
Costa Rican Treasures

LAND TOUR

Plus optional extensions in
Guatemala: Antigua & Lake Atitlan;
Tortuguero National Park: Rain Forest Experience

2014

Grand Circle Travel

Costa Rican Treasures

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1. PASSPORT, VISAS AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS



Passport Required

U.S. citizens need a valid passport for this itinerary

Your passport should meet these requirements for this itinerary:

- It should be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S. (If you are traveling *only* to Costa Rica your passport need only be valid for 30 days after the end of your trip).
- It should have the recommended number of blank pages (see below for details).
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable.

Recommended number of blank pages:

This recommendation is based on a “worst case” scenario. When you are on this adventure, you might use fewer pages, depending on the whims of the Immigration official on duty that day. Since the consequence of having too few pages can be severe—you could be denied entry into a country—we feel that it’s better to be safe than sorry, and we strongly recommend that you follow these guidelines.

- **Main trip only:** 1 blank “Visa” page.
- **Optional pre-trip extension to Guatemala & Lake Atitlan:** 1 additional page.
- **Optional post-trip extension to Tortuguero National Park:** No additional pages.
- **Both a pre- and a post-trip extension:** A total of 2 pages.

Please take a moment to check if your passport meets all of these requirements. If not, you could be refused entry into a country. And if that happens, you might be required by that country to return to the U.S. immediately, **which would be at your own expense.**

If you need to renew your passport or get extra pages:

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit their website at www.travel.state.gov for information on obtaining a new passport, renewing your existing passport, or for additional pages. You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

***NOTE:** When updating your passport, it is worthwhile to check the prices on all the different services that might apply to you. For example, it might be less expensive to renew your passport than to have pages added, depending on the number of pages you need.*

Visas not Required

U.S. citizens do not need a visa to visit Costa Rica or Guatemala.

No U.S. Passport?

Non-U.S. citizens or non-U.S. passport holders: If you are **not** a U.S. citizen or if you possess a passport from a country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate or embassy about possible visa requirements. Or you may contact PVS International, who can also assist non-U.S. citizens:

PVS International
Passport & Visa Services
1700 N Moore Street
Rosslyn Center, suite 310
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: 1-800-556-9990

Backup Photocopies

The smartest security precaution you can take is to make photocopies of your passport's personal information pages, your air tickets, and your credit cards. Also, bring extra passport-sized photos. Make a list of the phone and fax numbers for reporting lost credit cards, your travel protection plan company (if you have an optional travel protection plan) and medical emergency network. Keep these documents separate from the originals, and they can save you immeasurable time, money, and trouble if your originals are lost or stolen as you travel. In addition, scan these photocopies and email them to your email address; you can then print out replacement copies if necessary.

2. YOUR HEALTH



Keep Your Abilities In Mind

We've worked closely with our local Program Directors and regional associates to identify the aspects of this adventure that you should be aware of, from physical requirements to cultural factors. **Please carefully review the information below prior to departing on this trip.**

Pacing

- 4 locations in 13 days, including 1 single-night stay

Physical Requirements

- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- You must be able to walk 2 miles unassisted and participate in 1-3 hours of physical activities each day, including stairs

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 75-95°F during touring season
- March-May are the warmest months
- Anticipate high humidity and moderate to heavy rainfall

Terrain

- Travel over uneven walking surfaces, including unpaved paths, hills, stairs, and cobblestone

Transportation

- Travel by 45-seat motorcoach, tractor, and 30-seat boat

Cuisine

- Meals will be based on the local cuisine



Health Check and Inoculations

If you have any ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date. Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your international itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling. You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential if you want to fully enjoy your trip abroad.

If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition. If you take medications regularly, be sure to pack an ample supply that will last your entire trip, as obtaining refills of your medication can be difficult during your trip. Pack these medications in your carry-on bag, and keep them in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

Vaccinations

We strongly suggest that you consult your family physician at least six weeks before your departure concerning vaccinations and medications that you may need on this trip. Discuss your length of stay at each foreign destination, and be guided by your doctor's advice on what, if any, inoculations you should obtain. At this time, specific vaccinations are not a requirement for entry into any of the countries on your itinerary.

Before you talk with your doctor, you can learn the current recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the geographical region that you'll travel. Contact them at:

On-line — visit the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

By phone—at the CDC's International Traveler's Hotline toll-free at **1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747)** 24 hours a day. Please note that automated information is arranged topically by disease, rather than by country or region.

Prevention of Malaria

The CDC states that there is a very low risk of malaria in Costa Rica. Occasionally there are rare cases in the province of Limon, where Tortuguero National Park is located. The most important steps you can take to prevent malaria are to use insect repellent (preferably containing DEET at 30-35% strength) to prevent mosquito bites and to wear clothing that keeps your arms and legs covered. Please consult your health care professional well in advance of your trip to discuss which regimen, if any, you will follow. For further information, you or your health care professional can obtain the CDC document "Prescription Drugs for Malaria" (available on the CDC website).

Medicine Suggestions

Naturally you should bring your own prescription medications and any standard travel medications you think you'll need (something for upset stomach, bandages, an antidiarrheal, etc.) In addition, our Program Directors also suggest a motion sickness medication because many of the roads in Costa Rica twist and curve. This is especially important if you know that you are prone to motion sickness or if you are taking any of the optional extensions (poor roads in Guatemala; boat rides in Tortuguero).

3. LUGGAGE REGULATIONS



Size, Number and Weight Restrictions

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current standard is 50lbs for checked bags and 15 lbs for carry-on bags .
Size restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (<i>length+width+depth</i>). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches .
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
The extensions have the same luggage restrictions as the main trip. Our Program Directors suggest a small additional bag for travelers on the extension to Tortuguero; see the note below for details.	
REMARKS / SUGGESTIONS	
<p>One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights.</p> <p>For the Tortuguero National Park extension: Our Program Directors recommend that travelers on this extension bring a small additional bag that can hold two days' worth of clothing/travel needs. (Think something like a weekend bag, gym bag, or backpack.) It is usually easier and more convenient to bring just this smaller bag on the extension and leave your main luggage in San Jose until you return from Tortuguero. Ideally, you'll keep this small bag light enough for you to carry yourself.</p> <p>Note: Enforcement of published restrictions by countries and airlines is a matter of governmental and corporate policy. Enforcement may include spot checks and may be inconsistently applied. Expect penalties and fines to be imposed immediately, however, when and if enforced. Before you choose to ignore the published restrictions you should ask: <i>Do I feel lucky?</i> And, even if you answer yes, you should make sure that you have the ability to pay the fine.</p>	

Should I confirm luggage restrictions with my U.S./international airline(s) before departure?

Absolutely, confirm current restrictions about a week or so before your departure. You should take this step no matter if your vacation has a lower limit than the average international flight or not, because there may be recent changes, such as new security regulations, or an update to the standard weight/size allowances. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our webpage in the *FAQ* section.

You should also check with the airlines on luggage fees—many airlines charge to check luggage, even on international flights. Others may charge a fee if you bring a second carry-on item, like a purse or a laptop. **These fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines. If you are making a connecting flight, you should also confirm if your luggage can be checked through to your final destination. For more information, see “Air Travel” in your *Important Information* booklet.

