


Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part I: Introducing Costa Rica	7
Chapter 1: Discovering the Best of Costa Rica	9
Chapter 2: Digging Deeper into Costa Rica	18
Chapter 3: Deciding Where and When to Go	26
Chapter 4: Following an Itinerary: Five Great Options	35
Part II: Planning Your Trip to Costa Rica	45
Chapter 5: Managing Your Money	47
Chapter 6: Getting to Costa Rica	59
Chapter 7: Getting Around Costa Rica	67
Chapter 8: Booking Your Accommodations	71
Chapter 9: Catering to Special Travel Needs or Interests	77
Chapter 10: Taking Care of the Remaining Details	84
Part III: San José and the Central Valley	95
Chapter 11: Settling into San José	97
Chapter 12: Exploring San José	126
Part IV: Guanacaste and Environs	151
Chapter 13: Going for Gold in Guanacaste	153
Chapter 14: Exploring Guanacaste	175
Part V: Manuel Antonio and Environs	187
Chapter 15: Enjoying Magnificent Manuel Antonio	189
Chapter 16: Living the Lush Life on the Central Pacific Coast	209
Part VI: Monteverde and Environs	235
Chapter 17: Visiting the Cloud Forests of Monteverde	237
Chapter 18: La Fortuna and the Arenal Area	256
Part VII: Touring the Rest of Costa Rica	279
Chapter 19: Seeking Solitude in Southern Nicoya	281
Chapter 20: Exploring Southern Costa Rica	299
Chapter 21: Chilling on Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast	325
Part VIII: The Part of Tens	355
Chapter 22: Ten Myths about Costa Rica	357
Chapter 23: Ten Costa Rican Moments	360
Appendix: Quick Concierge	363
Index	371

Maps at a Glance



Exploring Costa Rica in One Week	36
Exploring Costa Rica in Two Weeks	38
Costa Rica with Kids	40
Best Costa Rica Adventures	42
San José	102
Guanacaste	163
Tamarindo	167
Playa del Coco.....	169
Playa Hermosa	171
Manuel Antonio.....	195
Central Pacific Playas.....	211
Playa Jacó	213
Monteverde	241
La Fortuna and the Arenal Volcano	257
Along the Shores of Lake Arenal.....	271
Montezuma	283
Malpaís and Santa Teresa	293
Osa Peninsula	303
Puerto Jiménez	311
Southern Costa Rica.....	313
Cahuita.....	327
Puerto Viejo.....	341
Tortuguero.....	347

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
About This Book.....	1
Conventions Used in This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	2
How This Book Is Organized.....	3
Part I: Introducing Costa Rica	3
Part II: Planning Your Trip to Costa Rica	3
Part III: San José and the Central Valley.....	3
Part IV: Guanacaste and Environs	4
Part V: Manuel Antonio and Environs	4
Part VI: Monteverde and Environs.....	4
Part VII: Touring the Rest of Costa Rica.....	4
Part VIII: The Part of Tens.....	4
Appendix: Quick Concierge	4
Icons Used in This Book.....	5
Where to Go from Here.....	5
<i>Part 1: Introducing Costa Rica</i>	7
Chapter 1: Discovering the Best of Costa Rica	9
The Best High-End Hotels and Luxury Resorts	9
The Best Accommodations Values	11
The Best Ecolodges	12
The Best Restaurants	13
The Best Beaches.....	14
The Best Adventures and Activities	15
The Best Family Spots	16
Chapter 2: Digging Deeper into Costa Rica	18
History 101: The Main Events.....	18
The early years.....	18
Colonizing Costa Rica.....	18
Staking out independence	19
Growing democracy in Central America.....	20
Building Blocks: Local Architecture	21
A Taste of Costa Rica: Local Cuisine.....	21
Getting the most out of eating in Costa Rica:	
Bocas and fresh fruit	22
Enjoying a cup of joe	23
A Word to the Wise: The Local Language	23



Background Check: Recommended Books and Movies	23
Costa Rica on paper	24
Costa Rica on film	25
Chapter 3: Deciding Where and When to Go	26
Going Everywhere You Want to Be	26
Seeking the center: San José and the Central Valley	26
Going for gold in Guanacaste	27
Enjoying magnificent Manuel Antonio	28
Living the luxe life on the central Pacific coast	28
Visiting the cloud forests of Monteverde	28
Watching the lava flow from Arenal volcano	29
Seeking solitude on the Nicoya Peninsula	29
Exploring southern Costa Rica	30
Chilling on the Caribbean coast	30
Scheduling Your Time	31
Revealing the Secrets of the Seasons	31
Understanding Costa Rica's climate	32
Avoiding the crowds	33
Perusing a Calendar of Events	33
January	33
March	33
April	33
July	33
August	33
September	34
October	34
December	34
Chapter 4: Following an Itinerary: Five Great Options	35
Seeing Costa Rica's Highlights in One Week	35
Day 1	35
Day 2	35
Day 3	36
Day 4	36
Day 5	36
Day 6	37
Day 7	37
Touring the Best of Costa Rica in Two Weeks	37
Days 1 and 2	37
Day 3	37
Day 4	37
Day 5	38

