

NATIONAL PROFILE
COSTA RICA
2024 - 2025





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¡Hola y bienvenido!

Hello and welcome to ACI Costa Rica's National Profile. By now you have already decided on Costa Rica as your destination of choice, or are in the process of making your decision. Whatever the case may be, this profile will provide you with important information before your arrival in Costa Rica, or will help to give you an idea of our country and the programmes we offer, in order to make the choice easier for you.

You are about to embark on an adventure which is filled with exciting, challenging and engaging experiences! There are lots of things which you would like to know, and others you really need to know about Costa Rica, before arriving. Take some time to read through this profile, so that you can get an impression of Costa Rica, which is a highly diverse country in Central America, with copious biodiversity, beaches, volcanoes, and tropical jungles. It is also one of the economically most stable countries in Latin America, with an economy focused on exports and ecotourism, ranging from traditional crops like coffee or pineapple to rocket engine parts and computer chips.

We want to leave you with an idea of our beautifully diverse country and its people by giving general information about daily life and country facts as well as cultural information and recommendations about the programmes that we offer. We aim at giving you an integral description of our country, our organisation and about the projects which are open to you. If you have any questions or would like to receive more information on a particular area, please do not hesitate to talk with your sending coordinator.

Thank you - The ACI Incoming Team

Facts at a Glance

- The official language is *Spanish*. On the Caribbean Coast a Creole dialect is also spoken. There is a small indigenous population who has its own language. English is spoken by many in the larger cities.
- The capital city is *San José*, which is located in the Central Valley, at 1150 m above sea level and with a population of 1.5 million.
- Total population: 5,075,000 (INEC, 2021).
- Land area: 51.100 km². Including the sea territory 440 km².
- Catholicism is the main religion in the country, most of the national holidays and customs have catholic origins.
- The President is the Head of the Government and Chief of the State elected for a 4-year term.
- The army was abolished on 1st December 1948. Costa Rica therefore is one of only 15 countries in the world that do not have an army.



Electricity 110 V, which means you will need to bring along some adaptors for your mobile, laptop or any other electronic device.



Currency Colones

€1 (EUR) Euro = ₡547

\$1 (USA) Dollar = ₡508

BCCR (January, 2024)

02

Geography and Climate

Location: Bordered by Nicaragua to the North, Panama to the South, the Caribbean Sea to the East and the Pacific to the West, our small country is incredibly diverse, climates and ecosystems differ throughout the country, and there is a staggering amount of biodiversity.

The country is divided into seven provinces: San José, Heredia, Alajuela, Cartago, which are located in the mountains of the Central Valley; and Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Limón down the coasts. The majority of the country's population lives in the Central Valley of San José.

Highest Point

The Chirripó - 3821 m above sea level.
On a clear day it is possible to see both
the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean from the
top.



Climate: The rainy season (Época Lluviosa) lasts from April to Mid November and the dry season (Época Seca) from November until March.

The climate during the rainy season can become chilly, especially in the afternoons when it rains heavily for hours. In the morning the weather usually starts warm (although it can rain throughout the day especially in October/November); in the afternoons clouds form and tropical downpours begin.



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During the months from October to December you can expect low temperatures that can drop as low as 8°C. Laugh now, but with a 100% humidity, you will run for your anorak and gloves.

During the dry season, the weather stays consistently warm and sunny, especially near the coastal areas, where it is even hotter, however rainfall can occur all year round. In the Central Valley, where San José is located, the weather is slightly milder, around 25 degrees. In the mountain ranges and near the volcanoes, the climate is colder year round, and temperatures can drop below zero, but do not expect any snow.

Make sure to come prepared for all types of weather, from hot to cold and from rain to sun!!

Environment

Costa Rica is famous for having incredible biodiversity within its small land territory. The country takes up about 0.035% of the planet's land mass, yet it has over 5% of the world's biodiversity. You will find the most exotic animals, plants and fruits. The country has the perfect conditions for producing all sorts of delicious tropical fruits, some of which you can only find in this little haven.

The landscapes themselves vary from elevated cloud forests to humid tropical beaches, striking volcanic views, and much more...

25% of Costa Rica are covered with national parks to protect this incredible diversity. In total, there are 32 national parks, 8 biological reserves, 51 wildlife refuges and 13 forest reserves.



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LANDSCAPES



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History

Costa Rica has been inhabited for over 10,000 years and although today there is only a small representation of the indigenous people within the population, their heritage is still apparent; one of the most amazing traces are the perfectly shaped spheres, dating back centuries, that have been found throughout the country.

In 1502, Christopher Columbus arrived on the shores of Costa Rica. Columbus and his companions were amazed by the views of the coast at sunset, which appeared like liquid gold and this inspired the name of Costa Rica, "Rich Coast".

Shortly after Columbus' arrival, Costa Rica became part of the wide kingdom of the Spaniards. The colonization brought a lot of suffering to the indigenous population, who were brutally exploited, enslaved, and not prepared for the diseases introduced by the Europeans, and colonial traits can be seen until today.

After 300 years of colonization, on 15th September 1821, Costa Rica, along with the other Central American States, declared independence from the Spanish Empire.

In 1823 the Federal Republic of Central America was formed, electing its first Head of State one year later. After many struggles, the idea of a federal republic was dropped, leaving five new states. The next few decades consisted of public policy making and a focus on agricultural production. At this point, coffee became the most important crop.