Luggage Suggestions

Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase for your checked luggage. Due to space limitations on our motor coaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Portage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.

Consider a daypack or small backpack as your carry-on bag. It will do double duty during excursions and walking trips. A daypack leaves your hands free and distributes its weight onto your back. Packed with daily travel needs (sweater, camera, rain/wind jacket, water bottle, etc.), it will compress to fit the storage space of foreign motorcoaches, and yet still have room for an impulse buy at a local street market.

***Tip:** Bring a second, empty lockable bag folded into your main suitcase, with a luggage tag and small lock. Use this to carry souvenirs home – but remember that you may incur extra luggage fees. If you’re traveling with a companion we recommend “cross-packing,” i.e., pack 2 outfits of your clothing in your companion’s luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.*

Airport Security/TSA

Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage may change. To avoid inadvertently packing restricted items in your carry-on, we suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website at www.tsa.gov, which keeps a current list of restricted items. From the main website click on *Our Travelers*, then *Air Travel*, and then you will see a link for *Prohibited Items*.

Liquids and your carry on: Per the TSA’s **3-1-1 rule:** Liquids must be in a 3.4 ounce or less (100ml) bottle (by volume); all bottles must be in a 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin. One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. The 3.4 ounce (100ml) container size is a security measure.

Locking your luggage:

To reduce the risk of damage to your luggage, *either* do not lock your bags when checking in for flights that originate in the U.S. *or* use TSA-approved locks. (These are locks that TSA screeners can open and relock with a special tool, avoiding damage to your luggage or lock if a physical inspection is required. Look for the words “TSA” or “TSA-approved” on the lock’s packaging.) Outside of the U.S., we strongly recommend that you lock your luggage as a preventative measure against theft.

4. WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Your GCT Program Director

During your Grand Circle Land Tour, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from an on-site Grand Circle Travel Program Director. Your Program Director is a resident who is fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. Your Program Director is supported along the way by local tour guides, who guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle, training that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable. Your Program Director offers both a deep knowledge of the region and a commitment to make this a very pleasant, informative, and rewarding travel experience for you.

Your Program Director will provide sightseeing tips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee your Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of the Program Director throughout your Land Tour, and during the optional trip extensions if you choose to take them.



GCT Air Travelers

U.S. Departure: If you are among a group of ten or more GCT travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, it is our goal to have a GCT Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time and at the gate one hour before your departure time. If you are flying domestically before your international flight, the representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.

Arrival. A Grand Circle Travel Representative will meet you at the airport after you exit Customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel.

Important note: *Airport porters are **NOT** allowed in the customs hall area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart (available for a nominal fee), which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your motorcoach. Your motorcoach driver will load your luggage onto your motorcoach.*

Guatemala Departure. You will be required to pay an Airport Usage Tax each time you board an international or local flight in Guatemala. The fee is US \$3.00, (in total you will pay \$6.00 during the pre-extension program). The tax must be paid directly at the airport and Traveler's checks are not accepted.

Costa Rica Departure. At the end of your program, you will be transferred to the airport in a motorcoach for your return flight to the U.S. Upon departure from Costa Rica you will be required to pay an airport departure tax of approximately U.S. \$29 (subject to change without notice). This tax must be paid on site, and cannot be included in the cost of your ticket. It is best to pay this tax in cash only; if you choose to use a credit card you may be charged a cash advance fee. Traveler's checks will not be accepted.

U.S. Arrival. If you are among a group of ten or more GCT travelers who return from Costa Rica into the same U.S. gateway city, a GCT Airport Representative will meet you as you exit customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have a GCT Airport Representative waiting for your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.

Please note: *If you plan on booking your own international flights or arranging with our air department to arrive/depart on an earlier/later date than standard for your program, airport transfers will NOT be included in your program price. Transfers must be purchased separately, as an optional add-on, and are subject to availability. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Traveler Support team at 1-800-321-2835. For more information, please see your Important Information booklet.*

Flying with a Travel Companion

If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.

5. MONEY MATTERS



How to Carry Your Money

Cash, not Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks—not recommended: We urge you not to rely on traveler's checks. They are very difficult to exchange and the fee for cashing them is quite high. Most banks or exchange offices in Costa Rica or Guatemala will not exchange them, and few businesses accept them.

U.S. dollars have an advantage. Cash is more readily exchanged and accepted than traveler's checks, and sometimes commands a better exchange rate.

There is no need to obtain local currency before your trip. **In fact, U.S. dollars are widely accepted in Costa Rica, so you may not need to change money at all.** Please note that torn, dirty, or taped bills may not be accepted.

ATMs and Debit Cards

Debit cards give you a reliable payment method and ready access to local currency. We recommend you use a debit card for withdrawals at ATM machines when you need cash, as it will allow you the flexibility of accessing money at your convenience without relying on bank hours for money exchanges. When traveling, typically PLUS, Cirrus, and other bank networks are available throughout large cities and small towns.

Always notify your bank before you leave home that you are going abroad so that they may remove any blocks on your account and also ask them about the number of withdrawals you may make abroad. For cash withdrawals, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's 4-digit PIN (Personal Identification Number), as many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their numeric keys, they only display digits.

***Note on ATM use:** Many banks have begun imposing a fee ranging from \$1 to \$5 every time you use an ATM in a foreign city. You may want to limit the number of withdrawals that you make. Your Program Director/Hospitality Desk Representative can advise you on locations, but when to exchange money is left to your discretion.*

Credit Cards

Though major American credit cards (American Express, Visa, and MasterCard) are accepted abroad, always inquire if your type of credit card is accepted before deciding on your purchase. It is also wise to notify the credit card company that you will be using your cards abroad so that they may remove any security block. When using a major credit card you may receive a different exchange rate than if you pay with cash; ask your bank or credit card company about the rate before you leave.

Please be aware that credit cards might not be accepted for small purchases or in the markets. Note that Discover credit card is not widely accepted outside the U.S. Keep your receipts in case you have questions about the conversion or exchange rate. Also, keep your receipts as proof of purchase for items to be shipped home.

Please note: Optional tour payments made by credit card may take up to 3 months to process. For this reason we ask that you use a credit card that will not expire until at least three months following your trip. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "OPT Boston" (depending on your credit card company).

Currency by Destination

Costa Rica

The official currency is the Costa Rica colón (CRC), but U.S. dollars are widely accepted at local businesses.

- Bills come in denominations of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, and 50,000
- Coins come in denominations of 5, 25, 50, 100, and 500 colóns

U.S. dollars are widely accepted for payment, except in situations that require small change (on public transportation, for example). Purchases made with U.S. dollars may receive change back in colóns. Some previous travelers have remarked that breaking large bills (\$50s or \$100s) can be difficult.

Banking Hours

National banks in Costa Rica are open 9 am to 3 pm Monday through Friday; in San Jose private banks may be open 8:30 am to 8 pm. You will need your passport for any currency exchange. Exchanging money in Costa Rica can be time-consuming; private banks generally offer faster service. As banks can be hard to find, ask your Program Director in advance if you'll require assistance.

