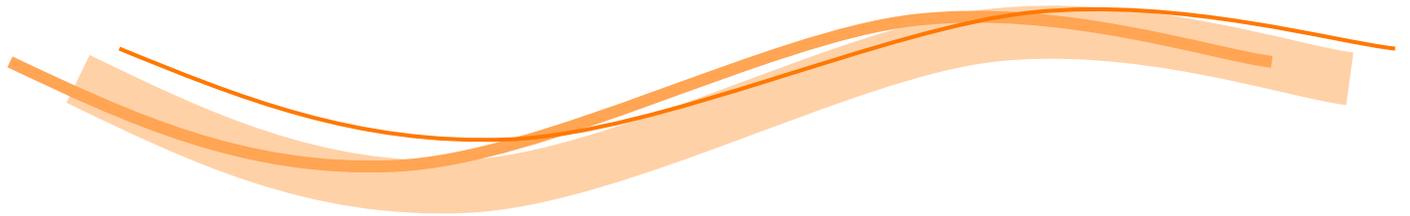




COSTA RICA





<p>COSTA RICA</p>	<p>Costa Rica – the Garden of Eden! It’s a land of shimmering ocean sunsets and mysterious cloud forests - with lush green vegetation as backdrop to colourful birds and iridescent butterflies. The landscape is graced with majestic volcanoes. Magnificent waterfalls cascade beside steaming hot springs - and exotic wildlife is everywhere. This country's natural riches enable visitors to enjoy almost every kind of outdoor activity you can imagine, and its towns and villages offer endless cultural and historical treasures.</p> <p>The name “Costa Rica” means "the rich coast." The first word, Costa or "coast", attests to this country's position in Central America, bordered by two long, sinuous coasts with kilometers of idyllic beaches.</p> <p>And the land that lies between these coasts can only be described as "rich". Costa Rica is the natural habitat for many species of flora and fauna found in both the northern and southern continents. The microclimates of its mountains and rivers, valleys and plains, and tropical forests allow an abundant plant and animal life to flourish. Costa Rica's natural beauty is mesmerizing. However, its culture and people are just as fascinating and the warm and welcoming Ticos have contributed greatly to Latin American society.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>Costa Rica, situated in Central America, is bordered to the north by Nicaragua and to the south by Panamá. The territory covers 50,700 km² Although the country is small and it covers only 0.03 % of the surface of the globe, it shelters 6% of the existing biodiversity in the entire world. 25 % of the country is composed of conservation and natural protected territory.</p>
<p>Geography</p>	<p>Rugged highlands are found throughout most of the country, ranging from approximately 1,000 to 2,000 meters above sea level. The Guanacaste mountain range, Central Mountain Range, and Talamanca Mountain Range are the main mountains extending the entire length of the country. There are several active volcanoes (Arenal Volcano, Irazu Volcano, Rincon de la Vieja Volcano and Turrialba Volcano) and the country’s highest mountain (Chirripo) with a height of 3,819 m/12,530 ft. The country has long coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as well as a number of rivers that attract kayakers and rafters from all over the world.</p>
<p>Name</p>	<p>The name “Costa Rica” means "the rich coast." The first word, Costa or "coast", attests to this country's position in Central America, bordered by two long, sinuous coasts with kilometers of idyllic beaches. And the land that lies between these coasts can only be described as "rich".</p>
<p>Population</p>	<p>Costa Rica has a population of just over four million, more than half of whom live in the Central Valley and are considered as urban. Some 94% of the population is of Spanish or otherwise European descent,</p>

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	and it is not at all unusual to see fair-skinned and blond Costa Ricans. This is largely because the indigenous population in place when the first Spaniards arrived was small and thereafter was quickly reduced to even more of a minority by wars and disease. There are still some remnant indigenous populations, primarily on reservations around the country; the principal tribes include the Bribri, Cabécar, Boruca, and Guayamí. In addition, on the Caribbean coast and in the big cities, there is a substantial population of English-speaking black Creoles who came over from the Antilles to work on the railroad and on the banana plantations.
Language	The official language is Spanish. The second language for a large portion of the population is English.
Currency	The Costa Rican currency is called the Colon. US dollars and major credit cards are widely accepted. As at 20 th April 2012, the Canadian Dollar is worth 501 Colon.
Tipping	Tipping is not necessary in restaurants, where a 10% service charge is always added to your bill (along with a 13% tax). If service was particularly good, you can leave a little at your own discretion, but it's not mandatory. Porters and bellhops get around 75¢ (40p) per bag. You don't need to tip a taxi driver unless the service has been superior; a tip is not usually expected.
Government	Costa Rica is a democratic and peaceful country, and it has not had an army since the year 1949.
Documentation	A valid passport is mandatory to enter Costa Rica, but no visa is required for Canadians. Your passport should be valid during the following 6 months from the entry date to Costa Rica.
Time zone	Costa Rica is on Central Standard Time (same as Winnipeg), 6 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time. Costa Rica does not use daylight saving time, so the time difference is an additional hour April through October.
Health	The water is potable in most of the country, however I recommend using bottled water, especially in areas around the coast. Your chance of contracting any serious tropical disease in Costa Rica is slim, especially if you stick to the beaches or traditional spots for visitors. However, malaria, dengue fever, and leptospirosis all exist in Costa Rica, so it's a good idea to consult your local GP ahead of your trip.
Safety tips	Although most of Costa Rica is safe, petty crime and robberies committed against tourists are not uncommon, so take all the normal precautions that you would do when away from home in Canada.

CLIMATE	
General climate	In general, 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. During the rainy season rain can be expected in the afternoons, on the other hand the mornings are usually sunny.

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	<p>Costa Rica has a tropical climate with an average temperature of 22 degrees C that increases considerably on the coastal areas. The changes in temperature are considerable and due to the short distances in this relatively small country, they can all be experienced in just one day.</p> <p>Due to factors such as the geographical location, the weather conditions, the formation of mountain chains, mountains, and valleys, this country experiences different microclimates that give a home to different types of vegetation.</p> <p>The inter-mountainous valley region with an elevation between 1,000 and 1,100 meters in altitude which is a characteristic of the central valley, with temperatures that range from 14 to 18 degrees C.</p>
Today's weather	Today, April 20 th 2012, San Jose is at 23C and sunny skies; it is a little warmer on the Pacific coast.
Best time to visit	The dry season runs from December to April – perfectly timed for escaping winter's chill.

GETTING THERE	
Flying	<p>Air Transat flies directly from Montreal to San Jose in Costa Rica from December to end March each winter and flight time is around six hours. There is a departure tax is US\$28 which can be paid in US Dollars, colones or with a credit card.</p>
Cities	<p>San José San José is the political and economic centre of the country, comprising more than half of the country's business and services. It is a city with an interesting mix of history and modernization. Although the downtown area is almost uninhabited by residents, it is a stop-over point that sees more than one million people a day, where people from the metropolitan area and visitors converge. It is a hub made up of many points of interest, as well as faces and colors that reflect the history of the people. Here are some of the principal sights:</p> <p>The Legislative Assembly The Congress or Parliament, here known as the Legislative Assembly, is the first power of the republic. Its location is spread between various neighboring buildings, among those are: the old Sión school, the Blue House, the Casa Rosada de los Salazar and the Plenary Building, all with a rich history. They were designed at first with distinct purposes in mind. Then they were used as the presidential house, and now they house the offices of some 57 officials and their advisors.</p> <p>The Blue House This served as the presidential house during the presidential term of Alfredo González Flores, General Federico Tinoco, and Licenciado Julio Acosta. Open to the public: Mondays to Fridays, from 8:00am to 4:00pm</p>

