

## **Suggested Packing List and Travel Tips for Costa Rica**

**PURA VIDA!** ‘Pure Life! Natural Life!’ You can say it when you arrive in Costa Rica! I am looking forward to our trip to Costa Rica, and am hoping that you are also.

PLEASE HAVE YOUR LUGGAGE MARKED WITH A NAME TAG FOR EASY DELIVERY TO YOUR ROOMS AT THE HOTELS

Arrival in Costa Rica will be at the airport in Liberia. The tropical heat and humidity will strike you as soon as you leave the aircraft. The arrival terminal is quite low-key, and if you have packed light –I strive to make it with a day pack and carry on, even with the new liquid restrictions--it won't take us long to be on our way after a simple stop at the customs desk. Most people that have traveled with me complain that they have brought way too much! You have the opportunity to purchase direct dial international phone cards as you leave the airport for a nominal cost. Our tour guide and modern air-conditioned bus will meet us right in front of the terminal. We will have some orientation to Costa Rica as we travel to our hotel at Playa Hermosa.

Leaving Costa Rica is a little more involved. The airport is hot and crowded. Have water with you. Three lines: hands-on security check of all bags, departure tax line and immigration line and security check, so again, the less baggage, the happier you will be!

**Clothing:** Unless you are staying at an all-inclusive high end resort (we are not), the dress code is very casual. Resort casual for evening is good. Bring clothes that are lightweight, quick drying, comfortable and easy to pack. It can be cool, even raining in Monteverde so bring something that you can layer and a rain poncho. Hiking is not strenuous, but you should have footwear that has a good grip and can handle getting wet. I carry a plastic bag to pack my wet footwear in if necessary

**Water:** Unlike most Latin American countries, Costa Rica has a reputation for having good clean water. Tap water is safe to drink in the areas that we are visiting. Salads are safe because crops are grown with clean irrigated water. Bottled water is readily available and inexpensive if you are uncomfortable drinking the water. I drink the tap water with no problems.

**Weather:** We will be in Costa Rica during the dry season. This means that the Guanacaste Coastal Region will not be so lush and green as in the rainy season, but still beautiful. The sand on the beaches is very hot as soon as the sun beats on it. Still, be prepared for rain, especially in the mountain areas. Showers are usually brief and clear the air of humidity. The Manuel Antonio area is generally hot and humid.

**Electricity**-same as USA

### **Must/Should Bring**

\*\*\*Passport and copy of passport. Phone numbers for your credit card/bank card companies in case of loss or stolen cards.

**\$26US for airport departure tax.** Just have this in an envelope so you don't have to worry about it. Can also be paid with credit card.

Cool comfortable light-weight clothing. Zip-off long pants to shorts are great for the rainforest.

Swimwear and cover-up

Pair of good walking/hiking shoes/socks and sandals

Waterproof sunscreen/insect repellent/hat

Light sweater/sweatshirt/long-sleeved shirt for the rainforest and evenings

Light rain jacket or poncho

Sunglasses

Any emergency medical information/instructions if you have a chronic illness/allergies, etc. and list of medications.

Tylenol or ibuprofen for minor aches/pain/sunburn/etc.

Motion sickness medication if you are prone to this. Costa Rica is infamous for winding bumpy roads. and seasickness could be a problem on the boat trip for someone that is very sensitive, although the waters are protected.

Alcohol based hand cleanser.

### **Handy to have but not necessary**

TSA approved lock for your suitcase

Personal water bottle

Zip-lock baggies, gallon size for dirty clothes and wet swimwear. HINT: Vacuum seal bags are available in the travel departments of Target/Walmart. Use to compress your clothes, making more room in your bag. Beach towel or sarong—I use my sarong for a beach towel because it packs smaller and dries quickly. I recommend over the shoulder-type purse or passport pouch/not fanny pack (more easily stolen off your body)

Camera/film/batteries/charger if digital NOTE: the humidity can be very hard on digital cameras

Binoculars

Small flashlight

Book for those relaxation opportunities and airport waits

Travel journal

### **DO NOT BRING ANYTHING VALUABLE THAT YOU WOULD MISS IF IT WERE STOLEN!**

**Pack based on what you know you need, not what you think you might need.** All of the places that we go are very casual; therefore, no need for dressy clothes. Wardrobe rule of thumb—if you can't wear it with at least two other things, don't bring it! Shampoo works great for simple laundry needs. If you forget something, Costa Rica has everything you need, and shopping for that toothpaste is part of the adventure! If you can't fit it in a carry-on, you don't need it! Shampoo is in all of the rooms.

#### **A note on money:**

- US dollars are widely accepted in Costa Rica. I do not change any money. \$20 bills and smaller are best. You will get your change in colones. A supply of \$1 bills are good in case you want to tip extra for exceptional service.
- Travelers checks are not widely accepted. Bank ATM card/Debit card—this is the preferred method to get cash. ATM machines are in most towns. You will get current currency conversion rates with no interest. You will most likely be charged a fee on both ends for use of the machine—a few dollars. Be sure that you know your PIN number.
- When I get cash from a machine, I get an amount that I think will last me for awhile so I do not have to keep paying fees. You often have your choice of getting money in USD or Colones.
- Credit card/debit card—this is the best for most purchases. Widely used and you get the prevailing currency exchange rate. Setting up a charge account at the hotels for drinks and meals makes life easier for all involved. Be sure to keep your receipts in the case of any questions at check-out. NOT good for cash withdrawal if you can avoid it, as this is considered a loan and you pay interest.
- Let your bank and CC company know that you are traveling internationally and the dates so they do not put a block on your card for suspicious purchases. You may also want to increase the amount that can be withdrawn at a time.

**Tipping:** Taxes and gratuities are included for our hotels and meals that are provided. Gratuities for our guide and driver are not and are optional at the discretion of the traveler. \$5 a day per person for the guide and \$3 per day per person for the driver is a good rule of thumb. You will be responsible for handling your own tips. Restaurants usually add a 10% service charge to your bill to cover the tip so be sure to read your bill before leaving extra money. If you receive unusually good service or are especially pleased with your waiter, you might feel good about leaving no more than an extra 5% or leaving the change on the table. Taxi drivers are not usually tipped.

Hotel maids are also sometimes left a small additional tip if service is exceptional.

\$1.00 per bag is customary if the porters at the airport handle your luggage.

**Extra hotel charges:** If you wish to run a tab for beverages or extraneous services at the hotels, please establish a line of credit with your credit card at the time of check-in, or be prepared to pay cash at the time of service.

**Final note:** Costa Rica is a beautiful country with beautiful people who are proud to be Costa Ricans and are anxious to show off their country. They will bend over backwards to make your vacation enjoyable. Tourism is now the number one source of income for the country, but is still emerging. Do not expect things to be same as in the USA but enjoy the differences. Our lodgings have been picked for good service, cleanliness and comfort. Most of the staff that you will need to deal with directly will speak English. If you have complaints, problems or suggestions as we travel, please make them known immediately so that we assure your journey is a pleasant one!