Guatemala

The currency in Guatemala is the *quetzal* (Q); 1 *quetzal* equals 100 *centavos*. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: 100, 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 *quetzal*; 50 *centavos*
- Coins: 25, 10, 5 and 1 *centavos*

U.S. dollars are accepted for payment at many businesses in Guatemala, but not all. Small denomination bills in good condition—clean with no tears, no writing, etc—are preferred.



Shopping

There is **no** requirement to make a purchase during stops at local shops and markets, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. **Grand Circle Travel cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.**

If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or gold dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica offers a mixed bag of craft items at moderate prices. Wood is a good buy, but can vary in quality. Wooden jewelry and jewelry boxes, utensils, serving bowls and other small ornaments can be easily transported home in your luggage. Fresh roasted coffee beans are popular, and can be purchased in gift packaging. Silver, gold, and ceramic replicas of pre-Columbian artifacts also make good souvenirs, but consider carefully before purchasing anything advertised as an 'antiquity.' Counterfeits are common, and the Costa Rican customs inspectors may confiscate genuinely old articles. Customs will also seize most items involving furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, and plants. Bargaining is not common in Costa Rica, even at the stands of street vendors. Prices at shops and stores are fixed, just as in the U.S.

Shop hours: Shops are generally open from 9 am–7 pm, Monday through Saturday, often with a two-hour lunch break in the afternoons. On Sundays almost all stores are closed, but some souvenir shops remain open.

Note: We recommend that wherever possible you carry your purchases home with you, especially if they are valuable or fragile. (Remember to leave some extra space in your luggage when you are packing for your trip, so you can fit in your vacation purchases.)

Guatemala and Lake Atitlan

The color, variety, and overall quality of Guatemalan arts and crafts make shopping a favorite activity among visitors. Woven goods are among the most popular finds; you'll find everything from rainbow-hued tablecloths to woolen rugs to cotton string hammocks. Glass, ceramics, and ceremonial masks are also good buys. Antigua's jade factory showrooms offer high quality and interesting jewelry, though jade can be pricey. Three blocks west of Parque Central, you'll find a sprawling town market offering all sorts of handcrafts.

U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the *export* duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the *import* duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20229
Tel. **1-877-277-5511**
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/

Problem with a Purchase?

The best way to address a problem with a purchase is to not have one in the first place! So don't forget to examine merchandise before paying for it, check contracts or agreements before signing, and review your receipt before leaving the shop. For major purchases, don't hesitate to ask in advance about the return policy—local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up.

But what if you do discover an issue with an item later on? In that case, your best recourse is to contact the vendor directly. For this reason we recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. due to delays in communication, the complexities of international shipping/customs duties, and even cultural differences in how business is conducted.



To Tip or Not to Tip

Sometimes *that* is the question. Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Listed below are our recommendations for the tips that are not included in your tour price. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

- **GCT Program Director:** It is customary at the end of your trip to express a personal “Thank You” to the Grand Circle Program Director or the hotel Hospitality Desk Representative, especially if he or she has provided you with individual assistance. We recommend \$4-\$6 per person, per day. Please note that tips for our Program Directors can only be in the form of cash, and local currency is appreciated.
- **Airport/Hotel/Pier Portage & Transfers:** While using GCT transfer services, tips to hotel, airport, and pier porters are included in the cost of your trip. Tips to the motorcoach driver for your airport/hotel/pier transfers are also paid by GCT.
- **Included Group Meals:** Your Program Director will tip waiters for the included meals when the group dines together.
- **Tours & Excursions:** During your vacation, you have the opportunity to participate in included and optional tours. Please note that optional tours can only be paid with a credit card. A tip to your motorcoach driver (and local tour guide, if one accompanies the tour) is customary, and the following are the suggested amounts for each of them:
 - \$2 per person for each half-day tour
 - \$3 per person for each full-day tour
- **Costa Rica Leisure Time:** During the times that you explore independently it will be helpful to know that in Costa Rica 10% service charge is added, by law, to all restaurant bills, so there's no need to leave an additional amount unless service is especially good. Taxi drivers are never tipped, except for special services. You can tip in either U.S. dollars (not in coins, however) or in Costa Rican colons.
- **Hotel Housekeepers:** At your hotels, your housekeepers will appreciate a tip equivalent to one dollar per person, per day.

6. PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP



In General

Travel light: A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. Eliminate all but the essentials and start packing a few days before you leave. That way, you'll have time to think—not fret—about what you might be forgetting. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.

Pack casual clothes: In this age of informality, low-key seasonal apparel is perfectly acceptable at each of your destinations. Basic pants, shirts, walking shorts, everyday dresses and skirts, supportive shoes, and functional outdoor clothes are recommended. We recommend a sweater for the San Jose portion of your trip. Men do not need jackets and ties; women do not require fancy dresses or high-heeled shoes. A small selection of your favorite everyday outfits is fine for all activities, including dinners. For motorcoach tours & transfers, you'll want to wear loose-fitting clothes that are comfortable to sit in for extended periods of time. Remember to include appropriate attire for any sports and relaxation activities in which you plan to participate: swimming, fitness walking, jogging, etc.

Comfortable, supportive walking shoes are essential: You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, so choose your footwear carefully. You can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful on some days.

Rain gear: You'll want good, light rain gear all year round, Consider that from April to November it will rain almost every afternoon, so you'll want rain gear you are comfortable in, and dry footwear, such as light hiking boots with a built-in Gore-Tex liner.



Packing your Carry-On

Using a daypack as a carry-on bag for your flights is a smart solution. We **strongly urge** you to pack your carry-on with at least one full change of clothes, your camera gear, medications, changes of socks and underwear, your important travel documents, and other irreplaceable items, in case your checked bags go astray. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture. It is usually best to pack liquid or pressurized items (like foaming shaving cream or hairspray) in a leak-proof bag or container inside your checked luggage. Currently, most airports worldwide limit the amount of liquids and gels than can be packed in your carry-on, see below. With a daypack you can then remove these items on arrival and load your bag with the gear you'll need on walking tours and excursions.



Clothing Options

The luggage weight and size restrictions imposed by travel realities today have made traveling light an absolute necessity. With modern fabrics – Gore-Tex, Polarfleece, polypropylene, etc. – lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy. A visit to any on-line or local sporting goods/outdoor stores (L.L. Bean, REI, EMS, etc.) will yield a treasure trove of lightweight, specialized, and fashionable clothing and gear that is readily adaptable to your itinerary.



Travel Gear Suggestions

Though it's often fun to do things as the locals do, it can be frustrating when daily necessities or conveniences from home aren't available. To travel wisely these days you must juggle your personal needs and preferences against the physical constraints of your transportation—whether it's an international airplane, a transfer motorcoach, a small ship or a day-long trek on a camel. You'll have to distinguish between what you **must** have, what you'd *like* to have, whether you can zip your suitcase closed, and what you can reasonably expect to wrestle through airport hallways and security checkpoints. Consult the following items to create your personal checklist – ignoring what you don't need and making the tough decisions over borderline cases. Remember that many airlines today will charge you extra for added luggage.

