport is required to enter and leave most foreign countries. Only the U.S. Department of State has the authority to grant, issue, or verify United States passports.

The Passport Services Office provides information and services to American citizens about how to obtain, replace or change a passport.

To obtain a passport for the first time, you need to go in person to one of over 9,000 passport acceptance facilities located throughout the United States with two photographs of yourself, proof of U.S. citizenship, and a valid form of photo identification such as a driver’s license.

Acceptance facilities include many Federal, state and probate courts, post offices, some public libraries and a number of county and municipal offices. There are also 13 regional passport agencies, and 1 Gateway City Agency, which serve customers who are traveling within 2 weeks (14 days), or who need foreign visas for travel. Appointments are required in such cases.

You will need to apply in person if you are applying for a U.S. passport for the first time:

- If your expired U.S. passport is not in your possession;
- If your previous U.S. passport has expired and was issued more than 15 years ago;
- If your previous U.S. passport was issued when you were under age 16;
- Or if your current valid U.S. passport has been lost or stolen.

*To obtain more information on obtaining a passport please visit*  
http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/first/first_832.html

*To renew an existing passport please visit*  
http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/renew/renew_833.html
Weather Information
For weather information on specific countries please visit:
http://worldweather.wmo.int/

Central Intelligence Agency-The World Factbook

The World Factbook provides valuable geographic and demographic information. For more information on individual countries, please visit:

Make Your Trip Better Using 3-1-1

3-1-1 for carry-ons =

- 3 ounce bottle or less (by volume);
- 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag;
- 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin.

One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. 3 oz. container size is a security measure.

**Consolidate** bottles into one bag and X-ray separately to speed screening.

**Be prepared.** Each time TSA searches a carry-on it slows down the line. Practicing 3-1-1 will ensure a faster and easier checkpoint experience.

**3-1-1 is for short trips.** If in doubt, put your liquids in checked luggage.

**Declare larger liquids.** Medications, baby formula and food, breast milk, and juice are allowed in reasonable quantities exceeding three ounces and are not required to be in the zip-top bag. Declare these items for inspection at the checkpoint.

**Come early and be patient.** Heavy travel volumes and the enhanced security process may mean longer lines at security checkpoints.

**TSA working with our partners.** TSA works with airlines and airports to anticipate peak traffic and be ready for the traveling public.
Useful Phone Numbers -- Sources of information include:

U.S. Dept. of State Travel Advisory: tel. 202-647-5225 (manned 24 hr.)

U.S. Passport Agency: tel. 202-647-0518

U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler’s Hotline: tel. 404-332-4559

Lost & Found

Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen, and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. To report a lost or stolen

American Express - To protect your information, you can only report a lost or stolen card by calling American Express Customer Service at 1-800-992-3404. Outside the United States call, collect 336-393-1111.

Diners Club - Call Diners Club Customer Service at 1-800-234-6377. Outside the United States call, collect 702-797-5532.


If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via Western Union. Call tel. 1-800-325-6000 www.westernunion.com.

Identity theft and fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you have lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are Equifax (tel. 800-766-0008; www.equifax.com), Experian (tel. 888-397-3742; www.experian.com), and TransUnion (tel. 800-680-7289; www.transunion.com). Finally, if you have lost all forms of photo ID, call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you have filed.
Here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

1. **Register so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency**: Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at [https://travelregistration.state.gov](https://travelregistration.state.gov). This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.

2. **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information**: Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.

3. **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page**: Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.

4. **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage**: Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.

5. **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws**: While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department web site at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html) has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.

6. **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime**: To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

7. **Contact us in an emergency**: Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). Also, note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.
U.S. Customs Restrictions – What You Cannot Bring Back With You

Some items may not be brought into the U.S., or may only be brought in under certain restrictions. For information on U.S. customs regulations and procedures, see the Customs and Border Protection booklet “Know Before You Go,” available at http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg.