In 1948 a short civil war broke out, yet its outcome would shape what the country is today. Among other reforms, the army was abolished and the bases for clean elections were established.



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The knocking down of the wall of an army headquarter symbolized the end of the army. The next period of change was the economical unrest in the 80's due to civil wars in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Costa Rica stayed neutral and helped to bring back peace to the region.

Government and Economy

Costa Rica is one of the most stable democracies in Latin America. The army was abolished in 1948, and the country has managed to avoid situations of war, dictatorships and other internal problems since then, which have affected many of the other countries in the area. Óscar Arias Sánchez (president from 1986-1990 and from 2006-2010) received the Nobel Peace Prize (1987) for his efforts in ending internal strife in Central America.

Traditionally, the economy of Costa Rica has almost totally relied on agricultural production and the export of bananas and coffee. Today these products continue to be produced, but new crops have been added. At the moment, the country is one of the main producers of pineapples, flowers and ornamental plants for export, as well as services such as the rapidly growing (eco-) tourism and medical tourism industries, moreover, high-tech support call centres.

Some of the current challenges Costa Rica is facing are increasing inequality and poverty, specially after the pandemic, as well as high immigration from the region. Also, narcotraffic is one of the major national concerns.



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Values and Attitudes

Costa Ricans, or, as they refer to themselves, “*Ticos*”, are known for their friendliness, helpfulness, hospitality and a healthy amount of curiosity. They tend to look for compromise and peaceful resolutions and try to avoid conflicts.

Ticos often tend to put things off, and have a relaxed view of time. You will often hear words like “mañana” (tomorrow) or “ahorita” (later), but this doesn't necessarily mean that things will always happen within the mentioned time frame.

Directions can be a bit confusing at first sight. Street numbers are not used, so north, east, south and west are used in relation to landmarks. You will get used to this way of getting around very quickly and develop a good sense of direction.

The Costa Rican society is strongly family-oriented, elders are respected and cared for. It is not unusual for the extended family to live nearby or visit often. Costa Ricans like having a chance to get all the family together! Ticos are very patriotic and love their country and stable democracy, however sadly there is a disregard for cleanliness in public areas.

Costa Rica is very liberal, yet some people are rather conservative. In some households the women are in charge of all the chores. It is something that women do with pride, however, times are changing and men are now much more involved in household work.

Religion

The main religion in Costa Rica is Catholicism. About 70% of the population is “officially” catholic. Many traditions and customs as well as sayings have religious origins; most of the times when you leave your house, someone will say “*¡Que Dios le acompañe!*” (roughly “May God go with you”). Most city centres are marked by a catholic church in front of their park.

Try to understand and respect others' beliefs, as well as they will respect yours.



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Costa Rican Life

Most Ticos live in single-family-houses and their home is a source of pride. Usually the women run the house and manage the family's life and budget. Cleanliness is important to them, so focus on a clean appearance and intend to keep your room tidy. Ticos start their day early with sunrise, around 6 am, and after work like to relax, meet friends, watch TV or of course follow a soccer game.

Costa Rica's most important staple foods are rice and beans and this forms the base of most meals. The traditional breakfast is **"gallo pinto"** (mixed rice and beans, with herbs, onions and sweet peppers), fresh bread, coffee, tortillas with **"natilla"** (sourcream) and **"maduros"** (plantains). For lunch and dinner, people eat a variety of rice, beans, vegetables, meat, chicken, or fish with salad. Tropical fruits are often enjoyed in fruit drinks called "frescos", and there are fruit vendors everywhere offering delicious fresh fruits.

Most businesses, including banks, open from 9am to 5/6pm, pharmacies or supermarkets and pulperías (corner store) have extended opening hours, because many people work or study during the day.

Costa Rica enjoys a relatively high rating regarding freedom of expression, but suffers from a degree of monopolization in the media sector. "La Nación" and "Diario Extra" are the largest daily newspapers.

Living Costs

Expect prices similar to Europe, with some exceptions, such as public transportation and fresh fruits.

Examples Living Costs (¢) (January 2024)

A loaf of baguette	¢700	=	\$1.34
1 litre of milk	¢1080	=	\$2.07
1 litre of bottled water	¢700	=	\$1.34
Cinema Ticket	¢3500	=	\$6.69
Dinner in a restaurant	¢8500	=	\$16.25



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Making friends

Costa Ricans are known for their warm hospitality, friendliness and sociability. Nonetheless, they might sometimes be too shy to initiate a conversation with someone new, so go ahead and start talking to someone and the ice will soon be broken. Trying out your Spanish, however imperfect it may be, will almost certainly earn you additional praise. Any mistake will be easily forgiven as people will appreciate your attempt to talk to them and will enjoy the chance to communicate. English in general is widely spoken.

The local *“pulpería”* (small grocery store) or *“Soda”* (local eatery) are information centres (especially in rural areas), and as a foreigner, you are interesting and people will be curious. Make an effort to be friendly and you will be rewarded with a lot of local info and tips. Offering English tutoring is another good way to meet local people.