What not to pack: do not pack aerosol cans, as they tend to leak during air travel. Avoid packing glass bottles; use plastic containers instead. Leave at home checkbooks and any credit cards not essential for your trip, valuable jewelry, and anything that you would hate to lose.

Consider ...

- Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, shower cap, body soap, etc.
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- Sunglasses with a neck strap
- Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger.
- Insect repellent with DEET
- Travel money bag or money belt
- Moisturizer, lip balm
- Swimsuit
- Compact umbrella
- Wide-brim sun hat or visor (seasonal)
- Pocket-size tissues
- Moist towelettes (packets) and/or anti-bacterial "waterless" hand cleanser
- Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb
- Extra passport-sized photos
- Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards

Medicines

- Your own prescription medicines
- Vitamins
- Cold remedies (Sudafed/Dristan)
- Pain relief (Ibuprofen/aspirin/naproxen)
- Laxatives (Senokot, Ex-Lax)
- Upset stomach (Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta)
- Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)
- Band-Aids
- Moleskin foot pads
- Antibiotics (Neosporin/Bacitracin)
- Motion sickness medication, especially if you are prone or taking an extension

Other Gear

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel alarm or wristwatch with alarm | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel journal/note pad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compact binoculars | <input type="checkbox"/> Home address book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hanging toiletry bag with pockets | <input type="checkbox"/> Photos, small gift for home-hosted visit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hair dryer (may not be provided in all hotels) | <input type="checkbox"/> Phrase book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handkerchiefs | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle for land excursions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basic sewing kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Collapsible walking staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite)
clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper | <input type="checkbox"/> Pocket calculator for exchange rates |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading materials |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Packets of decaffeinated coffee and/or
sweetener (local coffee is <i>strong</i>) |

NOTE: As a result of Costa Rica's particular topography and frequent heavy rains, the routes your motorcoach will travel along are often potholed. As a result you may want to bring a neck or seat cushion for use during longer transfers.

Items You Can Bring Into Costa Rica Duty-Free

- 6 rolls of film
- 5 liters of liquor
- 1.1 pounds of tobacco products (about two cartons of cigarettes)



7. REGIONAL CLIMATE INFORMATION

We can't predict what the weather will be during your travels, but you'll find historical averages and general information on the climate of your destinations below. As your departure nears it's a good idea to visit the *My Account* feature of www.gct.com, where you'll find monthly temperature averages for the countries you'll visit as well as a current 10-day forecast of local temperatures and conditions. Or check Internet weather sites (www.wunderground.com is very comprehensive) for those forecasts.

Costa Rica

As a narrow isthmus, Costa Rica is influenced by the many meteorological systems in the area and it is nearly impossible to predict the weather accurately. But generally, Costa Rica has a tropical climate with high temperatures, high humidity, and moderate-to-heavy rainfall. The country can be divided into four climate zones: the central highlands, the high mountains, the Pacific shore, and the Caribbean shore.

- **Central highlands:** This includes the area surrounding the capital, San José. This is the most moderate of Costa Rica's four zones. Days are less hot and humid, and nights are much cooler. But because the influence of the surrounding mountains, fog can gather over the highlands, causing cloudy skies or delays at San José airport.
- **High mountains:** The mountains surround the central highlands, and act as a barrier between them and the coast. It can be cool and windy at higher altitudes in the mountains. We travel above 5,000 feet, where temperatures can drop into the 30s °F at night, but usually the nighttime temperature is in the 50s.
- **Pacific shore and Caribbean shore:** Costa Rica's western Pacific shore is hot and humid with heavy rains from May through November. The Caribbean shore to the east is equally hot and even wetter. Note that the humidity, more than the heat, is the biggest inconvenience on either shore. Generally the humidity will start high and then decrease significantly toward the late afternoon hours, except during the rainy season, when the humidity increases throughout the day, resulting in an afternoon shower.

Seasons: As a tropical country, Costa Rica does not have four seasons like North America. Instead, the country has two distinct seasons—rainy and dry. The rainy season generally runs from May to mid or late November; the dry season is December through April. Because temperatures are fairly steady all year long, the real difference between the two is in the humidity and the amount of rain. The dry season will be less humid, with clearer skies, but the rainy season will have fewer crowds and better foliage (it is also known as the green season). During the rainy season it is very common to have clear skies or even sun in the morning followed by a brief but strong shower in the afternoon, rather than rain all day long.

Guatemala & Lake Atitlan (optional extension)

Located in a valley in Guatemala's central highlands, Antigua's climate is very similar to that of Costa Rica: year round temperatures are warm, and the rainy season runs from April to November. However, the rainfall here is more moderate than in other parts of the country, and rarely lasts for more than an hour or two.

Here is the data from the weather observation stations closest to our destinations:

WHAT'S THE TEMPERATURE?												
<i>Average highs and lows in °F.</i>												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Guatemala & Lake Atitlan (optional extension)												
High	72	75	77	78	78	75	74	74	73	73	72	72
Low	55	56	58	60	62	62	61	61	61	61	58	57
San Jose												
High	75	76	79	79	80	79	77	78	79	77	77	75
Low	58	58	59	62	62	62	62	64	61	60	60	58
La Fortuna												
High	83	84	86	87	88	86	85	85	86	85	83	82
Low	68	67	69	69	70	71	71	72	70	70	71	70
Puntarenas (for Guanacaste)												
High	89	91	92	92	89	89	87	87	86	86	86	87
Low	76	77	77	78	78	77	76	75	75	76	76	76
Puerto Limon (for Tortuguero)												
High	83	83	84	85	85	85	84	84	86	88	84	83
Low	72	72	73	74	75	75	75	74	74	74	74	72

Please note: The data cited above reflect *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions, and serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. A 60 degree *average* high temperature means that days may be as warm as 80 or as cool as 40 – but it’s most likely you’ll encounter temperatures in the 50 to 70 degree range.

8. TRAVEL AND TECHNOLOGY



In General

Smartphone, tablet, digital camera/camcorder, MP3 player: travel today can involve technology that didn't exist even five years ago. The usefulness of digital devices is enormous: smartphones can keep you connected and offer up-to-the-minute information via your cell plan or a local Wi-Fi connection. With a tablet (or smartphone) you can store multiple country guidebooks, access maps and connect to the internet in a small, lightweight device. (*Tip: you can download **this** document from the Grand Circle Travel website and import it into your tablet or e-reader, many of which can display PDF files.*)

Compact and lightweight, digital camcorders and cameras take high definition movies and still images of the people you meet and places you visit. For robust use a laptop may be effective; for occasional use it's wiser to rely on Internet cafes or a tablet and hotel Internet access rather than shoulder the heft and size of a laptop. To use these devices you should first consider the services available at your destinations. You'll encounter a range of electrical standards, varied plug configurations to access the local current, erratic availability (electricity and internet access), and differing technological standards.

You'll need to assess your power and data storage needs, and the accessories required to recharge/connect/use these devices. Finally, it's smart to read the owner's manual *before* you depart. Pay particular attention to electrical, power and storage requirements to ensure that you understand exactly what you need. Thorough preparation is the best guarantee that your devices will work up to their potential.