Customs and Border Patrol Top 10 Travelers Tips

1. Have all required travel documents for the countries you are visiting, as well as identification for re-entry to the U.S.
2. Declare everything you are bringing in from abroad, even if you bought it in a duty-free shop. This merchandise is also subject to U.S. duty fees and other restrictions.
3. Be cautious when buying something from a street vendor. Keep in mind that the merchandise may be counterfeit and/or unsafe and you might have to surrender it to U.S. Customs and Border Protection when you get home.
4. Know that the things bought abroad for personal use or as gifts are eligible for duty exemptions. If you are bringing them back for resale, they are not.
5. Know the difference between prohibited merchandise (such as ivory, tortoise shell products, absinthe, and counterfeit items) and restricted merchandise.
6. Be aware that many foreign-made medications are not FDA-approved, and you cannot bring them into the U.S. Also, when traveling abroad, bring only the amount of medication you will need during the trip.
7. Do not bring any Cuban-made products into the U.S., not matter where you purchased them.
8. Do not bring any food into the U.S. without first checking to see if it is permitted. Also, any and all live birds and bird products, whether for personal or commercial use, may be restricted and/or quarantined.
9. Understand that CBP officers can inspect you and your belongings without a warrant. This may include your luggage, vehicle, and personal searches, and is meant to enforce our laws as well as protect legitimate travelers.
10. Read our helpful brochure, “Know Before You Go,” before traveling. Print copies may be requested online, or view the web version at www.cbp.gov under the Travel section.
Costa Rica

Country Overview
Costa Rica is located in Central America. The country's size is small (51,100 sq km) and it covers only 0.03 % of the surface of the globe. Nevertheless, it proudly shelters 6% of the existing biodiversity in the entire world; 25% of the country is composed of conservation and natural protected territory. Costa Rica is also an attractive country for investment and it offers great potential for the establishment of important multinational companies, thanks to the outstanding academic level of its population, as well as the high standard of modern services and social and political stability. The army was abolished in 1948, and the money the country saves by not expending in military issues is invested in improving the standard of living, which has fostered a culture of social peace that makes it such a pleasant place to visit. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2008), San José ranks fourth among the cities in Latin America with the best quality of life.

Costa Rica is one of the most stable and robust democracies in Latin America, with a long-standing commitment to economic growth and social development. Distribution of income and opportunity is more equitable than in any other Latin American country. Costa Rica's social indicators such as literacy rate (96%) and average life expectancy (77.7 years old) rival those prevailing in developed countries, and are far higher than those of countries with similar per capita GDP (US$4,193 in 2003).

Costa Rica is a middle-income, developing country with a strong democratic tradition. Tourist facilities are extensive and generally adequate. The capital is San Jose. San José is more than a chaotic jumble of cars, buses, buildings, and people. The central downtown section of San José exists in a near-constant state of gridlock. Antiquated buses spewing diesel fumes and a lack of emission controls have created a brown cloud over the city's sky. Sidewalks are poorly maintained and claustrophobic, and street crime is a problem. Most visitors quickly seek the sanctuary of their hotel room and the first chance to escape the city.

San José was built on the profits of the coffee-export business. Between the airport and downtown, you will pass working coffee farms. Glance up from almost any street in the city and on the surrounding volcanic mountains you will see a patchwork quilt of farm fields, most of
which are planted with the *grano de oro* (golden bean). San José was a forgotten backwater of the Spanish empire until the first shipments of the local beans made their way to sleepy souls in Europe late in the 19th century. Soon San José was riding high. Coffee planters, newly rich and craving culture, imposed a tax on themselves to build the Teatro Nacional (National Theater), San José’s most beautiful building. Coffee profits also built the city a university. Today you can wake up and smell the coffee roasting as you wander the streets near the Central Market (Mercado Central), and in any cafe or restaurant you can get a hot cup of sweet, milky *cafe con leche* to taste the bean that built San José.