Day 6.....	38
Day 7.....	38
Days 8, 9, and 10.....	39
Days 11, 12, and 13.....	39
Day 14.....	39
Discovering Costa Rica with Kids	39
Day 1.....	39
Day 2.....	40
Day 3.....	40
Day 4.....	40
Day 5.....	41
Day 6.....	41
Day 7.....	41
Having a High-Octane Week of Adventures	41
Day 1.....	41
Day 2.....	41
Day 3.....	41
Day 4.....	42
Day 5.....	42
Day 6.....	42
Day 7.....	42
Getting the Most out of a Week on the Gold Coast.....	43
Day 1.....	43
Day 2.....	43
Day 3.....	43
Day 4.....	43
Day 5.....	43
Day 6.....	44
Day 7.....	44

Part II: Planning Your Trip to Costa Rica.....45

Chapter 5: Managing Your Money.....47

Planning Your Budget	47
Transportation	48
Lodging.....	49
Dining	50
Sightseeing.....	50
Shopping and nightlife	50
Cutting Costs — But Not the Fun	51
Getting the best airfares	51
Avoiding paying full price for your hotel room.....	51
Cutting other costs	52
Handling Money	53
Unlocking the mystery of the colón	53
Exchanging money.....	54

Using ATMs and carrying cash.....	55
Charging ahead with credit cards.....	56
Toting traveler's checks.....	56
Taking Taxes into Account.....	57
Dealing with a Lost or Stolen Wallet.....	57
Chapter 6: Getting to Costa Rica.....	59
Flying to Costa Rica.....	59
Getting the best airfare.....	60
Booking your flight online.....	61
Joining an Escorted Tour.....	62
Choosing a Package Tour.....	64
Chapter 7: Getting Around Costa Rica.....	67
Flying Is Fastest.....	67
Renting a Car.....	68
Busing It around Costa Rica.....	69
Chapter 8: Booking Your Accommodations.....	71
Getting to Know Your Options.....	71
Relaxing at a large resort.....	72
Hanging at a hotel.....	73
Enjoying intimacy at a boutique hotel or B&B.....	73
Getting close to nature at an ecolodge.....	74
Choosing a cabina.....	74
Finding the Best Room Rate.....	74
Surfing the Web for Hotel Deals.....	75
Reserving the Best Room.....	76
Chapter 9: Catering to Special Travel	
Needs or Interests.....	77
Traveling with the Brood: Advice for Families.....	77
Making Age Work for You: Tips for Seniors.....	78
Accessing Costa Rica: Advice for Travelers with	
Disabilities.....	79
Following the Rainbow: Resources for Gay	
and Lesbian Travelers.....	80
Planning a Costa Rican Wedding.....	81
Volunteering and Studying in Costa Rica.....	82
Chapter 10: Taking Care of the Remaining Details.....	84
Getting a Passport.....	84
Applying for a U.S. passport.....	84
Applying for other passports.....	85
Playing It Safe with Travel and Medical Insurance.....	86
Staying Healthy When You Travel.....	87
Staying Connected by Cellphone or E-Mail.....	89

Accessing the Internet Away from Home90
 Keeping Up with Airline Security Measures92

Part III: San José and the Central Valley 95

Chapter 11: Settling into San José97

Getting There98
 Arriving by air98
 Getting from the airport to your hotel98
 Arriving by bus100
 Arriving by car100
 Orienting Yourself in San José100
 Introducing the neighborhoods101
 Finding information after you arrive104
 Getting Around San José105
 By taxi105
 By bus106
 By car107
 On foot107
 Where to Stay in San José107
 Runner-up hotels113
 Where to Dine in San José115
 Fast Facts: San José121