Regional Electricity

Costa Rica operates on the same 110-voltage current, 60-cycle, and uses the same Type A and Type B plugs, as does the U.S. Your small electric appliances (shaver, hair dryer, electric hair rollers, etc.) will operate as well and as safely in Costa Rica as they do at home; no plug adapter or current transformer is necessary. **Please note, however:** Electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays—power outages are more common in Costa Rica than they are in the U.S. Passengers dependent on an electrical supply (as those with sleep apnea) should consider a different Grand Circle vacation.



If you use multiple digital devices—cell phone, digital camera, and MP3 player for instance – it's handy to have a travel power strip, perhaps with a surge suppressors and USB-style port for charging cell phones, MP3 players or e-readers without the use of a device-specific plugs.



Smartphones

It will require some effort to get the most out of your smartphone when you travel. Even with an international roaming plan, costs can add up quickly – those handy apps often pile up download fees. The simplest solution is to shut down all cell phone functions, automatic data feeds and roaming options, and take advantage of the apps via available Wi-Fi. With an Internet VOIP app (like Skype) you can make inexpensive calls. If necessary, turn international roaming back on and your phone will work as usual – albeit at some cost. If your phone doesn't support international roaming (most smartphones do), some carriers offer loaners.

App quality, availability and costs vary – as do platforms (iPhone, Android, Blackberry ...), so again you'll need to do some legwork. Apps come in all forms: packing lists, currency converters, language translators, maps, journals, Wi-Fi hotspot finders ... one problem is going to be searching through the vast array of available apps to uncover what works best and what you're likely to use most. Smartphones have a lot to offer, but their small size can be a drawback for some uses (maps, extended reading, etc.)

Cell Phones

If you want to use a standard cell phone while traveling overseas, be sure to check with your service provider (www.verizon.com, www.t-mobile.com etc.) to see if your phone will work outside the U.S. or whether you're better off renting an international phone. The websites www.travelcell.com and www.globalcellularrental.com have good information on rentals. Or, consider buying an inexpensive local phone for your stay.

Phone Calling Cards

If you don't carry a phone, you can use a prepaid calling card to call the U.S. with minimal additional charges. Besides the prepaid long distance charges, you might have a local fee of a few cents and possibly a connection fee if you are using your card at a hotel. Check with the reception desk prior to using it to avoid unexpected charges.

Calling cards purchased locally are usually less expensive than those purchased in the U.S. and are more likely to work with the local system. Note that dialing a U.S. 1-800 number outside the continental United States will incur costly long distance fees, since 1-800 does not work outside the U.S.



Photo Gear

For many people, capturing the highlights of their travel experiences in photographs or movies and sharing them is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the journey. Remember, however: some individuals and cultures are less tolerant of photography than others. It's always best to respect local customs. And in some places you may be charged for photography at specific sites, or restricted from any photography at all.

Digital cameras and camcorders are excellent travel companions—and many do dual duty by recording movies *and* still images. Fist sized camcorders can capture HD movies and high quality still photos; cameras the size of a deck of cards are great for snapshots and casual movie clips. With an ample supply of high-capacity memory cards you can record your whole trip with a small, lightweight package.

But you must remember the batteries. Recharging batteries is sometimes impossible, cameras can drain batteries *very* quickly, and replacements may be unavailable. Whether you need standard or proprietary batteries, it's good to have spares. Be sure your charger will work with the local electrical system, and bring more than enough memory cards—they may be hard or impossible to find. Memory cards are small, thin and light: you can never have too much storage.

Compact cameras are impractical for distant subjects. Some models have a zoom lens of up to 120mm, which is good for middle distances. For distant subjects a *megazoom* (with a zoom lens of at least 300mm) or a single lens reflex (DSLR) camera with up to a 300mm telephoto lens are good choices. With a DSLR you can use multiple lenses, though your gear can quickly get complex, weighty and cumbersome. Cameras or lenses that need a tripod are impractical for travel photography. A single mid-range telephoto lens coupled with a small, fast prime lens (for low light/no flash situations) is an effective, flexible and compact kit. Consider mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras (MILC), which combine small bodies and multiple, small lenses with high quality for both still and HD movie images.

If you use a DSLR or MILC camera, protect the lenses with a UV filter and bring lens caps, covers, cleaning paper and a waterproof bag (a heavy duty Ziploc-style bag is good) to protect your gear. Be sure your camera has a flash that you can turn off, and if it's detachable, remember to pack it. (At many sites and museums, flashes are *not* permitted.)

Consider disposable cameras, as well. They are inexpensive and capable of acceptable photos as long as the light is not too dim *or* bright. X-rays do not damage the data of digital cameras (in any media format), and so pose no problems for travelers using digital cameras.

9. ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS

We're including some handy practical details and a brief introduction to the places you'll visit on your Land Tour. If you expect to explore in depth on your own, we recommend that you consult one of the many available book-length guides to your destinations. If you have one or two specific sites, museums or features that you're interested in, an Internet search is the ideal way to get-up-to-date information and details. And of course your Grand Circle Travel Program Director or Hospitality Desk Representative will be able to assist you with suggestions and arrangements of activities you wish to participate in during your stay.



Accommodations

We stay in some unique accommodations that convey a sense of Costa Rican culture. It's important to note that some of your hotel rooms are smaller than what you may be used to in the U.S. Lodge amenities may not be what you expect from a hotel in the U.S.; in rural areas, our lodgings may have limited services. For instance, some hotels do not have elevators, water temperature and pressure may vary, and bed sizes may vary. Some of our accommodations won't have air conditioning or hairdryers.



Drinking Water

In Costa Rica tap water is safe to drink, and ice is usually safe too. If you prefer bottled water, it is readily available and reasonably priced. Note that even though the water is safe, it may be processed differently than you are used to, so it may taste or feel different.



Laundry Service

Your Program Director or concierge can assist you with making arrangements for this service.

San José in Brief



City Layout

Situated in a broad, fertile region 4,150 feet above sea level, it was called Villa Nueva when it was settled in 1736. San José developed slowly as a tobacco centre in the Spanish colonial era. In 1823 the national capital was transferred there from nearby Cartago.

Downtown San José is laid out on a grid. *Avenidas* (avenues) run east and west, while *calles* (streets) run north and south. The center of the city is at Avenida Central and Calle Central. To the north of Avenida Central, the *avenidas* have odd numbers beginning with Avenida 1; to the south, they have even numbers beginning with Avenida 2. Likewise, *calles* to the east of Calle Central have odd numbers, and those to the west have even numbers. The main downtown artery is Avenida 2, which merges with Avenida Central on either side of the downtown area. West of downtown, Avenida Central becomes Paseo Colón, which ends at Parque La Sabana and feeds into the highway to Alajuela, the airport, and the Pacific coast. East of downtown, Avenida Central leads to San Pedro and then to Cartago and the Interamerican Highway heading south. Calle 3 takes you out of town to the north and puts you on the Guápiles Highway out to the Caribbean coast.