Part of the reason the coffee grows so well is the climate. The Central Valley, in which the city sits, has what has often been described as a perfect climate. At 1,125m (3,690 ft.) above sea level, San José enjoys spring like temperatures year-round. The pleasant climate, along with the beautiful views of lush green mountainsides, makes San José a memorable city to visit. All you have to do is glance up at those mountains to know that this is one of the most beautifully situated capitals in Central America. In addition, if a glance is not enough for you, you will find that it is extremely easy to get out into the countryside. Within an hour or two, you can climb a volcano, go white-water rafting, hike through a cloud forest, and stroll through a butterfly garden -- among many other activities.

The climate in Costa Rica is very pleasant not only during the dry season, which extends from December to April but also during the rainy season, which runs from May to November. Costa Rica has a tropical climate with an average temperature of 22 degrees C (72 degrees F) that increases considerably on the coastal areas.

**Banking**

**Banking hours** - Banks are open from 9am to 3pm weekdays (Monday to Friday), with few exceptions in San José. Government offices are supposedly open 8am to 4pm weekdays, but often close for lunch between about 11:30am and 1pm. Stores are open 8am to 6pm or 7pm Monday to Saturday, but a two-hour lunch break is not uncommon, especially outside San José. Malls are open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and with banks available even weekends. It is easy to find ATM in Costa Rica.

**Currency** - The unit of currency in Costa Rica is the colón. The colón is divided into 100 céntimos. There are currently two types of Costa Rica currency coin in circulation. The older and larger nickel-alloy coins come in denominations of 10, 25 and 50 céntimos and 1, 2, 5, 10 and 20 colones; however, because of their evaporating value, you will rarely see or have to handle centimes. It is easy to change money at banks in Costa Rica. In general, private banks provide faster service than the state-run banks. Have someone direct you to a private bank or exchange house (*casa de cambio*), where you will not have to stand in line for hours.
Communication

Language - The official language is Spanish. Many Costa Ricans also speak some English.

Internet - Internet cafes are all over San José. Many hotels have their own Internet cafe or allow guests to send and receive e-mail. Many have added wireless access, either for free or a small charge. You can also try Racs, Avenida 5 and Calle 1 (tel. 2287-0087; www.racs.cr), the state Internet monopoly, which sells prepaid cards in 5-, 10-, and 15-hour denominations for connecting your laptop to the Web via a local phone call. Some knowledge of configuring your computer's dial-up connection is necessary, and you will want to factor in the phone call charge if calling from a hotel.

Postal Service - The main post office (correos) is on Calle 2 between avenidas 1 and 3 (tel. 800/900-2000 toll-free in Costa Rica, or 202-2900; www.correos.go.cr) and is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 7:30am to noon. Many international courier and express-mail services have offices in San José, including DHL, on Paseo Colón between calles 30 and 32 (tel. 209-0000; www.dhl.com); EMS Courier, with desks at the principal metropolitan post offices (tel. 800/900-2000 in Costa Rica; www.correos.go.cr); FedEx, which is based in Heredia but will arrange pickup anywhere in the metropolitan area (tel. 800/463-3339; www.fedex.com); and United Parcel Service, in Pavas (tel. 290-2828; www.ups.com). Beware: Despite what you might be told, packages sent overnight to U.S. addresses tend to take 3 to 4 days to reach their destination.

Telephone - Phone numbers in Costa Rica changed in 2008 to 8 digits. Now is necessary to add number “2” at the beginning of the previous one, if calling to a regular phone, or 8 for a cell phone. The Access Code for Costa Rica is 506. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the country code you want to call.

The following important telephone numbers are in use in Costa Rica:

- 911 Emergency
- 116 International Collect Calls
- 117 Police
- 118 Fire Department & Paramedics
- 128 Ambulance
- 128 Red Cross
- 441-0744 Airport Information

The Costa Rican Telephone Company ICE has the following service numbers in use:

- 112 Time, this number costs 3.25 Colones per call
- 113 Information. This free number assists you in finding the telephone number of the person or company you are looking for, 24 hours a day.
• **124 International information.** This number helps you find international telephone numbers. Each call costs 19.5 Colones.