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	<p>Our Lady of Solitude Church Our Lady of Solitude Church was constructed in the middle of the 19th century, becoming a driving force within the population in the southeast part of the city. It is a distinguished structure built with limestone in baroque style and is one of the most representative structures of the 19th century that is still intact.</p> <p>The San Pancraccio House Located south of the Church of Solitude, the structure, known as the San Pancraccio House, was the residence of the Pacheco Zamora family and has cultural significance. The residency was built at the end of the 19th century and was reconstructed at the end of 1920, after a fire. The structure is a bahareque with stone and brick baseboard and with internal wood walls. The building houses large rooms and sun rooms. It was acquired in 1996 by the Costa Rican International Monuments Council, making it its permanent residence.</p> <p>The Central Bank Museums Located on the lower level of the Culture Plaza, it is an underground cultural center. It offers five unique exhibitions including the Pre-Colombian Gold Museum, one of the few of its kind that has a large collection of gold artifacts, which reflect the world vision, the social structure, and the metallurgy of the Pre-Colombian people of Costa Rica. Visitors can also view the Currency Museum and enjoy its extraordinary collection of paper bills, coins, coffee tokens, die stamps, as well as other documents and photographs. Three temporary exhibition galleries offer the visitor the chance to experience visual arts, archaeology, and history of Costa Rica. www.museosdelbancocentral.org Hours: Mondays to Sundays, from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.</p> <p>The National Theatre A symbol of European aspirations of the liberal coffee society, the National Theatre was built at the end of the 19th century by means of a heavy tax on coffee production. The monumental architecture, the picturesque works of art, and sculptures by highly acclaimed artists (mainly Italians), the tastefulness and visible meticulousness of this national jewel when completed, clashed with the underdevelopment of the country of those times. In Europe, it was said that Costa Rica was “a village, surrounded by a National Theatre.”</p>
Distances	San Jose to Punta Arenas on the Gulf of Nicoya is 115kms or around two hours drive.
Ferries	Three different ferries operate across the Gulf of Nicoya. Two are car ferries: one from Puntarenas to Playa Naranjo, and one from

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	Puntarenas to Paquera. The third is a passenger ferry that runs between Puntarenas and Paquera. There's also regular passenger ferry service between the southern cities of Golfito and Puerto Jiménez.
Trains	Tourists can take the train from San José to the Pacific Ocean on the “ Paseo en Tren a la Tica ” departing for Caldera every Saturday and Sunday at six a.m. This unique activity started up a few years ago after a group of friends had the idea to revive those unforgettable train trips that started in 1910, when the María Cecilia locomotive first began direct train service between San José and Puntarenas. With a total capacity of 130 passengers, the train departs at 6am. The route has not changed; behind the tracks are the Numar factory, La Sabana, Pavas and Belén. Vendors pass through selling coffee and refreshments, followed by newspapers, oranges, mangos and sweets. At Río Grande, a serenade begins and is repeated from car to car. The Cambalache tunnel indicates the train’s approach to Mata de Limón, and at 10am it arrives at its last stop: Puerto Caldera.
Car Rental	All major car rental companies are represented here. You are allowed to drive with your normal driver’s license for three months.
Buses	Two companies run regular, fixed-schedule departures in passenger vans and small buses to most of the major tourist destinations in the country. Gray Line (www.graylinecostarica.com) is run by Fantasy Tours, and has about 10 departures leaving San José each morning and heading or connecting to Jacó, Manuel Antonio, Liberia, Playa Hermosa, La Fortuna, Tamarindo, and playas Conchal and Flamingo. There are return trips to San José every day from these destinations and a variety of interconnecting routes. A similar service, Interbus (www.interbusonline.com) has a slightly more extensive route map and more connections. Fares run between \$25 and \$45 depending upon the destination.

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	There’s a wide range of options available from the all inclusive resorts on the Pacific Coast (such as our prize hotel, Barcelo Tambor Beach – see below) to friendly B & B’s, often run by ex-pat Canadians!
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TARGET GROUPS	
Kids	For active families, head to Tamarindo and arrange for the whole family to take surf or boogie-board lessons. Hopefully you will have already booked a class with Tamarindo Surf School or Witch's Rock Surf Camp. Be sure to rent your boards for a full day, so that you can practice after the lesson is over. Costa Rica Science and Culture Centre, San Jose 4th street, Ninth avenue, the Old Penitentiary Building, San Jose www.museocr.org Popularly known as the Children’s Museum , this beautiful structure, dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, was inaugurated in

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	<p>1994. It is the first interactive museum in Central America with themes related to sciences, history, technology, and arts. You can also find the National Art Gallery, the Youth Knowledge Complex, and the National Auditorium.</p>
<p>Teens</p>	<p>Canopy Tours Born in Costa Rica in the 90s, the canopy tour is the closest experience to enable one to feel like a monkey travelling in the tree tops. It is also one of the best ways to explore the richness of the canopy, where the biggest amount of the forest's biodiversity is found, and to raise awareness about the rainforest's fragile ecosystem. It consists of a series of suspended cables attached from tree to tree on which you can glide along using a pulley that is secured to alpinism equipment (the harness). Cables vary in length (they can measure even 700 meters long!) and end in small wooden platforms built in the tops of trees, which are located up to 100 feet above the jungle floor. The impact to the forest is minimal. This explains why biologists were the first ones who, more than three decades ago, started using this technology for research. The canopy tour has been adapted to a great variety of environments and landscapes within the country, including mountains, canyons, rivers, waterfalls and cloud, dry and tropical forests. The tour has also been exported to other countries.</p> <p>Rafting Every adventurer and nature lover should take the opportunity to experience white water rafting in Costa Rica. The reason is simple: you will have not only world-class rapids, but also a stunning tropical landscape, where you can see a great variety of wildlife while running the tranquil stretches and getting ready for more action. Turbulent waters can be experienced by people of all ages starting from 12 year-olds and who can choose between rapids of class II for beginners, to class IV for the more experienced or adrenaline junkies. This feat involves the ability to keep a raft afloat, led by a guide, as the rest of the crew rows in synch with the rapids. If you are new to this sport, you can try the Sarapiquí or Corobici rivers. Other rivers like Reventazon have sections for beginners and amazing turbulent waters for the experienced, while if you are looking for a very robust trip, you cannot miss the Naranjo and the Pacuare rivers. This last one, located on the Caribbean side, offers the longest and more spectacular experience, including a two-day trip, where you camp in the middle of the forest and explore waterfalls, cross the river canyon and take a refreshing dip in the tranquil river sections. It is also possible that herons, toucans, sloths and howler monkeys will give you a warm welcome to a place that you will never forget.</p>
<p>Romance</p>	<p>A gentle cruise from the Nicoya Peninsula to Tortuga Island in the</p>

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	Pacific Ocean is a romantic holiday within a holiday. Or try a night at a mountain lodge in the cloud forest...
Honeymoons & Weddings	Canadians can get married in Costa Rica. The documents needed are: - original birth certificate - affidavit of single status - police record - valid passport - divorce decree (if applicable). These documents need to follow the authentication procedure before being taken to Costa Rica.
Seniors	This is an excellent destination for Seniors and there are many Canadian retirees who live in Costa Rica.

UNIQUES	Pura Vida! (Pure Life!) is Costa Rica's unofficial national slogan, and in many ways it defines the country. You'll hear it exclaimed, proclaimed, and simply stated by Ticos from all walks of life, from children to octogenarians. It can be used as a cheer after your favorite soccer team scores a goal, or as a descriptive response when someone asks you, "How are you? (¿Como estas?)." It is symbolic of the easygoing and gentle nature of this country's people, politics, and personalities.
Surprising	The Mystery of the Spheres Although the indigenous populations inhabiting Costa Rica before the Spanish arrival did not build architectural structures rivaling the Mayan pyramids of northern Central America, our ancestors who lived in Costa Rica's South Pacific left as their legacy a mysterious production of artistically elaborate stone spheres whose meaning remains a mystery to this day. There are 235 registered stone spheres in Costa Rica, all of them equal in perfection, measuring up to two meters and as small as 20 centimeters. They were created over a 1,000-year time period that began around the year 400 A.D. and lasted until the colonization of Costa Rica by the Spanish. The majority were found in the South Pacific and constituted such an important element to these societies, that their production survived nearly a millennium. The spheres were associated with pre-Columbian populations and regions where plazas, passing zones and open terrain were present. They constituted an art form that was meant to be seen, perhaps to differentiate the towns in which they were made from their neighbors. The spheres were often aligned with each other, forming lines, triangles or rectangles with an unknown meaning.
History	Little is known of Costa Rica's history before its colonization by Spanish settlers. The pre-Columbian Indians who made their home in this region of Central America never developed the large cities or advanced culture that flowered farther north in what would become Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico. However, ancient artifacts indicating a strong sense of aesthetics have been unearthed from scattered excavations around the country. Beautiful gold and jade jewelry, intricately carved grinding stones, and artistically painted terra-cotta objects point to a small but highly skilled population.

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In 1502, on his fourth and last voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus anchored just offshore from present-day Limón. Whether he actually gave the country its name -- "the rich coast" -- is open to debate, but the Spaniards never did find much gold or minerals to exploit here.