Cuisine

Costa Rican cuisine is simple and chefs shun spices. *Comida típica*, or native dishes, rely heavily on rice and beans, the basis of many Costa Rican meals. Meals are generally wholesome and reasonably priced. *Gallo pinto*, the national dish of fried rice and black beans, is as ubiquitous as is the hamburger in North America, particularly as a breakfast (*desayuno*) staple. Many meals are derivatives, including *arroz con pollo* (rice and chicken) or *arroz con tuna*. At lunch, *gallo pinto* becomes the *casado* (married): rice and beans supplemented with cabbage-and-tomato salad, fried plantains, and meat. Vegetables also form a large portion of the diet, often included in dishes like *picadillos*.

Food staples include *carne* (beef, sometimes called *bistek*), *pollo* (chicken), and *pescado* (fish). Beef and steaks are relatively inexpensive, but don't expect your steak to match its North American counterpart. They're also lean (cattle is grass-fed). Despite 1,227 kilometers (767 miles) of coastline, seafood — especially shrimp (*camarones*) or lobster (*langosta*) — is expensive, because Costa Rica exports most of its seafood.



Local Transportation

Bus: Many Costa Ricans don't own cars. Therefore, the public transportation system is fairly well developed, particularly in San Jose. There is no central bus terminal, however, and different bus lines depart from different places; the "Coca-Cola" bus stop is one major one (in front of a closed Coca-Cola bottling plant). Your Program Director can assist you if you wish to use public transportation during your leisure time.

Taxi: Taxis in Costa Rica have meters. Ask your taxi driver if his meter is working before you enter his cab; find another taxi if it's not.

Outside of San Jose, taxis are actually considered to be a form of public transportation. Long trips, including sightseeing stops, can be very inexpensive, especially if you share a cab with other travelers. This can be a great way to explore out of the way places on your own.

Guatemala and Lake Atitlan in Brief—Optional Extension



City Layout

The town of Antigua is centered around the Parque Central, and its streets are arranged along a strict grid: *calles* run from north to south, and *avenidas* run from east to west. *Calles* east of Parque Central are marked as *oriente*; those west are *poniente*. Similarly, *avenidas* north of the park are *norte*; those south are *sud*. While the grid makes it easy to find a certain street, the house and business numbers on each street do not necessarily indicate how far from the Parque Central an address is, so rely on the expertise of your Program Director for specific directions outside the city center. Parque Central occupies an entire city block, and is framed by City Hall on the north, the Palace of the Captains-General on the south, the Cathedral on the east, and a shopping area on the west.



Drinking Water

In Guatemala the tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled drinks, bottled juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled are safe. The most cautious approach is to carry a bottle of drinking water in your day bag at all times.



Local Transportation

Antigua itself is small enough to be explored entirely on foot. Public buses to Guatemala City and outlying villages run on a regular schedule from the station on Alameda Santa Lucia, which is on the western side of town. While the repainted American school buses add a good deal of local color to the streets, they can be cramped—they're referred to as “chicken buses” for a good reason! You can consult with your Program Director before heading outside of Antigua to ensure the safest and most convenient travel route. You'll find, however, that Antigua boasts so many attractions within walking distance that using public transportation won't be necessary.

10. DEMOGRAPHICS

Costa Rica

Area: 19,929 square miles

Capital: San Jose

Location: At 19,929 square miles, Costa Rica is slightly smaller in area than West Virginia. It borders Nicaragua on its north, Panama on the southeast, the Pacific Ocean on the west and southwest, and the Caribbean Sea on the northeast.

Geography: Costa Rica is located in Middle America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama. Its terrain consists of coastal plains separated by rugged mountains.

Languages: Spanish (official), English

Population (2011 estimate): 4,307,712

Religions: Catholic (70%), Evangelical (10%), Other denominations (Methodist, Jewish, ect.) (20%)

Time zone: Costa Rica's time zone is the equivalent of U.S. Central Time. When it is noon anywhere in Costa Rica, it is 1 pm in New York (Eastern Time), and 10 am in California (Pacific Time). Costa Rica does not observe daylight-savings time. Therefore, during daylight-savings time in the U.S., the time in your Costa Rican destinations will be two hours behind Eastern Time, one hour behind U.S. Central time, and one hour ahead of Pacific Time.

Costa Rican Public Holidays:

01/01	New Year's Day
04/11	Battle of Rivas
04/17	Maundy Thursday
04/18	Good Friday
05/01	Labor Day / May Day
07/25	Annexation of Guanacaste
08/15	Mother's Day
09/15	Independence Day
12/25	Christmas Day

Business hours during holidays: Banks, public offices, and many stores close during Costa Rican national holidays. On the Thursday and Friday before Easter, buses run randomly and the sale of alcohol is prohibited. Many businesses and government offices are closed for the entire week before Easter. On all holidays, and often the days immediately before and after them, public transportation may be limited.

Historical Overview

Small tribes inhabited the area now known as Costa Rica as early as 8000 BC. When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1502, he chose the name "Costa Rica," which means "rich coast," because he believed the land would yield vast amounts of gold. However, Spanish conquistadors soon discovered Costa Rica did not contain the mineral wealth they had hoped for. Instead, what they found were tribes of farmers and artisans. Early Spanish settlers exploited these indigenous people for their labor and harsh treatment along with foreign diseases wiped out the majority of the native population within a century. With neither precious metals nor a supply of cheap labor Costa Rica attracted only a few Spanish colonists. Prospective settlers went to more developed colonies, such as Nicaragua. As a result Costa Rica grew slowly and remained a poor colony.

Costa Rica declared independence in the mid 19th century. Spain, with limited interest in Costa Rica, did not attempt to force the colonists back to the crown. The early years of independence were difficult. Over the first five decades, Costa Rica experienced numerous coups and power struggles. In 1823, Costa Rica joined the United Provinces of Central America in the hopes of bolstering the country's stagnant economy but that plan backfired as the fledgling union proved to be mired by corruption and poorly led. The union had completely collapsed by the time Costa Rica officially withdrew in 1848.

Costa Rica experienced a brief period of dictatorship from 1838 to 1842. Ironically, the dictatorial government enacted many positive reforms, including the country's first legal code. The national debt was paid in full. The promotion of coffee as a staple crop gave a much-needed boost to the economy. The years following 1842 were marked by an endless series of coups. New constitutions were adopted and new leaders took control, creating an atmosphere of ongoing chaos. In the 1870s, Tomas Guardia named himself ruler for life. He immediately set about building a railroad from San José to the Caribbean coast. The project bankrupted the nation, but it also laid the foundation for a thriving banana industry by establishing large plantations near the tracks.

In 1889, President Bernardo Soto opened the door to democratic reforms by sponsoring Costa Rica's first free and open elections. Soto also advocated freedom of the press and the peaceful transition of power. His reforms ushered in a period of great advancements in education and the arts. The first three decades of the 20th century were a time of order and tranquility. Each president advanced democratic liberties and continued to expand the education system. But economic depression and uneven distribution of wealth led to a brief civil war in 1948. The government responded by expanding social welfare programs, extending suffrage rights to women, imposing a progressive income tax on the wealthy, enacting new economic reforms, and stabilizing Costa Rica's finances.

Since 1948, two parties have competed for power in Costa Rica. A plan was devised to ensure the orderly transfer of government: Every four years, the incumbent party relinquishes office to the opposition. As a result of these reforms, Costa Rica has enjoyed several decades of peaceful unity between political factions.