• **137 Service number especially designed for people with hearing, sight or speech problems.** This service is offered in Spanish and English.

• **192 Tourist information**

**Documents Needed**
For entry into Costa Rica, U.S. citizens must present valid passports that will not expire for at least thirty days after arrival, and a roundtrip/outbound ticket. Some U.S. airlines may not permit passengers to board flights to Costa Rica without such a ticket. Passports should be in good condition; Costa Rican immigration will deny entry if the passport is damaged in any way. Costa Rican authorities generally permit U.S. citizens to stay up to ninety days; to stay beyond the period granted, travelers must submit an application for an extension to the Office of Temporary Permits in the Costa Rican Department of Immigration. Tourist visas are usually not extended except under special circumstances, and extension requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There is a departure tax for short-term visitors. Tourists who stay over ninety days may experience a delay at the airport when departing. Persons who overstayed previously may be denied entry to Costa Rica.

**Electricity**
Electricity throughout Costa Rica is 120 V, 60 Hz using the same type plugs as in the United States.

**Emergencies**
**Emergencies** -- In case of any emergency, dial tel. **911** (which should have an English-speaking operator); for an ambulance, call tel. **128**; and to report a fire, call tel. **118**.

**Embassies & Consulates** - Americans living or traveling in Costa Rica are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department’s travel registration web site so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security within Costa Rica. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency. The U.S. Embassy is located in Pavas, San Jose, and may be reached at (506) 2519-2000; the extension for the Consular Section is 2453. The Embassy is open Monday through Friday, and is closed on Costa Rican and U.S. holidays. Those seeking information are strongly encouraged to utilize the embassy web site http://sanjose.usembassy.gov/, and can email consularsanjose@state.gov with any questions/concerns. For emergencies arising outside normal business hours, U.S. citizens may call (506) 2220-3127 and ask for the duty officer.
Hospitals - Medical care in San Jose is adequate, but is limited in areas outside of San Jose. Most prescription and over-the-counter medications are available throughout Costa Rica. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services, and U.S. medical insurance is not always valid outside the United States. A list of local doctors and medical facilities can be found at the website of the U.S. Embassy in San Jose, at http://sanjose.usembassy.gov. An ambulance may be summoned by calling 911. Most ambulances provide transportation but little or no medical assistance. The best-equipped ambulances are called “unidad avanzada.”

Pharmacies/Drug Stores - There are countless pharmacies and drugstores in San José. Many of them deliver at little or no extra cost. The pharmacy at the Hospital Clínica Bíblica, Avenida 14 between calles Central and 1 (tel. 2522-1000), is open 24 hours every day. The pharmacy (tel. 2208-1080) at the Hospital CIMA in Escazú is also open 24 hours every day. Farmacia Fischel (tel. 2295-7555; www.fischel.co.cr) has numerous branches around the metropolitan area.

Police - Dial tel. 911 or tel. 2222-1365 for the police. They should have someone available who speaks English.

Holidays
The following are the official holidays of Costa Rica

- January 1 - New Year’s Day
- March 19 - St. Joseph’s Day
- March and/or April - Easter - Holy Week
- April 11 - Juan Santamaria Day.
- May 1 - Labor Day. Dia de los Trabajadores.
- June - Corpus Christi
- June 29 - St. Peter and St. Paul’s Day
- July 25 - Guanacaste Day
- August 15 - Mother’s Day and Assumption Day
- September 15 - Independence Day
- October 12 - Columbus Day
- November 2 - All soul’s Day
- December 8 - Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.
- December 25 - Christmas Day

Safety
Over one and a half million foreign tourists, the majority American, visit Costa Rica annually. All are potential targets for criminals, primarily thieves looking for cash, jewelry, credit cards, electronic items and passports. U.S. citizens are encouraged to exercise the same level of caution they would in major cities or tourist areas throughout the world. Local law enforcement agencies have limited capabilities and do not act according to U.S. standards. Travelers should
minimize driving at night, especially outside urban areas.