The earliest Spanish settlers found that, unlike settlements to the north, the native population of Costa Rica was unwilling to submit to slavery. Despite their small numbers, scattered villages, and tribal differences, they fought back against the Spanish until they were overcome by superior firepower and European diseases. When the fighting ended, the European settlers in Costa Rica found that very few Indians were left to force into servitude. The settlers were thus forced to till their own lands, a situation unheard of in other parts of Central America. Few pioneers headed this way because they could settle in Guatemala, with its large native workforce. Costa Rica was nearly forgotten, as the Spanish crown looked elsewhere for riches to plunder and souls to convert.

It didn't take long for Costa Rica's few Spanish settlers to head for the hills, where they found rich volcanic soil and a climate that was less oppressive than in the lowlands. Cartago, the colony's first capital, was founded in 1563, but it was not until the 1700s that additional cities were established in this agriculturally rich region. In the late 18th century, the first coffee plants were introduced, and because these plants thrived in the highlands, Costa Rica began to develop its first cash crop. Unfortunately, it was a long and difficult journey transporting the coffee to the Caribbean coast and then onward to Europe, where the demand for coffee was growing.

In 1821, Spain granted independence to its colonies in Central America. Costa Rica joined with its neighbors to form the Central American Federation; but in 1838, it withdrew to form a new nation and pursue its own interests. By the mid-1800s, coffee was the country's main export. Free land was given to anyone willing to plant coffee on it, and plantation owners soon grew wealthy and powerful, creating Costa Rica's first elite class. Coffee plantation owners were powerful enough to elect their own representatives to the presidency.

This was a stormy period in Costa Rican history. In 1856, the country was invaded by William Walker, a soldier of fortune from Tennessee who, with the backing of U.S. President James Buchanan, was attempting to fulfill his grandiose dreams of presiding over a slave state in Central America (before his invasion of Costa Rica, he had invaded Nicaragua and Baja, California). The people of Costa Rica, led by their own president, Juan Rafael Mora, marched against Walker and chased him back to Nicaragua. Walker eventually surrendered to a U.S. warship in 1857, but, in 1860, he attacked Honduras, claiming to be the president of that country. The Hondurans, who had had enough of

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	<p>Walker's shenanigans, promptly executed him.</p> <p>Until 1890, coffee growers had to transport their coffee either by oxcart to the Pacific port of Puntarenas or by boat down the Río Sarapiquí to the Caribbean. In the 1870s, a progressive president proposed a railway from San José to the Caribbean coast to facilitate the transport of coffee to European markets. It took nearly 20 years for this plan to reach fruition, and more than 4,000 workers lost their lives constructing the railway, which passed through dense jungles and rugged mountains on its journey from the Central Valley to the coast. Partway through the project, as funds were dwindling, the second chief engineer, Minor Keith, proposed an idea that not only enhanced his fortunes but also changed the course of Central American history. Banana plantations would be developed along the railway right of way (land on either side of the tracks). The export of this crop would help to finance the railway, and, in exchange, Keith would get a 99-year lease on 1,976,000 hectares of land with a 20-year tax deferment. The Costa Rican government gave its consent, and in 1878 the first bananas were shipped from the country. In 1899, Keith and a partner formed the United Fruit Company, a business that eventually became the largest landholder in Central America and caused political disputes and wars throughout the region.</p> <p>In 1889, Costa Rica held what is considered the first free election in Central American history. The opposition candidate won the election, and the control of the government passed from the hands of one political party to those of another without bloodshed or hostilities. Thus, Costa Rica established itself as the region's only true democracy.</p>
Books	<p>Frommer's Costa Rica 2012 is one of my favourites amongst my vast library of their country guides, full of colour photos, maps and invaluable traveler information.</p>
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>Corcovado National Park: one of the country's largest and wildest parks with no roads in its 100,000 acres.</p> <p>Manuel Antonio National Park: where the vibrant rain forest plunges into the Pacific Ocean.</p>
Must Sees	<p>There are three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Costa Rica: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talamanca Range-La Amistad Reserves / La Amistad National Park - Cocos Island National Park - Area de Conservación Guanacaste <p>This last is the most easily accessed by visitors. Guanacaste is located in north-western Costa Rica. It stretches 105 km from the Pacific, across the Pacific coastal lowlands, over three tall volcanoes and down into the Atlantic coastal lowlands. It includes the Guanacaste Cordillera and surrounding flatlands and coastal areas. The most notable volcano is Rincon de la Vieja, which has three craters and one lagoon. Its last eruption was observed in the 1970s, but some fumarole activity still</p>

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	<p>occurs in one of the craters. At the base of the volcano are several minor craters.</p> <p>At least 32 rivers and 16 intermittent streams originate in the vicinity of the volcano, and flow into the Tempisque, a river of enormous importance for irrigation of agricultural land in the Guanacaste Province. The marine area includes various near shore islands and islets (mostly uninhabited), open ocean marine zones, beaches, rocky coasts, and approximately 20 km of sea turtle nesting beaches and a high diversity of wetland ecosystems (37 wetlands). The wetland forests are considered to be among the most pristine in Central America and worldwide.</p> <p>On the Naranjo and Nancite beaches during the breeding and mating season (August to December), over 250,000 turtles nest. The majority of them are olive ridley turtles. The green, leatherback and hawksbill turtles also use the beaches quite extensively. Guanacaste's beaches are of global importance for the protection of Olive ridley sea turtles and leatherback sea turtles, both endangered.</p> <p>The main vegetation types include mixed deciduous forest with fig trees and rosewood; evergreen gallery forests along streams and behind the occasionally flooded zone; savannahs with exotic jaragua grass; oak forests and savannahs; and mangroves. There is also beach vegetation, and areas of calabash forest. The intact altitudinal transect contained within the site protects an entire elevational and east-west seasonal migratory route from the Pacific coast to 2,000 m above sea level, from dry forest to cloud forest and down to Atlantic rainforest, which is critical for the range and life histories of many species of animal.</p> <p>In the area of Volcan Rincon de la Vieja, four different forest types are present: tropical wet; premontane moist; premontane rain; and lower montane rain; this forest is covered by clouds all year and the trees are dwarfed because of prevailing strong winds and sandy soils.</p> <p>The area contains a very diverse fauna with several species of conservation concern. Some notable mammals are white-tailed deer, white-lipped peccary, collared peccary, Central American tapir, white-face monkey and spider monkey, howler monkey, collared anteater, jaguar, margay, jaguarundi and ocelot.</p> <p>The avifauna is well represented in the area with more 500 species. Among the bird species the following are the most common: military macaw, rufescent tinamu, spot-bellied bobwhite, great curassow, crested guan, blue-winged teal, roseate spoonbill, thick knee, jabiru, ibis and laughing falcon</p>
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SPORTS ACTIVITIES	
Golf	Courses surrounded by lush rainforests, a passing macaw or monkeys watching you swing away is what makes golf in Costa Rica special.

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	<p>Explore the spectacular mountain views of the course in the San Jose area or enjoy the ocean views of Guanacaste and mid Pacific courses – here are a couple of suggestions:</p> <p>Marriott Los Sueños: Located inside the Marriott resort in Herradura/Jaco area, this Ted Robinson course was landscaped to include exotic native plants, banana trees and orchids, more than 150 species of birds as well as monkeys and other wildlife that have been identified on the grounds. This challenging course blends into the mesmerizing scenery. Website: http://www.golflaiguana.com</p> <p>Los Delfines: Located in Tambor at the tip of the Nicoya Peninsula, this 6,264 yard course consists of nine intriguing holes that have an unbelievable setting, Costa Rica’s tropical scenery. Type: Resort course Website: http://delfines.com/golf/</p>
<p>Fishing</p>	<p>Because of the great diversity of its marine fauna, Costa Rica has become a sport fishing icon, with three Grand Slam records per year. The country hosts several important tournaments throughout the year, such as: National Sailfish Tournament, International Sailfish Tournament, and Ladies Open Sailfish Tournament, Los Sueños Signature Billfish Series, and Presidential Channel among others. The Pacific flat coasts and exotic Caribbean coasts are abundant in species.</p>
<p>Horse riding</p>	<p>Opportunities abound to go horseback riding almost everywhere in Costa Rica, and climbing onto the horse's back, can be a wonderful way to spice up your vacation.</p> <p>The choice of horseback excursions ranges from morning trail rides taking you into the mountains above San Jose, which brings you back to your hotel in after lunch, up to all-day expeditions through the rain forest, from which you could leave walking like John Wayne.</p> <p>Though you might not associate it with a tropical country, Costa Rica has quite a cowboy culture Guanacaste, one of the country's first zones to be conquered by Spaniards, is the province with more tradition in this regard, where many cattle ranches cover the forest-draped hills.</p> <p>Nevertheless, mountain resorts and nature lodges located all over the country offer horseback riding trips, going through pastures, tropical forests, or down the beaches, and often stopping at waterfalls and lakes. Horseback riding tours are also an excellent choice for bird watching and getting close to nature, and the people leading the tours often have eyes peeled for interesting critters.</p> <p>I went riding at Los Inocentes Lodge in the north of the Guanacaste region – a glorious ride near Volcan Orosi, amongst toucan, parrots, and weaver birds.</p>