Furthermore, joining others in an activity you like gives you the possibility to practice your Spanish, enjoy yourself and get to know more people. Soccer games draw huge crowds to the stadiums or you can watch a game live on a TV at any bar. Most towns, whatever their size, have their own local soccer team that plays on Sundays. Soccer is a big topic of conversation and socialising. Other sports attract crowds, yet not as much as soccer.

Another great option for meeting friends is to dance. You can take classes or pick it up in the clubs and bars; dancing is a big part of the partying scene and is a lot of fun!



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Traveling

Traveling in Costa Rica is generally easy, even though road and weather conditions have to be taken into consideration. The driving style of Costa Ricans is quite aggressive and drivers don't pay much attention to traffic rules, pedestrians or bikers. Pedestrians have to take care and check both ways before crossing a street, and do not rely on traffic lights.

There is a huge bus and public transportation network offering good, frequent and inexpensive travel. You can also find information online about the bus schedules for traveling between provinces. It is best to buy your ticket a day or two in advance (online or at the terminal). Inner city buses run unscheduled, but regularly every day, although frequencies can be different on weekends and national holidays. To get to the terminals that offer transportation between provinces, you should always take UBER, which is the safest way to reach them.

Taxis and private transportation such as UBER are plentiful in the city and outlying areas and fares are reasonable (about \$1 or \$2 per km). However, avoid taxis and better use UBER instead (there is an app), as taxi drivers might increase the fares as soon as they notice that you are a foreigner.

One of the wonderful things about Costa Rica is that within a reachable distance, one can be at the coast, in the mountains, or in the jungle. The weather also changes frequently, so carrying a pullover at all times is not a bad idea.



Insurance and Safety Recommendations

Your Health Insurance:

Upon arrival your health insurance is valid in all health institutions throughout the country. We recommend public hospitals in case of a serious emergency because public hospitals have the best specialists, but for less serious ailments a private clinic is quicker. Most hospitals have English speaking doctors, or someone who can help translate. On arrival we will provide you with further specific details regarding insurance claims and the location of hospitals. Remember that in most cases you will have to pay upfront and be reimbursed later, so *carrying a credit card for emergencies is strongly recommended.*

Safety Recommendations:

Like all countries, Costa Rica does suffer from some criminality, and there are some areas that are rather to avoid. In the larger cities such as San José and Jacó, it is recommended to be careful and to not walk around after dark, as pick pocketing and robbery can be issues, and it is best to travel with a minimum amount of valuables.

Also be careful about nature when traveling, as you might experience unexpected situations such as riptides in the ocean, heavy rainfalls, strong sun, etc. that you do not know from your home country.

EMERGENCIAS: CALL 911

Dial this number for all types of emergencies: to contact the police, in case of fire, if you need an ambulance, suffer from violence, etc.



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For your Safety in Costa Rica

What to be aware of:

- Always take care of your valuables, such as your phone or camera, and avoid showing them in public spaces to not expose yourself. You may carry your valuables in a small waist bag. Write the most important phone numbers on a paper to always have them with you.
- Never walk around alone at night - we recommend to use transportation apps like UBER, but this usually works only in central provinces. Otherwise, taxis are an option, too.
- You should take care of your passport. If partying at night/traveling within the country, a copy of your passport or your home country's ID or driver's license are good options.
- If you are taking a journey by bus, always put valuable and important items in a separate backpack and carry it on your lap.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash, 15.000 to 25.000 colones are sufficient for going out, eating and transportation.
- Do not pay attention to people in the street asking you for money, or at bus terminals trying to confuse you by misinforming.
- We will give your more detailed information on your arrival about the public and private transportation systems, and which areas are best to avoid, especially at night.



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Volunteers' experiences



We are three volunteers, Stephan and Lena from Austria and Aliya from Germany, who are currently volunteering at Oratorio Don Bosco de Sor Maria Romero here in San José, the capital of the tropical country of Costa Rica.

Oratorio Don Bosco is a kind of interesting mixture between a kindergarten and a day care centre for older children. Here at Oratorio Don Bosco, we take care of children aged six to twelve. However, in December 2022, the director introduced the preschool which serves to kids younger than six years old. The institution is located at the corner of Avenida 9 and Calle Central. The building isn't particularly large, though it stretches further back than you might expect. In total the house has 3 floors. But be careful, in Costa Rica the "ground floor", as we in Europe say, doesn't exist so you always start with the 1st floor or "primer piso" in Spanish.

The first floor (and yes, we're doing the Costa Rican way) consist of the offices of the director, the finance department and administration as well as the canteen, two bathrooms and a vertical garden. At the second floor you'll find the office of the psychologist, who oversees the well-being of the kids. Furthermore, there are three classrooms, bathrooms and the computer room which is used for ICT classes. One of the three classrooms on the second floor is occasionally used as the mentioned preschool. The third and last floor hosts one more office, the music classroom and one big meeting area, which is used for a lot of things like doing the homework, activities and the infamous "buenas tardes", which you'll get to know quickly while working here.



As of January 2023, there about 100 students registered at Oratorio Don Bosco, but not everyone's coming every day as the children are not obliged to come (and spoiler: they don't). So, the average is about fifty to sixty each day, which isn't a huge deal considering the Oratorio has enough staff for everyone.

The children are divided into groups by grade rather than age, which would be grade one to six here in Costa Rica. Therefore, Oratorio has three different groups: First and second grade, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth grade. As of now, each volunteer takes care of one of the groups alongside with one or two teachers. However, this procedure can change and depends heavily on the quantity of volunteers currently working at Oratorio.