Americans should avoid areas with high concentrations of bars and nightclubs, especially at night, and avoid deserted properties or undeveloped land. For safety reasons, the Embassy does not place its official visitors in hotels in the San Jose city center, but instead puts them at the larger hotels in the outlying suburbs. Americans should walk or exercise with a companion, bearing in mind that crowded tourist attractions and resort areas popular with foreign tourists are common venues for criminal activities. Travelers should ignore any verbal harassment, and avoid carrying passports, large amounts of cash, jewelry or expensive photographic equipment. Tourists are encouraged to carry photocopies of the passport data page and Costa Rican entry stamp on their persons, and leave the original passport in a hotel safe or other secure place. Costa Rican immigration authorities conduct routine immigration checks at locations, such as bars in downtown San Jose and beach communities, frequented by illegal immigrants. American citizens detained during one of these checks who have only a copy of the passport will be required to provide the original passport with appropriate stamps.

Travelers should purchase an adequate level of locally valid theft insurance when renting vehicles, park in secured lots whenever possible, and never leave valuables in the vehicle. The U.S. Embassy receives several reports daily of valuables, identity documents, and other items stolen from locked vehicles, primarily rental cars. Thefts from parked cars occur in downtown San Jose, at beaches, in the airport and bus station parking lots, and at national parks and other tourist attractions.

Travelers should use licensed Taxi, which are red with medallions (yellow triangles containing numbers) painted on the side. Licensed Taxi at the airport are painted orange. All licensed Taxi should have working door handles, locks, seatbelts and meters (called "marias"); passengers are required to use seatbelts. When traveling by bus, avoid putting bags or other personal belongings in the storage bins. At all times have your belongings in your line of sight or in your possession.

Thieves usually work in groups of two to four. A common scam has one person drop change in a crowded area, such as on a bus, and when the victim tries to assist, a wallet or other item is taken. The most prevalent scam involves the surreptitious puncturing of tires of rental cars, often near restaurants, tourist attractions, airports, or close to the car rental agencies themselves. When the travelers pull over, "good Samaritans" quickly appear to change the tire - and just as quickly remove valuables from the car, sometimes brandishing weapons. Drivers with flat tires are advised to drive, if at all possible, to the nearest service station or other public area, and change the tire themselves, watching valuables at all times.

In late 2006, the government of Costa Rica established a Tourist Police force, and units
were established in popular tourist areas throughout the country. The Tourist Police can assist with the reporting of a crime, which can be difficult for victims due to language barriers and the requirement that only investigative police can accept crime reports.

**Time Zone**
Costa Rica is on Central Standard Time, - 6 hours GMT or -1 hour EST. Costa Rica does not recognize daily saving time.

**Transportation**

**Airports** - There are currently two international airports in Costa Rica, the largest being San Juan Tamaria Airport (SJO) which is located in the Central Valley region in Alajuela just north of the city of San Jose Costa Rica. The other is the Daniel Oduber Airport (LIR), which is right outside of Liberia Costa Rica in the Guanacaste region.

**Taxi** - Taxi have a yellow triangle at both sides of the car with their license number. It is a good habit to remember this numbers, just in case you forgot something in the car etc. They have a tax-meter. Make sure it is turned on and they charge you the amount showing. Taxi are cheap in Costa Rica and it is normal to give a small tip. Some hotels allow certain Taxi to be stationed in front of their place. Normally these Taxi are in better shape but they will not use the meter, because they will charge you a higher rate for the lost time waiting at the hotel. Make sure to ask them for the rate before you start your journey, or you might have to pay far too much at the end. If a car looks exactly like a cab, but does not show the yellow triangle, it is a private person working illegally as a cabdriver. They call them "pirates" and since there is a lack of Taxi, especially when it rains, there are many pirates. To go with them is not recommendable because they most likely have no or little insurance. Most of them also have no tax-meter and might charge you far too much. Then there are the airport Taxi. They have orange cars and are only allowed to work from the airport. They will tell you the most amazing stories about the hotel you want to go. They will tell you, that the Hotel burned down, is full of rats, only frequented by transvestites or far too expensive. They will recommend you a much better hotel. That Hotel will give him up to $ 20 for each customer. Taxi in rural areas work differently. They usually have a standard price for any trip within their community. If you go further away, the price depends not only on the distance but also on the road conditions.

