

# COSTA RICA

## General Information

Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502, Costa Rica is a part of the land bridge between North and South America. He named his discovery Costa Rica (Rich Coast). Some say he chose the name because of the natural beauty he found there, others say it was because he'd heard rumors of gold. Be that as it may, he would have been right in the first instance and wrong in the second. It was quickly discovered that there was comparatively little gold. With breath-taking landscape and an astounding abundance of animal and plant species, Costa Rica is richly endowed with bio-diversity unequalled anywhere in the world. Since its discovery, Costa Rica has fostered and maintained a thriving economy with a reputation of being one of the most stable democracies in the Americas.

Costa Rica was settled by those relatively few Spanish immigrants who valued natural beauty and independence more than riches. Since the rugged, mountainous land was not suitable for large plantations, Costa Rica developed into a country of independent family farmers. Even today, they are the backbone of the nation. This more than anything else, explains the fact that from its independence (1821) on, Costa Rica has been the most stable, democratic country in Latin America, a nation of peace and tranquility, without an army since 1948.

Costa Rica has a long tradition and stable democracy, which is recognized worldwide and has over 115 years of history. The voter turnout has been one of the highest percentages in any Presidential election among other countries. For over 55 years, Costa Rica has lived under a constitution that prohibits the establishment of an army and assures free elections every four years. The people (known as "Ticos") are Costa Rica's most powerful asset. They love life and live it to the fullest. They are friendly, well mannered, work hard, and very proud of their heritage and their Country.

The Costa Rican government is ruled by a series of constitutional controls and balances. The executive responsibilities rest on the President, who is at the center of power, and is supported by two Vice-presidents and his cabinet. The President and Vice-presidents, plus 57 Congressmen, which form the Legislative Assembly, are directly elected every 4 years. In addition, the country has a strong legal system that manages the 'judicial power', which ensures law compliance and covers nationals as well as foreigners within the country's territory.

Such vocation of respect for political and peace processes have been enriched and acknowledged internationally in 1987 when the then President of the Republic, Oscar Arias Sanchez, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the peace process in the Central American conflict of that time. Oscar Arias Sanchez is again serving the nation a second time as President of the Republic and will be the head of state until 2009.

Costa Rica takes pride in pointing out that they have a literacy rate of nearly 96%, one of the highest in the world. A program of free health care is recognized as the best in Latin America, and the Country has one of the

lowest infant mortality rates in the world. Costa Rica is well known for providing world-class healthcare services. The medical system is considered among the best in the world. Great numbers of visitors travel to Costa Rica especially for medical treatment, plastic surgery, and dental services. Most of the doctors are trained in the best North American medical schools, as well as in superior institutions in Europe and South America.

### **Conservation and Ecology**

Costa Rica is located in Central America, between Nicaragua to the North and Panama to our South. Much of the country is in a fault zone and thus includes a large number of volcanoes and mountains. This is part of the Andean-Sierra Madre chain, and runs the length of the Costa Rica separating the Caribbean Sea to the east from the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Evergreen rain forests, sun drenched savannahs, mangrove eco-systems, lofty mountains, unending rivers and parks, stunning coral reefs and palm lined dazzling beaches furnish Costa Rica with an unmatched mosaic of rich and varied eco-systems. Recreational activities are limited only by your imagination. Eco adventures, rain forest encounters, surfing, hiking, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, white water rafting, wind surfing, mountain climbing are to name a few. All this and much more eagerly await the uncompromising nature lover and the free spirited alike.

Although Costa Rica covers only 0.03% of the surface of the earth, Costa Rica has approximately almost 6% of the world's biodiversity. For this reason alone, Costa Rica has become a Mecca for eco-tourism, loosely defined as "come, look, see, experience, but don't touch", thus leaving this beautiful place intact for other to see next week, next year or next century. Approximately 2.9 million acres (26%) of the Country has been declared as National Parks, Biological Reserves, Rainforest and Cloud forest lands and Marine Parks that will be forever protected from development.

Costa Rica has twelve distinct ecological zones - incredibly, more than all of North America combined! Perhaps even more astounding, almost five percent of all known species on earth can be found here. Additionally, more species of butterflies and birds can be found in Costa Rica than on the entire continent of Africa.

Astonishingly, Costa Rica has 12 different climatic zones, and by some reports, as many as twenty-seven different weather patterns. While Costa Rica is assuredly in the tropics, the extreme variations in elevation provide climatic conditions that separate it from tropical climates elsewhere. Costa Rica's weather is enjoyable year round. Average temperature range in San Jose goes from 14 to 24 degrees Centigrade (57 to 75 Fahrenheit) in December and 17 to 27 degrees (63 to 81 Fahrenheit) in May. The Caribbean coast averages 21°C (70°F) at night and over 30°C (86 ° F) during the day. The Pacific coast is hotter than the Caribbean, but is less humid.

## **So what will you find in Costa Rica?**

- 1,000 species of butterflies
- 1,200 varieties of orchids
- 850 plus species of birds
- 130 species of freshwater fish
- 4,000 plus species of insects
- 160 species of amphibians
- 220 species of reptiles
- 1,600 species of fresh and salt water fish
- 208 species of mammals
- 9,000 species of plants
- Cloud forests
- Rain Forests
- Volcanoes (1 active!)
- Mangrove wetlands and swamps

## **The Economy and Foreign Investment**

Costa Rica also offers an excellent business climate for those wishing to take advantage of the many opportunities available, such as tax free zones, skilled labor, and low wage rates. The economic, political and social stability of Costa Rica is one characteristic that has distinguished it through its entire contemporary history and one of the most important strength that have enabled it to reach great success in alluring foreign investors.

The last World Bank survey for Political Stability puts Costa Rica in first place within Latin America and the 36th place among a total of 209 countries from all over the world. This measure includes several indicators, among which it includes a measure for the perception of the likelihood that the government in power will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional and/or violent means, including domestic violence and terrorism. Costa Rica cannot be compared to its neighbors to the north and south who have had quite a different history.

Through the annuals of its proud history, Costa Rica, like the United States, has at various times attracted immigrants from throughout the world. The nation's population of over 4.1 million people includes many English, French, German, Asian and Italian surnames. In recent years the Nation has become a favorite retirement haven for foreigners, and approximately 65,000 North American citizens and an equal number of Europeans now make their homes in Costa Rica. Resident status is readily attainable; and ownership of property is the same as in Canada and the United States. Property taxes are very low and personal and corporate tax advantages are attainable.