Keep in mind that Oratorio Don Bosco is an organisation which looks after children and adolescents from socially and financially disadvantaged backgrounds and families. This may lead to difficult situations from time to time because the kids sometimes don't receive enough care, education and attention at home. This is where Oratorio finds its motivation to care about its students and to provide some stability, peace and small bits of education for the students, as well as offering a daily warm meal, breakfast, and two snacks each day.

Every so often it can be hard and frustrating trying to educate the children because some are quite stubborn and just want to play and don't pay attention at all. Nonetheless, even if only one kid at the time listens to you, it's very satisfying and fulfilling to know that you're making a small difference in the world of at least one child by providing them with change from their daily life and maybe also a smile and a good time here at Oratorio Don Bosco de Sor Maria Romero.

Stephan J. Gruber, Aliya Paulini & Lena Berka - Volunteers at Oratorio Don Bosco de Sor Maria Romero 2022-2023



Language

Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica, but the Afro Caribbean people along the Caribbean coast also use a Creole - English dialect and the different indigenous groups have their own languages as well. In tourist areas, English is understood and widely spoken. Do remember that Spanish varies a lot between countries, so our version of Spanish differs a lot from the one you might know. For instance, **vos** is used instead of the singular form **tú** as the second person singular pronoun.

In Spanish we have only 5 vocals, and they are always pronounced with the same sound:

A (pronounced like “a” in calm)

E (like “e” in elephant)

I (like “i” in India)

O (like “o” in on)

U (like “oo” in too)

We also have an additional character: Ñ ñ - which is pronounced like “gn” in French or “nh” in Portuguese (it’s a bit like joining “n” and “y”). For example, **mañana** might be spelled in English: manyana. In Spanish, the pronunciation is pretty straightforward as you pronounce the words “as they are written”; letters always have the same sound. For example, “How do you do?” for us sounds as if it were spelled “Aw du jau du?” (Pretty different!)

In Spanish most words are pronounced with a stress on the penultimate syllable: Es-pa-ña, ex-ce-len-cia. Exceptions to this rule are indicated with an accent which looks like a French acute accent and tells you exactly where to put the stress: pa-ís, e-lec-ción, ca- fé.

Moreover, once talking to ticos in Costa Rica, you will learn many different expressions that are typically used here.



Vocabulary

Yes	<i>Si</i>	No	<i>No</i>
OK	<i>Ok</i>	Please	<i>Por Favor</i>
Thank you very much	<i>Muchas Gracias</i>	Thank you	<i>Gracias</i>
You are welcome	<i>Con mucho gusto</i>	I do not understand	<i>No entiendo</i>
I do not speak (much) Spanish	<i>No hablo (mucho) español</i>	Do you speak English?	<i>¿Habla inglés?</i>
I do not know	<i>No lo se</i>	Who?	<i>¿Quién?</i>
What?	<i>¿Qué?</i>	Where?	<i>¿Dónde?</i>
When?	<i>¿Cuándo?</i>	Why?	<i>¿Por qué?</i>
How?	<i>¿Cómo?</i>	This	<i>Esto/Este/Esta</i>
That	<i>Eso/Ese/Esa</i>	Now	<i>Ahora</i>
Later	<i>Más Tarde</i>	Open	<i>Abierto</i>
Closed	<i>Cerrado</i>	With	<i>Con</i>
Without	<i>Sin</i>	Good	<i>Bueno</i>
Bad	<i>Malo</i>	Big	<i>Grande</i>
Small	<i>Pequeño</i>	More	<i>Más</i>
Less	<i>Menos</i>	Today	<i>Hoy</i>
Tomorrow	<i>Mañana</i>	Yesterday	<i>Ayer</i>
I	<i>Yo</i>	You	<i>Usted/Vos/Tú</i>
He	<i>Él</i>	She	<i>Ella</i>
It	<i>Ello</i>	We	<i>Nosotros</i>
You (Plural)	<i>Ustedes</i>	They	<i>Ustedes</i>
Hello!	<i>¡Hola!</i>	Good morning	<i>Buenos días</i>
Good afternoon	<i>Buenas tardes</i>	Good evening/ night	<i>Buenas noches</i>
How are you (formal)	<i>¿Cómo está?</i>	How are you (informal)	<i>¿Cómo vas?</i>
Very well, thank you.	<i>Pura Vida, gracias.</i>	And you?	<i>¿Y vos/usted?</i>

Pura vida - literally "pure life", but used as "thank you", "you're welcome", "that's great", "everything is fine", etc.

Por dicha - Luckily
Que Chiva - Nice/Cool
Plata - Money
Que le vaya muy bien - That all goes well

About ACI

ACI-Costa Rica (Asociación Costarricense de Interculturalidad) is a non-profit organisation, founded in 1967 with the mission of *"promoting and facilitating intercultural learning, volunteer service and other international non-formal education experiences for a global citizenship"*.

The organisation is an active full member of the International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), a federation of more than 40 organisations located on the five continents and recognised as International Peace Messenger by the United Nations. ICYE Headquarters are placed in Berlin, Germany.