**Rental Car** - A rental car can be budget friendly transportation. However, with only one or two people, you will pay more for the convenience. A four-wheel-drive sport utility vehicle is not necessary but they survive the battering of the huge potholes on the paved roads much better. When traffic is light and the roads are good, a car can be a quick way to get around, but do not think you are going to average 60 MPH. The roads are narrow, and many wind steeply through volcanic valleys. At times, you will end up stuck behind a cattle truck going five miles an hour down the centerline for an hour or more. The rain is tough on the roads and construction and repair will often delay you.
Water
The water in San José is perfectly fine to drink. Nonetheless, some travelers experience stomach discomfort during their first few days in Costa Rica. If you want to be cautious, drink bottled water and frescos made with milk instead of water. Sin hielo means "no ice," and this is what you will want to say if you are nervous about the water -- just because it is frozen does not mean it is not water.

Academic System
Overview
Costa Rica boasts about having more teachers than police officers, and this affirmation is a source of great pride, since Ticos feel that their high education level sets them apart from many less fortunate countries in the world. Many of Costa Rica’s rulers have been educators as well, and have placed great importance in the expansion of primary and secondary education, even in the most remote areas of the country. About 20% of the national budget goes toward education. With the highest literacy rate in Latin America (95.2% of the population aged 10 and over according to a census in 2000) and compulsory education going through ninth grade (age 14), the education system appears to be in good shape. Appearances can be deceptive, however, and there are certainly problems that do not show up in the official picture. A Ministry of Public Education study, reported in the Costa Rican press in mid-1996, indicates that there are six times more dropouts from secondary school than there are students in the ninth grade - the final year of legally mandated study. This is blamed on various factors, including the need for conveniently located secondary schools, lack of student interest, lack of encouragement from parents, and the desire to enter the work force.

Structure of School System
Pre-Primary
Type of school providing this education: Preschooler
Length of program in years: 1
Age level from: 5 to 6

First Cycle Primary
Type of school providing this education: Primer ciclo
Length of program in years: 3
Age level from: 6 to 9

Second Cycle Primary
Type of school providing this education: Segundo ciclo
Length of program in years: 3
Age level from: 9 to 12

Lower Secondary
Type of school providing this education: Ciclo 3
Length of program in years: 3
Age level from: 12 to 15
Certificate/diploma awarded: Certificate

**Academic Secondary**
Type of school providing this education: Ciclo 4 or Colegio diversificadO
Length of program in years: 2
Age level from: 15 to 17
Certificate/diploma awarded: Bachiller en la Enseñanza media

**Technical Secondary**
Type of school providing this education: Ciclo 4 or Colegio Diversificado Técnico Profesional
Length of program in years: 3
Age level from: 15 to 18
Certificate/diploma awarded: Técnico en el Nivel Medio or Bachiller en la Enseñanza Medial

**K-12**
Primary education lasts for six years divided into two cycles of three years each. Secondary education covers five or six years divided into cycle 3, the last three years of basic education, and cycle 4 (or the diversified cycle) of two or three years' duration. On entering cycle 3, pupils choose an academic course or a technical/vocational program. At the end of this cycle, a Certificate is awarded. In cycle 4, pupils choose a two-year academic course or a three-year technical course. Both courses follow a core curriculum including Spanish, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science and Foreign Languages in addition to the specialized subjects. Satisfactory completion of this cycle leads to the Bachillerato, which gives access to higher education but most universities impose an entrance examination. In technical education, it leads to the title of Técnico en el Nivel Medio or Bachiller en la Enseñanza Media.