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<p>Hiking</p>	<p>Monteverde Biological Cloud Forest Reserve -- This private reserve might be the most famous patch of forest in Costa Rica. It covers some 26,000 acres of primary forest, mostly mid-elevation cloud forest, with a rich variety of flora and fauna. Epiphytes thrive in the cool, misty climate. The most famous resident is the spectacular resplendent quetzal. There is a well-maintained trail system, as well as some of the best-trained and most experienced guides in the country. Nearby you can visit both the Santa Elena and Sendero Tranquilo reserves. Location: 167km northwest of San José.</p>
<p>Cycling</p>	<p>The area around Lake Arenal and Arenal Volcano wins my vote as the best place for mountain biking in Costa Rica. The scenery's great, with primary forests, waterfalls, and plenty of trails. And the hot springs at nearby Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort is a perfect place for those with aching muscles to unwind at the end of the day. The Central Valley around San Jose offers a variety of picturesque roads and adventure or leisure sites that allow touring on regular or mountain bikes. Interesting routes include San Antonio de Escazú to the University for Peace, Turrialba to La Suiza, and Cañón del Guarco to Copey de Dota.</p>
<p>Diving</p>	<p>With a marine surface that is 10 times bigger than the terrestrial and an immense biodiversity, Costa Rica is the perfect place for diving fanatics. The majority of these places belong to wildlife protected areas around the country, such as the famous Cocos Island National Park, also a World Heritage Site. Costa Rica's Pacific coast was even considered by Rodale's Scuba Magazine as one of the top 5 destinations around the world for advanced scuba diving. Located 532 kilometers off the Pacific coast, Cocos Island was in old times a refugee for pirates, merchants, whalers and even colonizers. Today is known for its natural treasures that include the very peculiar and endangered hammerhead shark, as well as humpback whales, bottle nose dolphins, hawksbill turtles and a variety of coral species, just to mention some. The famous oceanographer Jacques Cousteau deemed Cocos Island "the most beautiful island in the world". But the Caribbean coast has its own wonders too. For example, the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge is unique because of the amazing species found there. In only 5 square kilometers of coral reef, scientists have discovered 600 species of mollusks, 10% of which are unique in the world. In general, the Costa Rican oceans shelter at least 6,777 species, representing 3.5% of known species in the planet and also making the country a real paradise for diving enthusiasts.</p>
<p>Windsurfing & Kiteboarding</p>	<p>Lake Arenal is considered one of the top spots in the world for high-wind boardsailing. During the winter months, many of the regulars from Washington's Columbia River Gorge take up residence around the nearby town of Tilarán. Small boards, water starts, and fancy gibes are the norm. The best time for windsurfing on Lake Arenal is between</p>

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	<p>December and March. The same winds that buffet Lake Arenal make their way down to Bahía Salinas (also known as Bolaños Bay), near La Cruz, Guanacaste, where you can get in some good windsurfing. Both spots have also recently seen the opening of operations offering lessons and equipment rentals in the new high-action sport of kiteboarding.</p>
<p>CULTURE</p>	<p>The richness of Costa Rica stems from the cultural diversity of its people. Throughout its history, waves of immigrants have added to the pre-Hispanic native populations, settling on this land and making it their home.</p> <p>Presently, in addition to the majority Mestizo demographic, there are several colonial and national immigrant ethnicities that have restored their unique cultural heritage like African descendants, Chinese, Hebrews, Libanese, Italians, etc., as well as native people of Bribri, Cabécar, Maleku, Teribe, Boruca, Ngöbe, Huetar and Chorotega. Costa Ricans are proud to have had more than a century of democratic tradition and more than 50 years without a military. This was abolished in 1948, and the money that the country saves from not having armed forces is invested in improving the quality of life of its citizens. This contributes to the social peace that makes Costa Rica a welcoming place to visit.</p> <p>Costa Ricans, also known as “Ticos,” are famous for being very hospitable people and they would like to keep this reputation. They are well-mannered and hard working, always willing to offer a smile and a handshake to people. They know that their country is unique, and they are generally willing to offer help to those visitors that are lost, at times even explaining cultural aspects that a foreigner might find strange, making their stay as pleasant as possible. It is said that “Ticos” are the best asset that the nation has, and once you have experienced their friendliness and spontaneity, you will be convinced.</p>
<p>Arts</p>	<p>Museum of Costa Rican Art Paseo Colón, 42nd street, La Sabana Metropolitan Park, San Jose www.musarco.go.cr</p> <p>The majority of its art is from national artists from the 19th century to the present. It is a place that stimulates critical thinking around national art within an international context. It is located within the old international airport built in 1940.</p>
<p>Music</p>	<p>Several musical traditions and styles meet and mingle in Costa Rica. The northern Guanacaste region is a hotbed of folk music that is strongly influenced by the marimba (wooden xylophone) traditions of Guatemala and Nicaragua, while also featuring guitars, maracas, and the occasional harp. On the Caribbean coast you can hear traditional calypso sung by descendants of the original black workers brought over to build the railroads and tend the banana plantations. Roving bands</p>

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	<p>play a mix of guitar, banjo, washtub bass, and percussion in the bars and restaurants of Cahuita and Puerto Viejo.</p> <p>There's also a healthy contemporary music scene. The jazz-fusion trio Editus has won two Grammy awards for its work with Panamanian salsa giant (and movie star and Tourism minister) Rubén Blades. Meanwhile, Malpaís, the closest thing Costa Rica has to a super-group, is a pop-rock outfit that is tearing it up in Costa Rica and around Central America.</p> <p>Swing Criollo: Much like the tango is synonymous with Argentina and the samba with Brazil, Swing Criollo is a fast-paced dance style that is unique to Costa Rica.</p>
<p>Films</p>	<p>To see Costa Rica used as a backdrop, the major motion picture productions of 1492 by Ridley Scott and starring Gerard Depardieu and Sigourney Weaver; Congo, featuring Laura Linney and Ernie Hudson, and The Blue Butterfly with William Hurt, all feature sets and scenery from around the country.</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>The National Museum, San Jose This museum researches and preserves the cultural and natural heritage and shares its history. The tour encompasses the following rooms: Pre-Colombian History, where you can learn about the lifestyles of ancient cultures from 12,000 B.C. until the arrival of the Spanish; Indigenous Gold; Native History, where a synopsis is presented of Costa Rica's development up to the present; the Colonial House, where you can view a dining room and a bedroom that show the austere characteristics of Colonial houses in Costa Rica; and a Butterfly garden. Open to the public: Tuesdays to Sundays: 8:30am to 4:30pm www.museocostarica.go.cr</p> <p>The Gold Museum The collection of indigenous gold objects displayed at the Gold Museum is considered one of the most valuable in the world. The museum is located in the Plaza de la Cultura, adjacent to the Tourism Information office of the Costa Rica Tourism Board. Located on Calle 5 at Avenida Central, the Gold Museum is open to the public Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m</p> <p>The Jade Museum Lower level of the National Social Security Institute, 9th and 11th street, Seventh and Ninth avenue, San Jose www.portal.ins-cr.com/Social/MuseoJade The Jade Museum looks after, preserves, and displays the largest Pre-Colombian jade collection in the Americas. It has a modern exhibition floor plan that also includes artifacts made of ceramic, stone, bone, shell, wood, and other materials in its permanent as well as its temporary exhibition rooms.</p>