Today Costa Rica is by far the most democratic country in Central America. The population is literate and politically involved. There is a healthy respect for freedom of expression and a commitment on the part of both political parties to work together for the good of the nation. Most importantly, the democratic reforms of the 1940s and '50s ushered in a period of peace and prosperity that has lasted several decades.

Costa Rica is a small country, but the population enjoys a relatively high standard of living. The country's wealth is very evenly divided, resulting in a strong middle class. Costa Rica spends a greater percentage of its national income on education than any other country in Latin America, resulting in a highly educated citizenry — more than 93 percent of all Costa Ricans are literate.

Guatemala

Area: 42,042 sq miles

Capital: Guatemala City

Languages: Spanish is the official language of Guatemala; 23 Amerindian languages (including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca) are also spoken.

Location: Guatemala is bordered by El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Belize, the Pacific Ocean, and the Gulf of Honduras.

Geography: Located in Central America between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Honduras, Guatemala is mountainous in the interior with plains along the coast.

Population: 14,373,472

Religions: Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs

Time Zone: Guatemala is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5am in Guatemala City.

Public Holidays:

01/01 New Year's Day

04/17 Maundy Thursday

04/18 Good Friday

04/19 Easter Saturday

(Some businesses also take Easter Monday off, but it is not recognized as a national holiday.)

05/01 Labor Day / May Day

06/30 Army Day

09/15 Independence Day

10/20 Revolution of 1944

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Historical Overview

The Mayans

Today, the lands once occupied by the ancient Mayan civilization fall within the boundaries of Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. Guatemala, a country of over 14 million that officially recognizes several Mayan-derived Indian languages—along with Spanish—has many direct descendants of the ancient Mayans among its people.

The ancient Mayan culture is believed to have taken shape between 1500 BC and AD 100 in the Pacific highlands of Guatemala and El Salvador. Beginning around AD 250, Mayan civilization entered what is now called its Classic Period, when the great city-states whose ruins define La Ruta Maya began to be built. This period lasted until about AD 900, after which many Mayan cities were abandoned. Some cities, however, particularly on Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, survived centuries longer, in a post-Classical period that extended as late as the 16th century.

At the beginning of the Classical Period, Tikal (now in Guatemala) was already well established. Early in the third century AD, a king named Yax Moch Xoc ruled Tikal and began a dynasty that lasted for the next 400 years. Yax Moch Xoc and his successors expanded their city-state by conquering surrounding kingdoms until Tikal had a population estimated at 100,000 by the middle of the sixth century. Then Tikal itself was conquered by Caracol (now in Belize), which ruled the area for over a century. A ruler named Moon Double Comb brought renewed greatness to Tikal early in the eighth century, building most of the great temples that still stand around the Great Plaza today. Tikal declined around AD 900, at the end of the Classic Period, with its population slowly dispersing and its buildings becoming overgrown by luxuriant tropical vegetation.

Spanish Conquest

When the Europeans arrived in the 16th century, they encountered several remaining Mayan groups. Spanish soldiers under Pedro de Alvarado completed the conquest of Guatemala in 1548 after pitting several of these indigenous groups against each other. Once it began, Spanish rule continued here until 1821. At this point, Guatemala briefly became part of Mexico before joining a short-lived federation known as The United Provinces of Central America.

Modern Era

The early years of the 20th century were marked by dictatorships and foreign influence. After the dictatorship of General Jorge Ubico was overthrown in 1944, Guatemala experienced its “ten years of spring,” an extended period of reform, progress, and personal freedom.

In 1960, the U.S. supported government, the paramilitary, and the Cuba-backed left-wing insurgents began a brutal Guatemalan Civil War sparked by a number of social and economic factors. The low point of the 36-year internal conflict was the violent presidency of Rios Mont. During his rule thousands of unarmed civilians were killed.

In 1986, the election of President Vinicio Cerezo brought reform and a period of relative peace. In 1994, the Commission for Historical Clarification sought to end 36 years of violence and corruption; a peace accord was signed in 1996. Since the end of the civil war, a series of successful reforms and democratic elections has inspired hope for the country’s recovery. One recent reform of note was the creation of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2006. This investigative group assists the Guatemalan Attorney General and national police, but is run as a joint venture between the United Nations and Guatemala.

11. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Books, Maps, and Movies

General:

A Brief History of Central America by Lynn V. Foster (History) A good overview of the economic and cultural history of the region. An earlier book by the same name but written by Hector Perez-Brignoll is also good, but isn't as up-to-date as this edition.

Nature of the Rainforest, Costa Rica and Beyond by Adrian Forsyth (Natural History) Although based in Costa Rica, biologist Forsyth used his experience to explain the basic ecology and conversation of any rainforest. Over 100 wonderful photographs complement the text.

The Monkey's Bridge: Mysteries of Evolution in Central America by David Rains (Natural History) An absorbing account of the history, exploration, and evolutionary role of the Central American land bridge by an award-winning nature writer.

Travelers' Tales Central America by Larry Habegger and Natanya Pearlman (Travel Account) A collection of eyewitness reports by journalists, travelers and writers, including Joan Didion, P.J. O'Rourke, and Paul Theroux.

Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America by Adrian Forsyth, Ken Miyata (Natural History) An engaging overview of the ecology of a tropical rain forest as written by two biologists. First published in the 1980s, but subsequently updated and re-issued.

Costa Rica:

A Place in the Rain Forest: Settling the Costa Rican Frontier by Darryl Cole-Christensen. (Travel Account) The author recounts his experiences as one of the first settlers of the Coto Brus, an almost impenetrable, mountainous rain forest region of southeastern Costa Rica, in the 1950s.

Costa Rica Butterflies & Moths: An Introduction to Familiar Species by James Kavanagh (Field Guide) A handy laminated guide of the 70 most common moth and butterfly species that includes color illustrations. And it folds up—so you can take it on walks. The same author and publisher offer a similar guide on birds titled ***Costa Rica Birds: An Introduction to Familiar Species***.

Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion by Barbara Ras (Anthology) A collection of works by local writers makes a great introduction to Costa Rica's people and culture.

The Birds of Costa Rica by Richard Garrigues and Robert Dean (Field Guide) A compact yet thorough guide from Cornell University Press that includes a range maps, key information on identification and habitat, and multiple illustrations. Useful for a birding enthusiast.

The Wildlife of Costa Rica, A Field Guide by Fiona Reid, Twan Leenders, Jim Zook, and Robert Dean (Field Guide) Portable enough to take along on a walk in the forest, this latest Zona Tropical guide includes 450 of the most common animals you are likely to encounter.

Monkeys Are Made of Chocolate: Exotic and Unseen Costa Rica by Jack Ewing (Natural History) Written by an American who has lived in Costa Rica for more than 30 years, this book explores how plants, animals, and people interact. Each chapter is an essay that shows a new side of the overall theme.

Happier Than a Billionaire: Quitting My Job, Moving to Costa Rica, and Living the Zero Hour Work Week by Nadine Hays Pisani (Memoir) Humor mixes with struggles in this observational book about the experience of living abroad as an ex-pat in Costa Rica.