**Higher Education**
Higher education is provided by public institutions, several private universities, university colleges and various private post-secondary institutions more specifically devoted to commercial studies and regional institutions of higher education which are supervised by the Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica. State university higher education is coordinated by the Consejo Nacional de Rectores (CONARE) and its technical secretariat, the Oficina de Planificación de la Educación Superior (OPES). Private universities are supervised by the Consejo Nacional de Enseñanza Superior Universitaria Privada (CONESUP).

**Professor/Student Relationship**
Usually, student will address professor by his title: Doctor and last name. Relationship with graduate students is formal but friendly. Students find important to participate in a team climate. They will expect to give input to the professor. They prefer diverse and creative teaching learning strategies.
**Teacher Education**

**Training of pre-primary and primary/basic school teachers** - Students must hold the Diplomado or Profesorado (two or three years of university study), the Bachillerato universitario (four years) or the Licenciatura (five years).

**Training of secondary school teachers** - Candidates must hold the Bachillerato Universitario or the Licenciatura. Teachers of technical education are trained in four years at the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica and the Universidad de Costa Rica. They obtain the title of Profesor de Educación Técnica.

**Training of higher education teachers** - Students must hold a degree in the field in which they will teach. In certain State universities, pedagogical courses are offered to improve training.

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**Etiquette**

**Cultural Orientation**

Costa Ricans love language and are open to discussions on any topic. They have strong beliefs that are rarely changed. Costa Ricans are primarily associative in their thinking and look at each situation as a unique happening. They are intuitive and use rules only as guidelines. Truth is what is believed at the moment.

Costa Ricans have a very humanitarian culture with a belief in peace through negotiations. There is an emphasis on the equality and dignity of work regardless of your social class.

**Business Practices**

There is a strong sense of personal honor and social equality. Every person is assumed to have value and dignity. Any behavior that would demean another person is not appropriate.

Decisions are made by consensus of all involved, not just by top officials. This may slow the process down; avoid showing impatience. Being impatient will only lower your credibility and put you at a disadvantage.

Costa Ricans are much more formal and serious than other Central Americans. Informality, casual dress, and the use of obscenity are negative traits. Business entertaining takes place in the evening and spouses are welcome. Children, families, politics and the beauty of Costa Rica are good topics of conversation. If you are going to talk about politics, you should have some knowledge of the political history of Central America.
Protocol
Business dress for men should consist of conservative dark suits. In warmer climates, a jacket is optional. Women can wear a dress or skirt and blouse for formal business meetings, but it is far more common for women to wear pants to work. Costa Ricans are much more formal and serious than other Latin Americans. Therefore, keep jackets on during business meetings. Local people bathe frequently because of the heat, and guests are expected to bathe at least once daily. Making a fist with the thumb sticking out between the middle index fingers is obscene. This gesture is known as the "fig". Most North American gestures will be understood in Costa Rica. Do not put your feet up on any furniture except items expressly designed for that purpose. Fidgeting with your hands or feet is considered distracting and impolite.

People are addressed by their title and surname. Only children, family members, and close friends address others by their first names. When a person has a title, it is appropriate to use the title only. A Ph. D. or physician is called Doctor, teachers are called Professor.

Tipping
It is customary to tip the bellhop/porter (US$0.50 to US$1.00 per service) and the housekeeper (US$1.00 per day in top-end hotels, less in budget places). On guided tours, tip the guide US$1.00 to US$5.00 per person per day, and tip the tour driver about half of what you tip the guide. Naturally, tips depend upon quality of service. Taxi drivers are not normally tipped, unless some special service is provided. Upscale restaurants may add a 10% service charge to the bill. If not, you might leave a small tip to show your appreciation, but it is not required.
References