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	<p>The Museum of Stamps and Currency of Costa Rica, San Jose The Stamp Museum was created to share and display cultural products of the Mail System, highlighting the development of the various communication systems, as well as displaying the history of the national and international stamp. It is visited by a large number of foreigners and nationals alike, especially student groups, of all levels. Visitors can participate in project activities such as stamp exchanges, demonstrations and stamp shows, stamp collecting courses and advising, as well as educational support. Hours: Mondays to Fridays, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Carnival time is big in Costa Rica. Limon Carnival is celebrated in October and Puntarenas from February 21 to March 3. In the South Guanacaste region there is a wide range of festivals: Jan 10: Patron saint's feast, Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, Santa Cruz Feb: Last weekend in February. Civic festivals in Liberia April: Good Friday. Lagarteada (crocodile hunt) in Ortega de Bolsón, Santa Cruz July 25: Nicoya Chorotega Tourism Expo-fair and Expoliberia, Guanacaste 25. Anniversary of the annexation of Nicoya Peninsula Aug 1: Pilgrimage to Cartago 2. Virgin of the Angels Day 24. National Parks Day Sept 7: Cultural Week, "Liberia, the White City" Nov Second Sunday: Día del Sabanero y Cocineras (Cowboy and Cooks Day) at Hacienda Santa Rosa Dec 11-12: Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Nicoya 24. Procession of the Valdelomar Baltodano family's Baby Jesus to La Ermita de Nuestro Señor de la Agonía, Liberia 25. Christmas</p>

<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>With more than 1800 km of coastline, Costa Rica is home to a diverse selection of spectacular beaches. From rugged and rocky gray or black sand, to coconut-tree-lined white sand paradise, there is a beach in Costa Rica for everyone. Trip Advisor awarded the beach at Santa Teresa first place in its Top 10 Beaches in Central & South America for 2011.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Costa Rica's territory is so small that it encompasses only 0.03% of the planet's surface but is still within the top 20 richest countries in biodiversity on Earth in terms of species density. It means that it is possible to find more species in 1,000 km² in Costa Rica than in the same area in countries like Brazil or Colombia. Using Brazil as an example: despite being 166 times bigger than Costa Rica, Brazil averages 6.5 plant species, 0.2 bird species and 0.05 mammal species per 1.000 km². Meanwhile, Costa Rica averages 234.8 plant species, 16.9 bird species and 4.6 mammal species in that same 1.000 km².</p>

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	<p>In fact, with only 51,100 km² of total territory, Costa Rica has nearly half a million species, representing 4% of the planet's expected biodiversity. Costa Rica has more than 230 species of mammals. Roughly half of these are bats. While it is very unlikely that you will spot a wildcat, you have good odds of catching a glimpse of a monkey, coatimundi, peccary, or sloth, or more likely any number of bats.</p>
<p>National Parks</p>	<p>Although Costa Rica is a small territory, it makes up about 5% of the earth's biodiversity. Fortunately, this natural treasure is protected by the National System of Conservation Areas, preserving a total of 25% of the national territory. Visitors can enjoy the country's majestic volcanoes, Pacific and Caribbean beaches, tropical dry, wet, and rain forests, as well as exhilarating jungle landscapes, all without traveling long distances. Here are three of the volcano National parks which are easily accessible to travellers:</p> <p>Volcan Irazu National Park This park protects colossal Irazú, which, at 3,432 meters above sea level, is the tallest volcano in Costa Rica. The active volcano has a long history of eruptions and eruptive cycles. The protected area's many geological features include the Playa Hermosa, Principal and Diego de la Haya craters, as well as the Sapper formation, the highest point in the massif, from which both Caribbean and Pacific coasts may be seen. Visitor services include information, a park ranger station, trails, restrooms, signage, a cafeteria, parking and several natural viewpoints.</p> <p>Braulio Carrillo National Park Created by Law 8357-A of April 5, 1978, this park is located northeast of the Central Valley in the central Cordillera Volcánica, between the massifs of Poás and Irazú volcanoes. Covering more than 44,000 hectares, Braulio Carrillo is one of the largest protected areas in Costa Rica. Nearly the entire landscape is made up of tall volcanic mountains swathed in forest, with countless great rivers running through deep canyons. Several extinct volcanoes have been identified: Chompipe, at 2,259 meters tall; Turu, at 2,139 meters; Cerro Cacho Negro, at 2,250 meters; and Barva, which has several craters collectively known as Tres Mariás with an average height of 1,725 meters. Visitor services include information, a park ranger station, trails, restrooms, drinking water, signage and several natural viewpoints.</p> <p>Volcan Poas National Park Rising 2,708 meters above sea level, this volcano's gas emissions have notably increased since 1989, causing acid rain that has damaged plant life in some areas of the park as well as neighboring agricultural plantations. The summit features two craters: the main one, at one and a half kilometers in diameter and 300 meters deep; and Laguna Botos,</p>

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	<p>a cold, rain-fed lake that feeds the Río Ángel, a tributary of the Río Sarapiquí that flows into the Caribbean. Currently the volcano emits a great quantity of gases and steam from the various fumaroles located in the crater's inner cone. Visitor services include information, a park ranger station, trails, restrooms, drinking water, signage, a cafeteria, souvenir shop and several natural viewpoints</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Else Kientzler Botanical Garden Located on the grounds of an ornamental flower farm, on the outskirts of the tourist town Sarchí, near San Jose, these are extensive, impressive, and lovingly laid out botanical gardens. Over 2.5km of trails run through a collection of more than 2,000 species of flora. All of the plants are labeled with their Latin names, with some further explanations around the grounds in both English and Spanish. There's a topiary labyrinth, as well as a variety of lookouts, gazebos, and shady benches on the grounds. A children's play area features some water games, jungle gym setups, and a child-friendly little zip-line canopy tour. Over 40% of the gardens are wheelchair accessible.</p>
<p>Historical Sites</p>	<p>The most important archeological site in Costa Rica, the Guayabo National Monument, located in the skirts of Turrialba Volcano, was declared in 2009 a World Engineering Heritage Site by the American Association of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Guayabo is the 3rd archaeological site in Latin America to receive this distinction after Machu Picchu and Tipón in Perú.</p> <p>One of the reasons is its over 700-year old aqueduct, still functional today, as is its calzada, a stone walkway used as a transit route and part of the drainage system. The calzada leads towards a ceremonial center, where it is possible to observe several mounds which at one time served as supports for the famous conical roofed straw and reed structures of South American influence. Stone was commonly used in Guayabo to build a system of sidewalks and walls that helped prevent erosion and landslides. There are also stone tombs decorated with pebbles, flagstones and engravings or petroglyphs.</p> <p>Guayabo was constructed between 300 B.C. and 1.400 A.D. and was populated by indigenous groups of the Intermediate Cultural Area, which extended from Alajuela, in Costa Rica, all the way to Colombia, Venezuela and part of Ecuador. Despite the fact that Guayabo was no longer populated when the Spaniards arrived and the causes of its depopulation are still a mystery, the site was for centuries undoubtedly a highly developed cultural and political-religious center, whose importance was heightened precisely because of its rich resources and the presence of the Turrialba Volcano.</p>
<p>Volcanoes</p>	<p>As part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, Costa Rica's volcanoes are among the most mesmerizing in the world. In fact, the present-day landmass known as Costa Rica is the result of complex volcanic activity that took place some 75 million years ago and still continues today.</p>

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	<p>Counting every location or crater where an eruption has occurred within its borders, Costa Rica volcanoes boast a stunning 112 sites throughout the country. Most Costa Rica volcanoes and their surrounding areas have been made into national parks.</p> <p>One of them is Arenal Volcano, listed among the 10 most active volcanoes in the world and for a good reason: It regularly puts on a spectacle, showing off with strong rumbling sounds and occasional rock avalanches, as well as smoke, ash and lava eruptions that descend its slope at speeds reaching 70 kilometers per hour and temperatures reaching 1,000 degrees Celsius.</p> <p>Arenal Volcano’s last great eruption took place in 1968. Until then, it was assumed that the volcano was just another peak of the mountain range. The mountain and surrounding area were declared a national park in 1994. Thermal hot springs are now the area’s main attraction, most of which boast nearby trails and numerous lookout points.</p> <p>Arenal Volcano is also on my list of “Chris’ Top 10 Volcanoes”: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Planning/ChrisTop10Lists/Top10Volcanoes.aspx</p>
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>The handicrafts of Guaitil de Santa Cruz and San Vicente de Nicoya are made of pure clay using the traditional and ancient techniques of the Chorotega indigenous group. Ornaments, urns, flowerpots, vases, plates, decorative whistles and other figures are fashioned and may be bought for their fine finish and interest in several parts of Guanacaste. Visitors can also acquire other kinds of handicrafts fashioned out of jícaro (a kind of gourd) or the thipa plant, from which various paper products are made.</p>
Markets	<p>San Jose Central Market After the transformation of the Main Plaza into Central Park, a place known as the “New Plaza” was chosen as the San José market place. The structure has undergone many transformations, but it hasn’t lost its most important aspect: a melting pot of cultures within the Costa Rican society and a daily symbol of its cultural heritage that brings together, day to day, the traditional and the modern. Hours: 8:00am to 5:00pm Mondays to Saturdays.</p> <p>Nicoya Peninsula: Guatil and San Vicente Pottery The residents of Guaitil de Santa Cruz and San Vicente de Nicoya (towns with more than 5,000 years of tradition in pottery) fashion beautiful work out of clay using the traditional and ancestral techniques of the Chorotega indigenous group, which once inhabited this part of the country. Pieces include ornaments, urns, flowerpots, vases, plates and ceramic whistles. Very distinctive ovens are used to fire these exquisite pieces. Souvenirs may be purchased in the two communities, where</p>

