



6. Travel Preparation

Passport and Visa Requirements

- You need to have at least six (6) months of validity on your passport to travel outside the continental U.S.
- Depending on the airline you travel and the agent checking into your flight the agent might ask to see your return flight details to the U.S. Please have them accessible.
- Visa Requirements – All U.S. Passport Holders receive a 90-day Visa on Arrival (no action required).

Banking

- Ensure you notify your bank of your international travel so there isn't a hold imposed on your card (s) when you use them for the first time in-country
 - Most banks offer this service online
- The number and type of cards is dependent on your needs and requirements. A recommended guideline is to carry (1) x debit card, (1) x primary credit card, (1) x backup credit card

Debit & Credit Cards

One convenient aspect of traveling in Costa Rica is that credit cards are widely accepted. It is preferred to use a credit card (or debit card for purchases) whenever possible because you know you're getting the correct conversion and it's nice not to carry a lot of cash on your person. Many restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and tour operators accept credit so be sure to ask.

Tip: Be sure to authorize your credit card for international use so your bank doesn't flag your account for fraud when you use it. Also ask your bank about its fees for foreign transactions so that you don't have any surprises when you return home. These charges typically range from 1-3% of the total transaction amount. Credit unions tend to have the lowest fees. If you travel out of the country frequently, consider getting a travel credit card, which doesn't have fees for international purchases.

ATMs are the most reliable method to get money. It is normal to get alarmed when using an ATM machine abroad, but the ATMs in Costa Rica are as safe to use as anywhere in the U.S. You can get local currency from an ATM as long as you've authorized your card for use internationally. ATM machines can be found throughout Costa Rica and in most tourist destinations.

Tip: Some banks in Costa Rica recently started limiting ATM withdrawals for people with foreign ATM/debit cards. Banco de Costa Rica (BCR) and Banco Nacional now allow foreign account holders to take out only \$100 per transaction or \$200 per day if you do two transactions. You can still go into the bank to get more money out, but of course, this is less convenient.



Travelers Insurance

It's important travelers purchase the right type of travel insurance before coming to Costa Rica, or whenever traveling abroad. Basic insurance tends to cover medical expenses, baggage loss, trip cancellation, accidents and personal liability, but it's worth spending extra to make sure you're covered in the event of natural disasters. If you intend to take part in adventure sports, make sure that those particular sports are covered by your policy; for divers, some policies only cover you up to a certain depth.

Mobile Phones

- Contact your cellular provider / carrier to determine type of roaming and international services they offer
 - ATT offers a \$10 / day unlimited data and cell usage plan for Costa Rica travel and other areas in the world
 - An ATT customer can access their wireless account online and easily enable this feature for the period traveling. Remember, to disable the feature upon completion of travel or ATT will continue to charge you for the period enabled.
- Whatsapp is the most popular method for communicating in Costa Rica due to accessible wifi at most establishments. Recommend Whatsapp is downloaded to the mobile device being used
- A SIM card can be purchased in-country and used with an unlocked phone. Ensure your mobile device is unlocked if you want to "pay as you go."

Helpful Mobile Device Applications

Downloading the below applications can assist with your travel throughout the country

- **Uber.** Uber does operate in the more populated dense areas, so it is recommended that you use Uber when traveling in vicinity of San Jose, especially to and from the airport. Rates do tend to be a bit more effective than taxi cabs.
- **WhatsApp.** WhatsApp is a communications tool that works on a wifi connection. Majority of people in Costa Rica rely on Whatsapp to communicate with one another. It is highly advised that you download Whatsapp prior to departing your point of origin and perform a communications check with a representative from Camp Zen Commando (See Points of Contact)
- **Currency converter.** A currency converter will assist you in converting local currency into USD in a more timely manner. Majority of establishments do accept USD, credit

Computers and Tablets

- Avoid traveling with extra electronics unless absolutely necessary - they are just extra items you have to account for everywhere you travel. If you elect to bring your computer, ensure there is no sensitive information saved on your computer that may be stolen by a hacker.
- Avoid accessing any type of sensitive account, e.g. bank accounts, business accounts, etc., while using public wifi hot-spots to reduce the risk of computer cyber attack.



- DO NOT leave electronics unattended or in sight in a locked vehicle

Costa Rican Currency

Costa Rica's currency is the colon (₡), named after Christopher Columbus. It comes in both paper and coin form. The paper money ranges from bills of ₡1,000 (called a "mil" (Spanish for 1,000) or "un rojo" because of the bill's red color) to ₡50,000. Coins go from an almost valueless ₡5 to ₡500 ("quinientos" (Spanish for 500)) and are quite heavy for the higher denominations.

Exchange Rate

The exchange rate fluctuates daily but usually factors to between ₡500-550 per USD. To provide an example, if an item costs ₡1,250, it is a little less than \$2.50. An easy way to think of it is to double the amount in colones and move the decimal point.

Here are the most common bills and their estimated USD equivalent using this method:

- ₡1,000 is about \$2.00
- ₡2,000 is about \$4.00
- ₡5,000 is about \$10.00
- ₡10,000 is about \$20.00
- ₡20,000 is about \$40.00

*Note the higher the bill, the less exact the calculation with the above formula. For example, if the current exchange rate is ₡550 for each dollar, a ₡20,000 bill will equal only about \$36 instead of \$40.

In addition to colones, US dollars are widely accepted throughout the country, though it is best to have some local currency to use just in case.

Weather

- On average, the temperatures are in the 80's and 90's with high humidity... typical of tropical weather
- Rain season is considered to be between late May and November with the heaviest rains falling between September and November. Though these months are the rain season, generally, the mornings are clear with rainfall beginning in the afternoon and lasting until in the evening.
- On average, the warmest month is March.
- On average, the coolest month is October.
- September is the wettest month. This month should be avoided if you don't like too much rain.
- February is the driest month.