

Explore Costa Rica presents: **Costa Rica A to Z**

A is for **Arenal**. Volcán Arenal (Arenal Volcano) whose sheer, classically-shaped 5,358-ft. (1,633-m) cone throws up ash and rock.

B is for **beaches**. Costa Rica has some fine ones, with most of the good ones located on the Caribbean Coast, along the coast of Guanacaste Province, and south of Golfito.

C is for the **casado**, a plate of rice served with salad, beans, and meat, chicken, or fish.

D is for **desayunos** “Breakfast” appears on the menu throughout the day. *Gallo pinto* (“spotted rooster”), rice and beans fried together, is the staple breakfast food which varies little from place to place.

E is for **ecology**, the central pillar of Costa Rica’s tourism industry.

F is for **flora and fauna**. Costa Rica has a phantasmogorical variety of flora. There are over 800 species of ferns, 1,200 species of orchids, and 2,000 varieties of trees. The Animal Kingdom’s wonderful diversity compliments that of the plants. The panoply of species includes manatees, ocelots, sloths, deer, coatimundis, coyotes, jaguars, marguays, peccaries, tapirs, plus squirrel, capuchin, and spider monkeys.

G is for the **green macaw**. The green macaw (buffon) is found on the Caribbean coast but rarely seen. It dines on the fruit of the wild almond (*Dipteryx panamensis*), a tree species which is also endangered owing to poaching and habitat loss. If no effective actions are taken, it is likely that the species may disappear from Costa Rica in ten years.

H is for the **howler monkey**. Actually sounding more like a “growler” than a howler, the sounds of the mantled howler monkey (*mono congo*) reverberate up to several km away.

I is for **Irazú Volcano**. Rising to 11, 260 ft. (3,432 m), Irazú’s prime distinction is that it is one of the world’s few volcanoes that can be viewed up close with ease.

J is for **Jamaicans**. The first African-Americans came to Costa Rica as early as 1825 to farm and hunt turtles. Today, most are the descendants of Jamaicans who were brought in to help build the railroad.

K is for **kayaking**, a popular activity in Costa Rica.

L is for **Lankester Gardens** near Cartago. They are named after British expatriate Dr. Charles Lankester who founded them in the 1940s, possesses one of the nation’s finest orchid collections.

M is for the **manatee** or sea cow (*manatí*). The manatí has been sighted in Tortuguero and off of Gandoca on rare occasions.

N is for **natilla**. Made with cream left out overnight, it is a popular topping on many dishes.

O is for **Osa**. The Osa peninsula is one of Costa Rica’s most important natural areas, due to its isolation, biological diversity, and the peninsula’s large areas of old growth forest and other undisturbed regions. The bulk of the peninsula is contained in Corcovado National Park. Despite the park, much of the area remains unprotected, and illegal logging is a serious problem here.

P is for **Poás**. The 8,871-ft. (2,704-m) Poás, the world’s largest geyser-type crater, last erupted in 1978, but its crater still boils and steams.

Q is for the **Resplendent Quetzal** (pronounced “ket-ZAL”) which is the nation’s most famous animal, period!

R is for **Rincón de la Vieja National Park** (*Parque Nacional Rincón de la Vieja*) NE of Liberia, Volcán Rincón de la Vieja, rises to an impressive 6,216 ft. (1,895 m). The volcano is still active: the last eruption was in Aug. 1999.

S is for **San José**, the capital of Costa Rica has 660-700,000 people. Some 30% of the nation lives here.

T is for **Turrialba**. This agriculturally-based town of 30,000 lies 64 km from San José, set at 2,050 ft. (625 m) up the slopes of the Turrialba volcano.

U is for **Uvita**, a small beach settlement (and coral reef and marine reserve in the southeast).

V is for the **venado**. The white-tailed deer (*venado, venado colo blanco*) was almost exterminated during the 1940s when the harvest of 10,000–40,000 animals was used for leather goods manufacture and for dog food.

W is for **white water rafting**. Rafting is one of the most popular activities for visitors to Costa Rica.

X is for **Xandari Plantation**, one of the nation’s many unique tourism lodges.

Y is for **yoga**. There are a number of yoga retreats.

Z is for **Zancudo**. Aptly named after the mosquito, this large beach is becoming increasingly popular during the dry season. However, its very remoteness ensures that it it will remain relatively uncrowded year round.

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