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	<p>pottery sales make up the residents' main source of livelihood. This lovely tradition is handed down from generation to generation; in addition, the time-honored techniques are taught to students at Guaitil's primary school, who fashion beautiful pieces to be sold to visitors.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>San Jose Catering to a mix of tourists, college students, and just generally party-loving Ticos, San José has a host of options to meet the nocturnal needs of visitors and residents alike. You'll find plenty of interesting clubs and bars, a wide range of theaters, and some very lively discos and dance salons. To find out what's going on in San José while you're in town, pick up a copy of the Tico Times, which is in English and is a good place to find out where local expatriates are hanging out. A good place to sample a range of San José's nightlife is in El Pueblo, a shopping, dining, and entertainment complex done up like an old Spanish village. It's just across the river to the north of town. The best way to get there is by taxi; all the drivers know El Pueblo well. Within the alleyways that wind through El Pueblo are a dozen or more bars, clubs, and discos -- there's even an indoor soccer playing field. Fiesta Latina (tel. 2222-8782), Twister (tel. 2222-5746), and Friends (tel. 2233-5283) are happening party spots. Across the street, Copacabana (tel. 2233-5516) is a popular dance spot. For a mellower option, inside El Pueblo, try Café Art Boruca (tel. 2221-3615). Most of the places listed here charge a nominal cover charge; sometimes it includes a drink or two.</p> <p>The Bar Scene There seems to be something for every taste here. Lounge lizards will be happy in most hotel bars in the downtown area, while students and the young at heart will have no problem mixing in at the livelier spots around town. Sports fans can find plenty of places to catch the most important games of the day, and there are even a couple of brewpubs that are drastically improving the quality and selection of the local suds.</p> <p>Boca The best part of the varied bar scene in San José is something called a boca, the equivalent of a tapa in Spain: a little dish of snacks that arrives at your table when you order a drink. Although this is a somewhat dying tradition, especially in the younger, hipper bars, you will still find bocas alive and well in the older, more traditional Costa Rican drinking establishments. In most, the bocas are free, but in some, where the dishes are more sophisticated, you'll have to pay for the treats. You'll find drinks reasonably priced, with beer costing around \$2 a bottle, and mixed drinks costing \$2 to \$5. For these suggestions I am grateful to our friends at Frommer's.</p>
<p>Casinos</p>	<p>Gambling is legal in Costa Rica, with casinos at virtually every major hotel. However there are some idiosyncrasies involved in gambling a la Tica. If you're looking for roulette, what you'll find here is a bingo-like</p>

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	<p>spinning cage of numbered balls. The betting is the same, but some of the glamour is lost. There are no craps tables or baccarat. Most casinos here are casual and small by international standards.</p>
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CUISINE	
Food	<p>Rice and beans are the bases of Costa Rican meals -- all three of them. At breakfast, they're called gallo pinto and come with everything from eggs to steak to seafood. At lunch or dinner, rice and beans are an integral part of a casado (which translates as "married" and is the name for the local version of a blue-plate special). A casado usually consists of cabbage-and-tomato salad, fried plantains (a starchy, banana-like fruit), and a chicken, fish, or meat dish of some sort. On the Caribbean coast, rice and beans are called rice 'n' beans, and are cooked in coconut milk.</p>
Drink	<p>The German presence in Costa Rica over the years has produced several fine beers, which are fairly inexpensive. Most Costa Rican beers are light pilsners. The most popular brands are Bavaria, Imperial, and Pilsen. Licensed local versions of Heineken and Rock Ice are also available.</p> <p>You can find imported wines at reasonable prices in the better restaurants throughout the country. You can usually save money by ordering a Chilean wine over a Californian or European one. Costa Rica distills a wide variety of liquors, and you'll save money by ordering these over imported brands.</p> <p>The national liquor is guaro, a crude cane liquor that's often combined with a soft drink or tonic. If you want to try guaro, stick to the Cacique brand. The Café Britt and Salicsa brands produce a couple of types of coffee-based liqueurs. Café Rica is similar to Kahlúa and quite good. Throughout Costa Rica, keep your eye out for roadside stands selling fresh, green coconuts, or pipas in Spanish. Green coconuts have very little meat, but are filled with copious amounts of a slightly sweet, clear liquid that is amazingly refreshing. Armed with a machete, the pipa seller will cut out the top and stick in a straw. In the best of cases, the pipa will have been cooled over ice. The entire thing costs around \$1.</p>
Restaurants	<p>Here are Frommer's recommendations for the best dining experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tin Jo (San José; tel. 2221-7605): In a city with hundreds of Chinese restaurants, this place stands head and shoulders above the competition. In addition to an extensive selection of Szechuan and Cantonese classics, there are Japanese, Thai, Indian, and Malaysian dishes on the menu. Tin Jo has the most adventurous Asian cuisine in Costa Rica. •Grano de Oro Restaurant (San José; tel. 2255-3322): This elegant little hotel has an elegant restaurant serving delicious Continental

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dishes and decadent desserts. The open-air seating in the lushly planted central courtyard is delightful, especially for lunch.

•**Bacchus** (Santa Ana; tel. 2282-5441): Set in a wonderfully restored and updated ancient adobe home, this restaurant serves up arguably the best Italian fare in the San José metropolitan area.

•**Ginger** (Playa Hermosa; tel. 2672-0041): Serving an eclectic mix of traditional and Pan Asian-influenced tapas, this sophisticated little joint is taking this part of Guanacaste by storm. They've got a list of creative cocktails to match the inventive dishes.

•**Mar y Sol** (Playa Flamingo; tel. 2654-4151): In a beautiful room on a high hilltop with great views, the Catalan chef here serves top-notch international fare.

•**Dragonfly Bar & Grill** (Tamarindo; tel. 2653-1506): Southwestern American and Pacific Rim fusion cuisines are the primary culinary influences at this popular restaurant. Portions are large, service excellent, and prices fair.

•**Lola's** (Playa Avellanas; tel. 2652-9097): With a perfect setting on the sand, excellent hearty fare, and an 800-pound pet pig, this is one of the best beachfront restaurants in the country.

•**Nectar** (at Flor Blanca Resort, Santa Teresa; tel. 2640-0232): Guanacaste's best boutique resort also has one of its best restaurants. The menu changes nightly but always has a heavy Pan-Asian fusion flavor to it. The setting is romantic and subdued, in an open-air space just steps from the sand.

•**Playa de los Artistas** (Montezuma; tel. 2642-0920): This place is the perfect blend of refined cuisine and beachside funkiness. There are only a few tables, so make sure you get here early. Fresh, grilled seafood is served in oversize ceramic bowls and on large wooden slabs lined with banana leaves.

•**Sofia** (Monteverde; tel. 2645-7017): Sofia serves excellent New Latin-fusion fare at a small space about halfway along the rough dirt road between Santa Elena and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve. Their new sister restaurant, Chimera (tel. 2645-6081), which specializes in creative tapas, is also excellent.