Two Weeks in Costa Rica by Matthew Houde and Jennifer Turnbull (Travel Narrative) The true-life misadventures of a young couple touring in Costa Rica, told in a breezy, upbeat style.

Costa Rica: The Ecotraveller's Wildlife Guide by Les Beletsky (Nature Guide) A handbook to Costa Rica's natural history, ecology, and wildlife habitats. Text, photographs, and drawings help ecotourists identify animals encountered in the wild.

Costa Rica in Focus by Tjabel Daling (History) A concise guide to the history, economy, environment, and culture of Costa Rica.

Inside Costa Rica by Silvia Lara (History) Offers a superb overview of Costa Rican society, including sections on government and politics, economy, social conditions, environment, and foreign influence.

A Naturalist in Costa Rica by Alexander F. Skutch (Nature/Memoir) Skutch records his life, work, observations, and reflections during thirty-five years in the southern Pacific region of Costa Rica.

Costa Rica: The Last Country the Gods Made by Adrian Colesberry, Brass McLean, et al. (Culture) This hardcover book explores the diversity of Costa Rica, portraying its people, its natural beauty and ecology, its history and politics in compelling prose and vibrant photography.

A Place in the Rain Forest: Settling the Costa Rican Frontier by Darryl Cole-Christensen (Memoir) The author recounts his experiences as one of the first settlers of the Coto Brus, an almost impenetrable, mountainous rain forest region of southeastern Costa Rica, in the 1950s.

Guatemala:

Antigua and My Life Before by Marcela Serrano, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden (Literature) Set in Santiago, Chile, and the Guatemalan city of Antigua, this is the story of two women—one a famous singer, the other an architect—and a tragic shooting that sparks off memories of their friendship.

Breaking the Maya Code by Michael D. Coe (Anthropology). The scientific detective story of how Mayan inscriptions were deciphered to reveal the fascinating history of this ancient civilization, told with eloquence by a retired professor of anthropology at Yale University.

I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala by Rigoberta Menchu (Biography/Memoir). Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, this Guatemalan woman speaks eloquently of her struggles against the military for a decent way of life. A compelling testimony to the power of a strong-minded, ordinary person and her love for her land.

Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico by Ronald Wright (Culture). Eight million people in Guatemala, Belize, and southern Mexico speak Mayan languages and maintain their resilient culture. Traveling through Central America's jungles and mountains, Wright explores ancient roots of the Maya, their recent troubles, and survival prospects.

The Maya by Michael D. Coe (Archeology) An introduction to the extraordinarily sophisticated Mayan civilization that flourished in the jungles of Mexico and Central America 1,500 years ago. Presents many details about specific sites.

Guidebooks:

Your Program Director will be happy to provide recommendations and suggestions during the trip, so a guidebook is not a necessity. But a good one can be invaluable as a one-stop reference, so for those travelers who have asked for suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Since different guidebook series each have their own target audience and structure, it is well worth your time to browse your local library or bookstore to find the one(s) you like best. To get you started, here is some general information on the most popular series:

Culture Smart! – Focuses on local customs and etiquette instead of sights, dining, etc.

DK Eyewitness – Innovative visuals make these books easy to use and a nice souvenir once the trip is over. The focus is primarily on the sights and activities.

Fodor's – A classic guidebook with strong information on activities, shopping, and dining. Good mix of upscale recommendations and budget suggestions.

Frommer's – A comprehensive guide series that is known for its restaurant recommendations.

Insight – Offers more information on history and culture than usual, nice visuals, good maps.

Lonely Planet – Practical guides geared towards a more adventurous traveler on a budget.

National Geographic – From the same company that publishes the magazine. Excellent photographs, good information on history, nature, and culture.

Rough Guides –For the independent traveler on a budget. Particularly known for their maps.

Maps:

Most hotels will provide maps free of charge at the reception desk or in your room. These maps are usually sufficient for our travelers, but if you plan on any independent exploration, you may wish to consider purchasing a map before your departure. This can be especially useful in a country that doesn't use the Roman alphabet as the hotel maps may only be printed in the local language.

Some recommended map series include: Rand McNally international maps (especially the StreetWise series), Insight's FlexiMaps, and Rough Guide's destination maps. We suggest that you visit your local bookstore or library to get a better sense of which type of map is best for your needs before making a purchase.

Suggested Movies

Here are few of our favorite movies that are about, or set in, or from the region you'll be traveling. Most are available at movie rental stores and websites—or even your public library. Sometimes films produced outside of the US may be harder to find, but they are usually available online.

Central America:

El Norte starring Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez, and David Villalpando (1984, color) Partially funded by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay in 1985. Escaping certain persecution in Guatemala, a brother and sister travel through Mexico and on to Los Angeles in search of a better life.

Love in the Time of Cholera starring Javier Bardem and Benjamin Bratt (2008, color) A story about love, patience, and (of course) cholera. Based on the novel of the same name.

NOVA: A Man, a Plan, a Canal – Panama produced by PBS (2004, color) An interesting and informative documentary on the sheer engineering feat that is the canal. Hosted by David McCullough, the author of *A Path Between the Seas*.

Romancing the Stone starring Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas (1984, color) Part adventure, part romantic comedy—a novelist and an adventurer team up to on a treasure hunt in Colombia.

Salvador starring James Woods, James Belushi, and Michael Murphy (1986, color) An American journalist covering the Salvadorian civil war becomes entangled with both sides.

Spirits of the Jaguar produced by the BBC (2006, color) Four-part series that offers an easy and clear introduction to the history and peoples of Central America. Includes programs on the Maya and the Aztecs.

The Mosquito Coast starring Harrison Ford and Helen Mirren (1986, color) Filmed on location in Belize, *Coast* follows an ex-pat American family looking for an ideal life in Central America. But the ideal proves elusive due to the increasingly stubborn and strange behavior of their father.

The Tailor of Panama starring Pierce Brosnan, Geoffrey Rush, and Jamie Lee Curtis (2001, color) The film adaptation of the classic John Le Carre spy thriller. Bosnan plays a spy, but a very different one from his famous 007 role.



Grand Circle Community & Useful Websites

If you have access to the Internet, the following sites offer a wealth of information:

Visit the Grand Circle Community website for a world of travel news and information:

www.gct.com/community

Government websites:

International health information: CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

U.S. Customs & Border Protection: traveler information

www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): agency responsible for screening luggage in U.S.

www.tsa.gov/public

National Passport Information Center (NPIC): for passport information

www.travel.state.gov

General travel information websites:

Travel books

www.amazon.com

www.barnesandnoble.com

World weather

www.intellicast.com

www.weather.com

Foreign languages for travelers: basic terms in more than 80 languages

www.travlang.com/languages

Travel tips: packing light, choosing luggage, etc.

www.travelite.org

Net café guide: 100s of locations around the globe

www.cybercafes.com

Electric current and plug types

www.kropla.com/electric2.htm

Foreign exchange rates

www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM locators

www.mastercard.com/atm for **Cirrus ATMs**

www.visa.com/pd/atm for **PLUS ATMs**

Country information:

www.costarica.com/travel.html **Costa Rica**

www.incostarica.net **Costa Rica**

www.costaricabureau.com **Costa Rica**

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Guatemala> **Guatemala**