Chapter 12: Exploring San José126

Seeing San José by Guided Tour126
 The Top Attractions: Gold Underground
 and Jade in the Skies127
 More Cool Things to See and Do130
 Visiting attractions just outside the city131
 Suggested one-, two-, and three-day
 sightseeing itineraries134
 Shopping: Gold Beans and Painted Ox carts135
 Best shopping areas135
 What to look for and where to find it137
 Living It Up After Dark: From the Theaters
 to a Bitter Street141
 The performing arts141
 Dance clubs and discos142
 The bar scene143
 Hanging out in San Pedro144
 Casinos144
 Taking a Day Trip out of San José145
 Guided tours and adventures145
 Bungee jumping146
 Canopy tours and the rain-forest aerial tram146

Day cruises	146
Exploring pre-Columbian ruins	147
Mountain biking	147
Rafting, kayaking, and river trips.....	147
Choosing the volcano trip that's right for you.....	148

Part IV: Guanacaste and Environs..... 151

Chapter 13: Going for Gold in Guanacaste.....153

Getting There.....	154
By air	154
By bus.....	155
By car	156
Orienting Yourself in Guanacaste	157
Introducing the beaches and neighborhoods	157
Finding information after you arrive	159
Getting Around Guanacaste.....	159
By taxi.....	160
By car	160
By foot	160
By bus.....	160
Where to Stay in Guanacaste.....	161
Where to Dine in Guanacaste	169
Fast Facts: Guanacaste	173

Chapter 14: Exploring Guanacaste.....175

Seeing Guanacaste by Guided Tour	175
The Top Attractions.....	176
More Cool Things to See and Do.....	179
Visiting some of the lesser-known beaches	179
Going under: Scuba diving.....	180
Hoisting sail	180
Hanging ten: Surfing and surf lessons	181
Landing a big one.....	182
Teeing off: Golf in Guanacaste.....	182
Canopy tours	183
Horseback riding.....	183
Shopping for Local Treasures.....	184
Living It Up After Dark.....	184

Part V: Manuel Antonio and Environs..... 187

Chapter 15: Enjoying Magnificent Manuel Antonio.....189

Getting There.....	190
By air	190
By car	190
By bus.....	191

Orienteering Yourself in Manuel Antonio192
 Getting Around Manuel Antonio193
 Spending the Night.....193
 Dining Locally199
 Exploring Manuel Antonio201
 Enjoying the beaches outside the park.....203
 Getting muddy on an all-terrain vehicle204
 Getting up close and personal with
 a mangrove204
 Landing a big one.....204
 Playing Tarzan205
 Playing tropical cowboy205
 Riding the back roads on a mountain bike205
 Riding the wild white water of a jungle river205
 Setting out to sea206
 Snorkeling and scuba diving206
 Taking a break to rejuvenate body and soul206
 Shopping for Local Treasures.....207
 Living It Up After Dark207
 Fast Facts: Manuel Antonio.....208

**Chapter 16: Living the Lush Life
 on the Central Pacific Coast209**

Jacó and Playa Herradura210
 Getting there.....210
 Orienteering yourself in and around Jacó and
 Playa Herradura213
 Getting around214
 Spending the night.....214
 Dining locally218
 Exploring Jacó and Playa Herradura219
 Shopping for local treasures223
 Living it up after dark in Jacó and Playa
 Herradura.....224
 Fast Facts: Jacó and Playa Herradura224
 Dominical and the Beaches South of Dominical225
 Getting there.....225
 Orienteering yourself in and around Dominical.....227
 Getting around227
 Spending the night.....228
 Dining locally229
 Exploring Dominical and the beaches
 south of Dominical.....230
 Getting wet in Dominical and the beaches
 south of Dominical.....232

Shopping for local treasures	233
Living it up after dark in Dominical	233
Fast Facts: Dominical and the Beaches South of Dominical	234

Part VI: Monteverde and Environs235

Chapter 17: Visiting the Cloud Forests

of Monteverde.....237

Getting There.....	238
By car	238
By bus	239
Orienting yourself in Monteverde.....	240
Getting around.....	240
Spending the Night.....	242
Dining Locally.....	245
Exploring Monteverde.....	247
The top attractions.....	247
Other attractions in Monteverde.....	249
Canopy tours and suspended bridges	250
More cool things to see and do.....	252
Shopping for Local Treasures.....	253
Living It Up After Dark in Monteverde.....	254
Fast Facts: Monteverde	254

Chapter 18: La Fortuna and the Arenal Area.....256

La Fortuna and the Arenal Volcano	256
Getting there.....	257
Orienting yourself in La Fortuna and around the volcano	259
Getting around and getting information	260
Spending the night.....	260
Dining locally.....	264
Exploring La Fortuna and the Arenal volcano area	264
Shopping for local treasures	269
Living it up after dark in La Fortuna and around the Arenal volcano	269
Fast Facts: La Fortuna and the Arenal Volcano	269
Along the Shores of Lake Arenal	270
Getting there.....	271
Orienting yourself along the shores of Lake Arenal.....	272
Getting around and getting information	272