•**Pacific Bistro** (Jacó; tel. 2643-3771): This place boasts a regularly changing menu of creative fusion fare with the freshest seafood and



	<p>best beef available. Asian influences are prominent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • El Patio Bistro Latino (Quepos; tel. 2777-4982): A casually elegant little place, El Patio Bistro Latino has made a name for itself in the Manuel Antonio area. The chef's creative concoctions take full advantage of fresh local ingredients. Its intimate setting is a welcome little oasis in Quepos. • Jade Luna (Puerto Jiménez; tel. 2735-5739): This remote and isolated little restaurant, down a dirt road in a tiny town, is proof positive that fusion cuisine has literally reached everywhere. The menu changes regularly, but is always eclectic, creative, and pleasing.
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MORE INFO	
Brochures	Pick up the Nolitours Sun brochure from your local travel agent to see their Costa Rica packages.
Website	http://www.visitcostarica.com

HOTEL PRIZE PARTNER	Barcelo Tambor Beach
Location	<p>Situated in the Puntarenas region, the hotel is cradled by the lush forested hills which belong to the biological corridor of Costa Rica. It is close to the Curu Wildlife Reserve and Tortuga Island. And is directly on Ballena Bay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approx. 25 minutes by commuter flight to the Tambor airport, or a ferry/land transfer (approx. 4 1/2 hours) to Playa Tambor • Approximately 1 km from the Tambor airport <p>*One night at the Barceló San Jose Palacio or other Barceló hotel may be necessary depending on arrival time in San Jose</p>
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pool • Snack bar and Bars • Disco • Casino • Massage and Beauty salon • Gym • Shops • Internet
Accommodation	<p>This beautiful property boasts 402 rooms in six 2-storey buildings. Hotel Room: air-conditioning, ceiling fan, 2 double beds, full bathroom, hairdryer, TV, coffee-maker, in-room safe, iron, balcony or terrace, maximum occupancy 4 adults.</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily activities program and Nightly entertainment • Boogie boards • Kayaking • Volleyball

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis and Basketball • Dance lessons • Archery • Aerobics • Horseback riding • Golf course nearby and Mini-golf • Motorized water sports • Windsurfing • Deep-sea fishing • Pool table
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids' Club (ages 2 to 12) • Playground • Children's pool • Babysitting (subject to availability)
Restaurants	Buffet restaurants and 2 à la carte (Steak and Seafood)

AIRLINE PRIZE PARTNER	Air Transat
Flight details	Air Transat flies directly from Montreal to San Jose in Costa Rica from December to end March each winter and flight time is around six hours.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Los Innocentes Lodge, riding, Volcan Orosi, toucan in rafters, parrots, weaver birds' nests - River rafting on Rio Corobici: monkeys, iguanas, caymans, ospreys, kingfishers, parrots, herons - Las Pumas Refuge, Canas: jaguar, ocelot, cougar, margay, tiger cats - Ecolodge: cloud forest hikes at night; Hercules beetle, sloth, canopy tour 100 feet up - Arenal Volcano Observatory: smoking crater 1633m, lava flows, coatamundi - Tabacon Hot Springs: 5 natural mineral pools, hot and cold streams, waterslide, garden, volcano looming above - Papagayo Bay: puffer fish, sunset cruises, nature rambles, mangroves, snorkeling
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<p>NOLITOURS VACATIONS IN COSTA RICA</p>	<p>Nolitours fly direct to Costa Rica each winter and feature resorts in San Jose and along the gorgeous Pacific coast. Nolitours also provide car rental and a range of excursions - so you have lots of opportunity to explore. Visit volcanic craters and hot springs, brave a sky walk high in the forest canopy, go on a crocodile and bird watching adventure or discover wildlife in Manuel Antonio National Park.</p> <p>Nolitours offer you the chance to really get to know this beautiful country on a fully escorted 7 night coach tour. A great introduction to the people, natural beauty and wildlife of Costa Rica, your tour also has the option for adventures such as horseback riding, hiking and white water rafting.</p> <p>Or you can enjoy a spectacular tall ship cruise experience with Nolitours and Star Clippers. Travel on a tall ship with polished brass, expansive teak decks, and spacious accommodations - not to mention two swimming pools. You can chose between itineraries that visit Costa Rica alone or that include visits to neighbouring Panama or Nicaragua.</p> <p>Nolitours feature 10 resorts in San Jose to choose from when you depart from Montreal. In addition, packages from Toronto are offered to 7 resorts in Liberia. See www.nolitours.com .</p>
<p>Transat Background</p>	<p>Nolitours is a part of Transat A.T. Inc., an integrated international tour operator with more than 60 destination countries and that distributes products in over 50 countries. A holiday travel specialist, Transat operates mainly in Canada and Europe, as well as in the Caribbean, Mexico and the Mediterranean Basin. Montreal-based Transat is also active in air transportation, destination services and distribution. (TSX: TRZ.B, TRZ.A)</p> <p>Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada, and is at the core of the vertical integration process developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe. The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more.</p> <p>Year-round, Transat Holidays provides its customers across Canada with a full range of holiday products. It offers sun vacations, with a choice of more than 140 hotels, mainly in the Caribbean, Mexico and Florida, along with an impressive array of flights, packages and tours to some 30 European destinations. Transat Holidays also offers more than 100 cruises all around the world.</p> <p>As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St-John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montréal, Québec, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver,</p>

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	Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna (as at 2012). Website: http://www.transat.com/en
Mission	Nolitours and Transat Holidays offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers. In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.
Products	Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals & Train Travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat Holidays are subject to a rigorous standard review.
2012: Transat's 25th Anniversary	In 2012, Transat is celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a silver lining, giving travellers a reason to celebrate! Like their Family Fiesta promotion... Book your next family vacations now for a departure between May 1 and October 31 2012 at one of Nolitours' selected hotels, and your kid will either travel for free or for only \$99 - but you need to book before April 30 th , 2012. Smallprint: <i>Booking dates for Ontario and West: Kids Fly & Stay Free from May 1 – June 25 and Aug 28 – Oct 31. Kids Fly & Stay For \$99 from June 26 – Aug 27.</i> <i>Booking dates for the province of Quebec: Kids Fly & Stay Free from May 1 – June 19 and Aug 25 – Oct 31. Kids Fly & Stay For \$99 from June 20 – Aug 24.</i> <i>Terms and conditions: Valid on sun vacation packages for a minimum of 7 night duration at select resorts. Valid on all sun destinations with the exception of Florida, Panama, Port-au-Prince and Cayo Largo. Applicable to 1 child per 2 paying adults staying in the same room; additional children pay applicable child rate. Child age eligibility varies by hotel. Promotion is capacity controlled and is subject to availability at time of booking. Subject to change withdrawal without notice. Not combinable with any other offer. Valid on new bookings made between April 12 & 30 only. Child pays taxes and fees (ATSC, airport fees, insurance, fuel surcharges, GST, PST). Not valid on groups or cruises.</i>
Weddings and Honeymoons	Transat has noticed that a growing number of couples are choosing destination weddings, either on a beach, in Europe or on a cruise, over traditional weddings. They see it as a way of avoiding an endless list of decisions and escalating costs. The Transat Holidays Wedding Collection offers the highest standards in destination weddings at an affordable price. The Transat Vows Transat Holidays has been helping couples enjoy their dream destination weddings and honeymoons for nearly 25 years. These wedding experts have designed three outstanding wedding packages to fit every couple's unique tastes and needs – Joy, Bliss and Euphoria – and made them available at their most stunning resorts. Each one has

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	<p>been created with its own exclusive components to offer the best service to future newlyweds and their guests, from flights, accommodation, food and beverages to the wedding coordination. The result is a worry-free destination wedding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transat promise to use their experience in destination weddings to help you create the special day you've always dreamed about. - They provide more than 16 exotic destinations, the greatest choice of options and a vast selection of turn-key wedding packages at more than 54 resorts, so that you can choose the perfect setting for your wedding. - And they simplify your plans by offering a no deposit wedding: Transat will book and hold space for your wedding party and guests for up to 90 days without a deposit. In the event a price drops below your group contract rate, they promise to honour the lower price. <p>Honeymoon Delight After the wedding, nothing spells romance like a honeymoon in an idyllic vacation spot. That's why the experts at Transat Holidays are also pleased to help newlyweds start their adventure together by offering a wide selection of honeymoon destinations. With private airport transfers and breakfast in bed, Transat Holidays' honeymoon packages are designed with lovebirds in mind.</p>
<p>Air Transat Upgrades</p>	<p>Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable. They have also introduced a new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights. Passengers flying south will now be welcomed onboard with a glass of champagne, while early morning passengers will be greeted with a mimosa. The meal service has also been improved. The airline will now offer passengers a more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.</p>
<p>Awards</p>	<p>Agent's Choice Awards: Transat Holidays ranked number one for three years in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the results of the Agents' Choice Awards, a survey carried out by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier.</p>
<p>Current Brochure</p>	<p>Nolitours Sun brochures are available at your local travel agent.</p>
<p>Air Transat Kids Club</p>	<p>To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves while onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges.</p> <p>Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the</p>