At national level, ACI is part of the Federation of Social Organizations of Costa Rica (FOS). Moreover, ACI has developed partnerships with other networks and programs such as: The Committee of Coordination of International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), associate to UNESCO, The Alliance of European Organizations (ALLIANCE), Volunteering Matters from United Kingdom (VM), VolontEUROPE, weltwaerts from the German government, and ERASMUS+ from the European Union.

Objectives

- To offer programmes of International Learning and International Volunteering for a Global Citizenship.
- To generate an intercultural learning process that encourages personal and social growth.
- To promote international voluntary service in Costa Rica.
- To provide opportunities for young people to use their initiative and creativity to help others.
- To develop environmental education processes for children and adolescents, promoting awareness of the importance of their role within the community.
- To create a network with national and international organisations to facilitate the diversification of projects and programs, and thereby further the aims of international voluntary service, intercultural learning, international relations, and environmental education.
- To promote our organisation as a sponsor of International Voluntary Service.



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ACI Staff

- **Mariel Pinel:** Executive Director and Outgoing Programmes Coordinator
- **Vanessa Blas:** Administrative Coordinator
- **David Pereira:** Short Term Coordinator
- **Andrea Poveda:** Long Term Coordinator
- **Volunteers:** Assistants for the different areas of the organization



Office hours: Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Physical address: Barrio Tournón, San José, Costa Rica. De la ULACIT 150 metros sur

Address in Google Maps/ Waze: Federación de Organizaciones Sociales, Barrio Amón



Check out our Social Media pages! We update it with current activities and goings on, and you can view further information and photos.

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Volunteering with ACI-CR

What do we expect from you?

We need you to be as *open-minded* as possible and come prepared to learn about Costa Rica, to get to know new ideas and views on the world. Be ready to become a "tico" or "tica" for the next 183 or 365 days. We expect you to take *initiative*. Our committee will provide guidance and help but we cannot (and should not, we believe) "walk" you through every step for the entire stay.

Communication is very important. We are always happy to be able to support you, but this only works if you are willing to address issues in an open, polite and friendly way.

We expect you to try your best to learn Spanish. To be able to communicate is a requisite to achieve a deep understanding of any culture. Once you speak the language, doors will open and opportunities will present themselves. We also expect you to contribute to the Costa Rican society with your professional and social skills so that benefits and the learning process are mutual. *Opening up to other people with respect, care and understanding* will teach you (and them) a lot.

It is important that you understand that you are not only representing your country and culture, but also ACI and your volunteer programme. As a volunteer, we expect you to respect the Costa Rican way of life. Costa Rica, its values and its beliefs will not change just because you have arrived.

Keep in mind that you are coming to live in another culture, with different customs, values, ways of communicating, food, weather, etc. You have made the decision to come to Costa Rica and we expect you to try to adapt yourself to our way of life.



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What can you expect from ACI-CR?

Orientation Activity

All incoming participants (Short Term, Work-Camps, Groups and Long Term) will receive an Orientation Meeting or Seminar as part of the Programme's requirements. This orientation includes an introduction to the Costa Rican culture, customs, security, life in a host family and/or volunteer placements. These activities *may include a Spanish course* which for Long Term participants is a must. This will enable you to continue learning the language. The Long Term orientation activities will be used for more in-depth information on Costa Rican history, administrative issues, host families, customs, and your specific work placements. Of course we will also do recreational activities, since this is not a boot camp.

Mid-Term Seminar

After six months in Costa Rica, Long Term participants will have another meeting for a Mid-Term Evaluation of your experiences. Topics will include culture shock, family life, volunteer work, and your personal observations and expectations, as well as proposals for further improvement.

Evaluation Seminar

The last Seminar for Long Term programs takes place a few weeks before you return home. We will evaluate your exchange year as a whole, prepare you for the "re-adaptation shock", and have a last good time together. This seminar will be held together with the outgoing Costa Rican volunteers.

Support

ACI staff provides you with support during your intercultural experience and in case of emergencies.

You might also have the opportunity to participate in social-cultural activities organized by ACI. The Orientation Seminar, Mid-Term Camp and the Evaluation Seminar are compulsory activities.



What can you expect from ACI-CR?

What do we not offer?

A travel agency. We are not a tourist company, and our work is to facilitate a learning experience.

Paid work. Volunteers are not allowed to work for wages.

What do you have to do before coming to Costa Rica?

Long Term Programme Volunteers need to get a **police record** and **birth certificate** for the visa process (see “Visa Process in Costa Rica”).

Please think well about the kind of project you want and let us know, **so we can take your preferences into consideration.**

It is very important to start learning or practicing **Spanish** before starting the Program, especially if you’re interested in social projects and in order to integrate. The language course in the welcome seminar is for basic improvement.