Spending the night.....	272
Dining locally.....	274
Exploring along the shores of Lake Arenal.....	274
Shopping for local treasures	276
Fast Facts: Lake Arenal.....	276

Part VII: Touring the Rest of Costa Rica279

Chapter 19: Seeking Solitude in Southern Nicoya...281

Montezuma	281
Getting there.....	282
Orienting yourself in Montezuma.....	283
Getting around and getting information	284
Spending the night.....	284
Dining locally.....	286
Exploring Montezuma	287
Shopping in Montezuma	289
Living it up after dark in Montezuma.....	289
Fast Facts: Montezuma.....	290
Malpaís and Santa Teresa.....	291
Getting there.....	292
Orienting yourself in Malpaís and Santa Teresa	292
Getting around and getting information	294
Spending the night.....	294
Dining locally.....	296
Exploring Malpaís and Santa Teresa	297
Living it up after dark in Malpaís and Santa Teresa.....	297
Fast Facts: Malpaís and Santa Teresa.....	298

Chapter 20: Exploring Southern Costa Rica.....299

Drake Bay	300
Getting there.....	300
Orienting yourself in Drake Bay.....	301
Spending the night.....	301
Dining locally.....	304
Exploring Drake Bay.....	304
Living it up after dark in Drake Bay.....	306
Puerto Jiménez and the Osa Peninsula.....	307
Getting there.....	307
Orienting yourself in Puerto Jiménez and the Osa Peninsula	308
Getting around and getting information	308
Spending the night.....	309
Dining locally.....	312
Exploring Puerto Jiménez and the Osa Peninsula.....	312

Golfito and the Golfo Dulce.....	316
Getting there.....	317
Orienting yourself in Golfito and along the Golfo Dulce.....	318
Getting around	318
Spending the night.....	319
Dining locally.....	321
Exploring Golfito and the Golfo Dulce.....	322
Fast Facts: Southern Costa Rica.....	323

Chapter 21: Chilling on Costa Rica’s

Caribbean Coast325

Cahuita	326
Getting there.....	326
Orienting yourself in Cahuita	328
Getting around	328
Spending the night.....	328
Dining locally.....	330
Exploring Cahuita	332
Shopping for local treasures in Cahuita.....	334
Living it up after dark in Cahuita	334
Puerto Viejo and the Southernmost Beaches.....	334
Getting there.....	335
Orienting yourself in Puerto Viejo and the southernmost beaches.....	336
Getting around	336
Spending the night.....	336
Dining locally.....	339
Exploring Puerto Viejo and the southernmost beaches	340
Shopping for local treasures	344
Living it up after dark in Puerto Viejo.....	345
Tortuguero	345
Getting there.....	345
Orienting yourself in Tortuguero.....	348
Getting around	348
Spending the night.....	349
Dining locally.....	350
Exploring Tortuguero	351
Fast Facts: The Caribbean Coast.....	353

Part VIII: The Part of Tens.....355

Chapter 22: Ten Myths about Costa Rica.....357

Costa Rica Is Just for the Adventurous	357
Costa Rica Isn’t for Families	357

Bugs Are Bad	357
Costa Rica Is an Ecological Eden.....	358
You Can't Drink the Water.....	358
The Caribbean Coast Is Dangerous.....	358
It's Okay to Feed the Monkeys	358
It's Always Raining in the Rain Forest	358
Everybody Speaks English.....	358
Costa Rican Coffee Is the Best.....	359
Chapter 23: Ten Costa Rican Moments	360
Pouring Salsa Lizano on Your Gallo Pinto.....	360
Waking Up to the Sound of Howler Monkeys	360
Catching Your First Wave	360
Zipping among Treetops on a Canopy Tour	361
Watching a Sea Turtle Come Ashore to Nest.....	361
Enjoying a Pacific Ocean Sunset	361
Marveling at the City Lights at a Mirador	361
Soaking in the Pool of a Jungle Waterfall	361
Catching the Glint of Sunlight off a Quetzal's Feathers.....	361
Watching Arenal Volcano Blow Its Top.....	362
Appendix: Quick Concierge	363
Fast Facts	363
Toll-Free Numbers and Web Sites	367
Where to Get More Information	369
<i>Index</i>	371