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	<p>whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.</p>
<p>Transat Club Class</p>	<p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider, more comfortable leather seats, a choice of gourmet meals and fine wines, priority check-in, baggage service and boarding.</p> <p>Club Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Club attendants • Attentive, personalized service • Exclusive, spacious Club cabin <p>Drinks & Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome cocktails • Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service <p>Club Privileges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased baggage allowance • 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on • Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports • Priority boarding • Practical travel items (on Europe flights) • Free headsets • Canadian newspapers <p>Comfort & Refinement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, more comfortable leather seats • More leg room • Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728 • Choice of gourmet meals • Choice of wine and more
<p>Option Plus</p>	<p>This Economy class option includes many priority privileges and services including priority check-in, priority baggage handling, an extra 10kg baggage allowance and even champagne. Here's what you get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights • Priority check-in at a dedicated counter • Priority baggage handling • Priority boarding • Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations • Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection • Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe) • Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment** • Wine or beer with the meal • Headsets <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at April 2012</p>

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<p>Transat and Sustainable Tourism</p>	<p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their employees, customers and partners. Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Society and communities reap the benefits, and, each year, hundreds of millions of travellers discover new countries and cultures. Transat is firmly committed to the responsible development of the tourism industry, and has adopted the following definition of sustainable tourism:</p> <p>“Sustainable tourism entails respect for nature, as well as for host communities and their values; it combines positive socio-economic benefits for local populations with an enriching experience for travellers.”</p> <p>The issue of the environment, as far as Transat's own facilities are concerned, is a clear and basic target. Their environment committees have implemented concrete initiatives with regard to recycling, conservation of resources, the disposal of obsolete electronic equipment, and raising employee awareness. Air Transat has begun developing an environmental management system that could lead to an ISO 14001 certification in the future. To find out more, consult the Transat and the Environment sections at their website:</p> <p>http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&ContentType=voyageur</p>
<p>Gift Certificates</p>	<p>Here's your chance to make a loved one's dream come true. With Transat gift certificates you can offer the beauty, excitement, and wonders of the world: the South with its heavenly beaches and endless sunshine, or just a rental car. Transat gift certificates are valid on all Air Transat, Nolitours, or Transat Holidays products in our brochures. They can be redeemed at a travel agent's office at the time of reservation. To order your gift certificates call 1-800-322-6649.</p>
<p>2012 Hurricane Policy</p>	<p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays provide you with true peace of mind. Vacationers can now travel secure in the knowledge that they will be protected should a hurricane affect their destination city in Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central America. This Nolitours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30, 2011 inclusive. If the conditions stipulated in the policy are met, clients may choose one of the four options listed below:</p> <p>1. Travel at a later date Travellers who choose to travel at a later date can do so at no additional cost. Travel must be completed on or before December. The dept day, destination city, hotel and room category must remain the same.</p> <p>2. Travel to another destination city Travellers who choose to travel to another destination can do so by selecting another Nolitours/Transat Holidays destination that is not at</p>

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	<p>risk of a hurricane. Travel must take place within four weeks of the original departure date. If the package price is higher than the original booking, the traveller will be responsible for paying the difference.</p> <p>3. Travel to the booked destination city Travellers who want to travel to their initially booked destination may do so, provided Nolitours or Transat Holidays still serves that destination city on the scheduled departure date. No refund will be issued if this option is taken.</p> <p>4. Cancel with a full refund Travellers who choose not to travel may cancel with a full refund (excluding travel insurance premiums already paid).</p>
<p>Nolitours Excursions in Costa Rica</p>	<p>Whilst staying in Costa Rica you can purchase a number of excursions to see more of the country in Nolitours style:</p> <p>Arenal Volcano and hot springs</p> <p>Monte Verde Sky Walk: cloud forest hike in the forest canopy, perhaps spotting a quetzal, bellbirds and humming birds.</p> <p>Poas Volcano and coffee plantation: the country's oldest national park featuring Poas crater 1.3 km wide; also Doka Estate Coffee Plantation</p> <p>Tortuga Island: sail across the Nicoya Gulf to Tortuga's idyllic white sand beaches, lush palms and clear blue waters.</p> <p>Manuel Antonio National Park: Short trail walks enable you to see white-faced and squirrel monkeys, plus some of the best Pacific beaches in the country.</p> <p>Crocodile Adventure and birdwatching: on the Tarcoles River and the Guacillo Mangroves – see crocs, scarlet macaws, pelicans, ospreys and trogons.</p>
<p>Nolitours Costa Rica Coach Tour</p>	<p>Nolitours features a tour called "Natural Wonders of Costa Rica" which is a great way of seeing as much of Costa Rica as possible in one week. The tour includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roundtrip Airfare, Roundtrip transfers between airport and hotel, Air Conditioned Coach and Professional English Speaking Tour Guide and nine included features: • Panoramic sightseeing tour of San Jose • Visit Poas Volcano • Visit the Doka Estate • Coffee Plantation

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- Visit the Butterfly Observatory
- Admire Arenal Volcano
- Visit the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge and Rio Frio
- Visit the hot springs
- Visit the Viento Fresco Waterfalls
- Visit the Monteverde Reserve

Itinerary:

DAY 1: CANADA - SAN JOSE Upon arrival in San Jose, your guide will greet you and escort you to your hotel. In the afternoon, enjoy a panoramic sightseeing tour of San Jose. Overnight in San Jose.

DAY 2: SAN JOSE - POAS VOLCANO - DOKA E TATE COFFEE PLANTATION - ARENAL

VOLCANO (FORTUNA DE SAN CARLOS) (2 nights) Morning departure for the Poas Volcano, which has one of the world's largest craters. Then, travel to the Doka Estate Coffee Plantation where you will discover the production process as well as the processing of coffee. Afterwards, visit the famous Butterfly Observatory before having lunch in the middle of the coffee plantation surrounded by beautiful landscapes. Continue towards the Arenal Volcano, one of the world's most active volcanoes. Overnight in the Fortuna de San Carlos area.

DAY 3: CAÑO NEGRO WILDLIFE REFUGE AND HOT SPRINGS Start the day with a visit to the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge and the Rio Frio, featuring some of the richest biodiversity in Costa Rica. You will see a variety of resident and migratory birds, iguanas, sloths, turtles, caimans and three different species of monkeys. In the afternoon, enjoy the soothing hot springs where you can relax and later enjoy the cool night air. Overnight in the Fortuna de San Carlos area.

DAY 4: MONTEVERDE (2 nights) Morning departure for Monteverde and its unique ecosystem known as the Cloud Forest. On the way, you will visit the spectacular Viento Fresco Waterfalls where a one-hour hike will show you the 4 waterfalls in the middle of the forest with views of the Gulf of Nicoya and the Cerro San José. Choose between hiking or horseback riding to return to the starting point of the excursion. After lunch, continue to Monteverde, founded by Quakers in 1951 and located at the beginning of the Cloud Forest. Overnight in the Monteverde area.

DAY 5: MONTEVERDE Visit the Monteverde Reserve and admire the various species of insects, plants and birds. Hike along a bridge system over the marvels of the Cloud Forest. Take advantage of the many optional excursions in the area such as the canopy tour. Overnight in the Monteverde area.

DAY 6: MONTEVERDE - PLAYA TAMBOR (2 nights) Early morning departure for the Central Pacific area of Costa Rica. In Puntarenas, you will take the ferry across the Gulf of Nicoya. Overnight in Playa Tambor.



	<p>DAY 7: PLAYA TAMBOR Spend the day relaxing on the beach or at the resort. Overnight in Playa Tambor.</p> <p>DAY 8: PLAYA TAMBOR - SAN JOSE - CANADA Transfer to the airport for your return flight to Canada.</p>
<p>Nolitours Resorts in Costa Rica</p>	<p>Nolitours hotels from Montreal are in four different areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. San Jose, the capital city in the Central Valley Best Western Irazu Hotel & Casino Barcelo San Jose Palacio Tour: Natural Wonders of Costa Rica Tour: Pura Vida 2. Around Jaco on the Central Pacific coast Balcon Del Mar Best Western Jacó Beach Resort Condo Hotel Jaco Bay Ramada Morgan's cove Resort & Casino Villas Estrellamar 3. On the Gulf of Nicoya near Punta Arenas Doubletree Resort by Hilton Puntarenas Punta Leona Hotel 4. On the southern tip of the Nicoya Peninsula Barcelo Tambor Beach <p>Nolitours also offers the opportunity to sail aboard a tall ship out of Costa Rica on one of two routes to either Nicaragua or Panama with Star Clippers.</p>

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