Packing List

- **Once again:** Don't forget the required documents for the visa, those are very important!
- If you're bringing a credit card with you, it is best to bring a VISA Card or MasterCard, since they are the most commonly accepted. Sometimes, it might be difficult to find a cash machine accepting American Express or Discovery cards. We'll also open a local bank account with an ATM Card (where you will receive your monthly pocket money).
- It's important that you bring some money (in cash) to cover your expenses here, until you get your first pocket money.
- Since there are lots of places to visit, we recommend to bring a backpack as well as, or instead of, a suitcase.
- Remember that, even though Costa Rica is a relatively warm country, most of the population lives in the mountains (San José, for example, is located at 1150 metres above sea level), and nights can become chilly. Bring at least a couple of sweatshirts. Raingear is also advisable, as during the rainy season it can rain continuously for hours and get quite cold, too.
- Furthermore, the dress code of some projects does not allow sleeveless shirts or pants/skirts shorter than knee level, so make sure to bring along appropriate clothes for work. And also, of course, clothes for warmer weather and traveling.
- Things like toiletries including mosquito repellent can be purchased here. Supermarkets in general offer the same items as everywhere in the world.
- Some small presents for your host family like typical items from your home country will be very appreciated. Moreover, they will be interested in seeing some photos of your country, your life there, relatives, etc.



Visa Process in Costa Rica

Short Term Programme Volunteers / Workcamps (less than 6 months):

For STP participants volunteering can stay as tourist in Costa Rica presenting a return flight or proof of onward flight within 180 days.

Long Term Programme Volunteers:

6 months volunteers can easily enter as tourist presenting a return flight within 180 days or show proof of onward travel. The renewal of the visa every 90 days in the country is no longer necessary.

12 months volunteers need to apply for a volunteer visa. It is essential to bring the following: Police Record and Birth Certificate APOSTILLED + 3 identical photographs (passport size) in COLOR + photocopy of main page of the passport and stamp of entrance in CR + \$230 if you bring consular visa or \$430 if you will enter as tourist. Bring the original passport to the orientation camp as well!!!

Requirements to enter CR:

Be aware that for entering CR as a tourist, you must have a **return flight within 180 days or show proof of onward travel.** Please verify if your country is in the list allowed to enter CR as a tourist (most Europeans and USA) or if you need a consular visa!!!



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Important Information for all Volunteers entering CR as Tourists

Be aware that for entering Costa Rica as a tourist, you must have a return flight within 180 days or show proof of onward travel.

Long-Term Volunteers (6-12 months) can enter as tourist but for 12 months you need to apply for volunteer visa once in our country. This is an alternative to the Pre-VISA process with the consulates in your countries.

*Take into account that **having an irregular immigration status carries various legal penalties** that can include being banned from re-entry to Costa Rica.*



Applying to the Volunteer Visa

One year volunteers or other Long Term volunteers

All 12 months- or volunteers for longer than six months will apply for a volunteer visa. In those cases, to enter Costa Rica you have two options: get a volunteer pre-visa (consular visa) or enter as a tourist and afterwards apply to change the migratory status.

All 12 months-volunteers must bring **2 identical photographs** (passport size) in COLOR, **Police Record** and **Birth Certificate APOSTILLED**. If you can't get the "apostille" the documents must be sealed by the CR ambassador consulate in your country. **Do not translate the documents in your home country**; we will do it in Costa Rica with officially authorised translators.

Complete names of both of your parents. We need the "maiden" or "children's name" of your mother.

Clearly legible **photocopy of the "main passport page"** that has your photo, passport number and personal information. Below you can see how the photocopy has to look like.

230 US Dollars (CASH) to cover the first part visa process expenses (if you have the pre-visa). You will hand this to ACI so we can manage the process. We recommend bringing dollars in cash directly from your countries. Normally the volunteers have problems taking money from the ATM the first days in Costa Rica.



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Applying to the Volunteer Visa

Also, in order to complete the process, after around 4 or 5 months, when/if you get the approval from Migration Authorities you must cover 7500 colones (around \$15) for “Correos de Costa Rica” and \$98 for the “Visa ID”. These you will not hand to ACI and you will only need to pay it if the VISA is approved during your time in CR. **PLEASE NOTE** that it is possible that the process takes so long that it will not be necessarily ended before the conclusion of your program. However, **applying to the volunteer visa is the way to guarantee your legal status in Costa Rica and it is the authorities' procedure.**

If you want to get the Pre Visa (consular visa):

You will need to present to the consulate an application letter for a “provisional visa, special category for volunteers” (visa provisional de categoría especial para voluntarios), which has to be signed in front of the consul and has to include the following information: name and surname of the applicant, nationality, profession or occupation, date of birth, place and estimated date of arrival in Costa Rica as well as type, dates of validity and number of the passport. Also, ACI will provide you with an Invitation Letter to present. [Please verify with the respective consulate the requirements!!!](#)

Your passport has to be valid at least 6 months after the end of your programme in Costa Rica.

The consulate will provide you with a Pre Visa Letter and you must bring it together with the other requirements. Your passport also has to be stamped and signed by the consulate for a provisional visa/special category for volunteers (“visa provisional de categoría especial para voluntarios”).



Applying to the Volunteer Visa

If you enter Costa Rica as a tourist and apply to the volunteer VISA once in the country:

In case there is no CR consulate in your country or the Pre Visa (consular visa) process is too expensive or complex you have the option to enter Costa Rica as a tourist and pay **\$200** to apply for changing the migratory category from tourist to volunteer, additionally the participant must pay the regular visa process cost of **\$230** (see one-year volunteer). So in case you enter as a tourist you need to consider in total **\$430 (handed to ACI) + \$113 for the final part.**

Also, please notice that in order to enter as a tourist in Costa Rica you would need to make sure that you bring a ticket to leave the country before the 180 days tourist visa expires.

For any question about the migration process, please contact the Incoming Area Coordinator.



General Visa Rules for Non-Residents in Costa Rica

The conditions for entering Costa Rica depend on your home country. All ICYE countries fall into 3 different groups. ICYE Partners with a Quota Agreement with Costa Rica are marked in bold.

Participants from ICYE countries in the 1st and 2nd group can apply for their volunteer visa at the Costa Rican embassy or once in our country. Participants from the countries on the 3rd group do need to comply with more requisites, we will provide your NC with all the info.

1st Group (tourist visa valid for up to 180 natural days):

- Europe -New Zealand
- Brazil -South Africa
- Japan -South Korea
- Mexico -United States
- Perú

2ndGroup (tourist visa valid for up to 30natural days):

- Bolivia
- Philippines
- Taiwan

3rdGroup (consular visa for up to 30 natural days):

- Colombia -Morocco
- Ecuador -Mozambique
- Ghana -Nepal -Uganda
- India -Nigeria -Tanzania
- Kenya -Russia -Vietnam
- Moldova -Indonesia

The citizens of ICYE countries in the 3rd group need to obtain a **CONSULAR VISA** to enter Costa Rica. This visa is valid for up to 30 natural days. As soon as they enter our country, we will proceed with the volunteer status procedure just like with the volunteers entering with a tourist visa.

Nationals from this third group will be able to enter Costa Rica without consular visa if they already have a visa to enter the USA, Canada and/or the countries of the European Union, stamped in their passport and valid for a minimum of 3 months. In this case, they can enter Costa Rica under the same conditions as the citizens of countries in the first group.

For any question about the migration process, please contact the Incoming Area

About Projects in CR - WORK PROFILE

General Observations

The age limits for the ICYE Costa Rica program is flexible.

In the case of some projects, volunteers must comply with certain rules as to behavior, personal presentation and vaccines. Regarding clothing, you will be allowed to dress as you please only during non-working hours, while at the project you will have to follow the dress code if there is one.

The admission of piercings, dread locks or other unconventional hairstyles (especially projects with children/ social projects tend to be a little stricter in that area), tattoos on visible areas, etc. is defined by the regulations of each individual project and has to be complied with.

Please keep in mind that volunteering in Costa Rica might be very different than in your home country. Some projects have less experience than others. Perhaps at first you might get frustrated because you may not have a specific task assigned, or because work seems boring. **Earn your superiors' and co-workers' trust, practice your Spanish so you can get more responsibilities.**

In Costa Rica, there are several different Volunteer Service Organisations. However, there are many volunteers who want to work in our country, so the organisations are generally able to choose who they will accept. If you do not have special training or qualifications, the tasks assigned to you will depend largely on the current needs of the project. **Initiative is always very important!**



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Important Information

To help ensure a positive volunteering experience with ACI-Costa Rica, please read carefully and take into account the following:

1. To be a volunteer in Costa Rica, 12 months volunteers need to get the migratory status as “VOLUNTEER”. Please review the chapter “Visa Process in Costa Rica” in this guide and bring the necessary documents with you to Costa Rica.
2. ACI-CR does its best to find a project that suits you the most. Nonetheless, please note that it is difficult to guarantee specific projects.
3. None of the volunteer placements offers a salary.
4. Depending on your specific project you are expected to work 30 to 40 hours per week. When you arrive in Costa Rica, you will have to sign an “Agreement on Participation”.
5. When there are “tours” or activities your project wants you to participate in, the project itself is responsible for your expenses.
6. Your vacations have to be coordinated with the project and sometimes are already defined by the project (for example in the case of schools). Volunteers have to adapt to the conditions of their project.
7. Accommodation is mainly with Costa Rican families. However, especially when you choose ecological projects, you may also live in the project.
8. You could be living in very different parts of Costa Rica: the capital, big cities, small towns and rural areas, depending on the family's/ project's location.
9. Host Family and Project Information can take time to be confirmed. Thank you for your patience. We do our best to coordinate everything. In case information is missing, you will get it during the orientation process.



Work Profiles

Types of Voluntary Service Projects: ACI offers many different work placements for international volunteers. In the following you find a list of general project types.

PROJECTS WITH CHILDREN: There are many projects working with children (for example day care centres for children from low income families, rural schools, shelter for children in social risk, etc.). Volunteer work usually includes assisting during classes, taking care of the children, playing with them and organizing activities with them. Manual work and help in the kitchen are also frequently part of the tasks. Office work could also be included.

ELDERLY PEOPLE: Homes for the elderly provide accommodation and special attention. Volunteers' tasks are mainly related to keeping company and sharing with the residents, organizing activities, and sometimes assisting in physical therapy. As in the case of projects with children, tasks may also include helping in the kitchen or other manual work.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: ACI cooperates with several institutions (mainly schools) for persons with physical, mental and visual or auditory special conditions. Volunteers assist during therapies and also fulfil the same tasks as in projects with children or elderly people.

ECOLOGICAL PROJECTS: Ecological projects include and often combine conservation, rural development, and sustainable tourism initiatives. Volunteers help in field work (reforestation, species documentation, construction or maintenance of trails, animal protection), but often also in the office (for example with the translation of information material or the maintenance of websites) or with environmental education projects for tourists and locals. **Please note that some ecological projects have basic rustic accommodation.**



Work Profiles

CULTURAL PROJECTS: There are different groups, institutions and non-governmental organisations dedicated to promoting and enriching Costa Rica's cultural life. In these projects, you will need an open mind and the ability to easily connect and communicate with people, which makes previous knowledge of Spanish at least at an intermediate level especially important. Please note that there are only few placements in this field.

ACI: ACI also accepts volunteers to work with different tasks ranging from office work and translations to project visits, preparation of camps and socio-cultural animation, giving you the opportunity of meeting lots of people and getting an insight into how the international volunteer work and intercultural learning are managed. If you are interested, let us know!

OTHERS: There also exist other possibilities of volunteer work, including work in universities or secondary schools, with drug/alcohol abusers, teaching English, sports, etc.

***PLEASE NOTE THAT IN SOME CASES (ESPECIALLY ECOLOGICAL PROJECTS)
ACCOMODATION COULD BE WITHIN THE PROJECT.***



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Rules and Regulations

Agreement on Participation: Volunteer and Exchange

Dear Volunteers,

The success of your exchange programme will depend very much on you and your attitude. Like any programme, there are regulations and procedures to guarantee a positive experience.

Please read carefully the following conditions and send a signed copy!

- I have read and agree to follow ACI National Profile and the ICYE Federation's Guide for Exchangees
- I am currently in good physical and psychological health. My Health Certificate provides all accurate information, including preexisting conditions and health history
- I have the willingness and I will put effort to learn Spanish during my Programme
- I have the willingness and motivation to work continuously on integration in the local costarican culture (host family, project, local activities, etc). I agree to adapt and respect the Costa Rican way of life and culture
- I accept the placement that ACI will provide me with. I am aware that I may be placed in a Host Family, Project, urban areas or small rural towns
- I will follow the Conflict Resolution process explained by ACI whenever I have a problem with my host project or family
- I understand that the Programme is not for tourism purposes and I will not travel excessively
- I will not use ANY drugs, including "soft" drugs like marihuana nor I will do excessive partying or excessive alcohol consumption
- I understand that the orientation, mid-term and final evaluation meetings are compulsory. The dates provided in advance shall be reserved by the volunteers.
- I am aware that my insurance doesn't cover ANY motorized accident while I'm driving. Volunteers should not drive and if so, I would need to get an insurance by my own.
- I am aware that I have to respect and obey my host country's laws and will avoid trouble with authorities
- I will have good communication with my family, project and coordinator in ACI. For security reasons, I will always inform when I am travelling.
- I accept that I can be photographed by my project, family or ACI. I am aware that these images may be used by ACI or its partners in their media. If I have any concerns about this or objections, I will notify the coordinator.

Host families and projects

- I will treat my family with respect as they are hard to come by and they are opening their home to me. I will accept the rules and conditions which can be very different in each case. I understand that host families are VOLUNTEERS and some are given only a small allowance to assist them. The concept is not commercialized. It is not a business for the families and they are not a hotel
- I accept that changing host situation would be possible only under extraordinary conditions, with the due process and ACI's intervention
- I have the willingness of working with responsibility in my project. I will comply with the rules and conditions of my project
- I understand that the project counts on my reliability and my presence at work and that some projects relies more in my independent way of working and initiative
- I will respect the schedule and vacations settled by my project or will coordinate them with sufficient time. I understand that I will have 2 days of vacation for every month that I work at my project (a total of 12 days for 6 month volunteers and 24 days for 12 month volunteers)
- I understand that changing the project is very difficult due to visa regulations and limited spaces
- I'm prepared to work between 30 and 40 hours per week depending on the project. I am aware that in some cases I may be required to work on weekends

• EXCLUSION CRITERIA OF THE PROGRAMME

- If the volunteer leaves the host family or project *on his/her own initiative* and without the prior due process with ACI
- If the project or family decides to dissolve the contract based on misbehavior of the volunteer
- If the volunteer is certified unfit for work by a doctor for more than 4 weeks due to accident, illness, etc. or if he/she is unable to work for more than 4 weeks
- If pre-existing physical or mental illnesses were not mentioned in the health certificate
- If the volunteers violates the law
- If the volunteer abandons the Program, he/she will be reported to the Migration Authorities and will lose his/her visa, can be deported or penalized.
- Once the Program is over, the volunteer is not covered by the insurance and none parties involved in the Program have longer responsibilities with he/she. Also, migration authorities are informed about the exact end date of the Program

Name: _____

Country: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Some interesting links

Social Media Instagram and Facebook

@aci.cr

Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), Tourism Board (English, Español, Deutsch, Français)

www.visitcostarica.com

GAM Cultural (agenda of cultural activities in Costa Rica)

<https://www.gamcultural.com/cr/home>

Asociación Costarricense de Turismo Rural Comunitario (ACTUAR - Costa Rican Association for Rural Community Tourism)

www.actuarcostarica.com

Banco Central de Costa Rica (Central Bank of Costa Rica)

www.bccr.fi.cr

Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica (in Spanish)

www.asamblea.go.cr/proyecto/constitu/const2.htm

Costa Rican government web site

presidencia.go.cr

Google maps' zoomable satellite view of Costa Rica

maps.google.com/maps?ll=9.595334,-84.078369&spn=5.647293,5.505524&t=h&hl=en

***We hope you've enjoyed reading our
National Profile!***