



# TOP 10

## COSTA RICA



With tropical rainforests, live volcanoes and long blond beaches with perfect surf, Costa Rica packs incredible diversity into a tiny space. It's just two-thirds the size of Scotland, yet contains over 5% of all the world's plant and animal species. A ridge of mountains runs northwest to southeast, and the capital, San José, lies in the lush green Central Highlands where coffee plantations created wealth long before tourism arrived. In the north, volcanoes spout red-hot lava; just a short hop from cloud forests where monkeys howl and birdsong fills the air. The Pacific coast has wonderful beaches on two peninsulas - the famous Nicoya and the more tranquil OSA- while the laid-back Caribbean coast remains the preserve of backpackers. Best of all, the native Ticos welcome you warmly wherever you go, making Costa Rica one of the few Central American countries safe and easy to travel in.

Flights direct from NYC to San Jose on Continental are around \$400 with a two-week advance purchase. [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)



### 1. TAKE IN THE VIEWS FOR LUNCH AT VILLA LA CALETAS

Organize a driver to take you from the airport for a 2.5 hour trip to Vista Del Golfo, with a stop for lunch at the picturesque Villa Caletas ([www.hotelvillacaletas.com](http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com)) perched on a hilltop with a spectacular costal views. The undulating setting and gardens at Villa la Caletas are reminiscent of Capri and the Amalfi Coast, with more tropical vegetation and Colonial Spanish-style architecture. The restaurant has a fantastic view of the coastline and the food was delicious, as well as reasonably priced. Lunch for four, with wine, is approximately \$US 130. The hotel at Villa la Caletas is very reasonable for a little bit of luxury. Rooms start at \$145 and will definitely be somewhere we'll stay a few nights on our next trip.

<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/>



### 2. ZIP-LINE AT VISTA DEL GOLFO

Boasting 30 lines, you'll find yourself zip-lining over 100 foot waterfalls with this once-in-a-lifetime experience. The hotel at Vista Del Golfo is basic, if not a little kitsch, designed with a Germanic Tyrolean flavor. The food is local and good, but it's the activities, like the zip-lines and horseback riding, that are the star of the show here.

<http://www.adventureparkcostarica.com/en/>

### 3. VISIT MANUEL ANTONIO NATIONAL PARK

This is Costa Rica's smallest, oldest and most popular park. Here you'll see monkeys swinging languidly through the trees, watch sloths climbing up trunks in slow motion and spot scarlet macaws flitting through branches, all from well-maintained trails through the jungle.

<http://www.manuelantonionipark.com/>



### 4. TAKE A FERRY RIDE FROM PUNTARENAS TO PACERA



The 45-minute ferry from Puntarenas to Pacera is a wonderful experience, especially at a cost of \$10 for the entire family and bags. We took our ride on a gorgeous sunny morning and the water was like glass. The islands and waterways we passed were completely natural, undeveloped and beautiful. Pacera is a tiny village and not worth stopping. But if your group gets hungry, the pizzas on the ferry proved to be a huge hit. We had a driver meet us and drive us down the dirt roads to Santa Teresa, where the first cement road was laid last November.

<http://www.nicoyapeninsula.com/general/boat.php>

### 5. VISIT THE CHIC PARADISE OF PLAYA HERMOSA

Visit the local fish shop in the town square, owned by an elegant French couple, and take a picnic to Playa Hermosa, becoming very popular with homes being bought by the likes of Giselle and Mel Gibson. It's a tropical paradise and one of my favorite beaches. Travel to the deserted end of the beach and take some ATVs for a ride. Collect shells in the rock pool and sleep in the shade of the palm trees. You could spend all day in this Oasis without seeing another person!

<http://www.anywherecostarica.com/destinations/playa-hermosa>



### 6. CHILL OUT AND LEARN HOW TO SURF IN SANTA TERESA



Visit the area of Santa Teresa is Playa Carmen and Playa Santa Teresa, known as 'Surfer's Paradise'. Rent a board and take a surf lesson or relax and participate in a yoga group. This sleepy surfing spot is very bohemian while boasting a fantastic restaurant and bar scene. Don't expect any hi-rises or big resorts. All buildings must be set back 150 meters from the beach making the setting very natural. The charisma of Playa Santa Teresa creeps up slowly until you are totally captivated by this chilled- out, little piece of paradise.

<http://www.surfvacationcostarica.com/>

### 7. SWIM IN A WATERFALL AND GO SNORKELING

Visit Montezuma where you can enjoy swimming in the local waterfall. From Montezuma, you can go snorkeling on Isla Tortuga. Make sure to check the seasons, though. During our visit at Easter time, we missed out on seeing the magnificent turtles from the area.

<http://www.zumatours.net/isla-tortuga-tour/>



### 8. ENJOY A MEAL ON A PRIVATE BEACH AT FLOR BLANCA



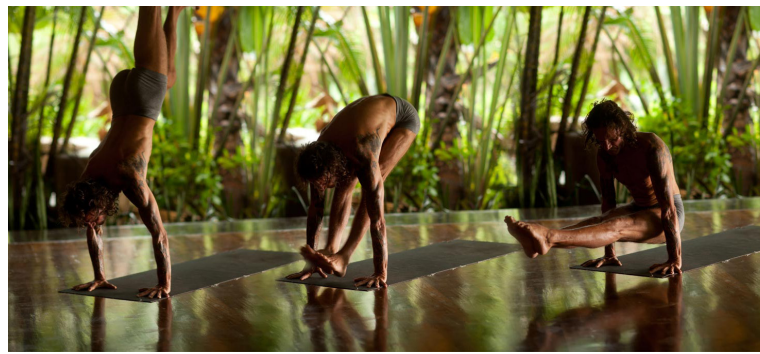
At Flor Blanca, make sure to sit near the pool or take the steps down to a small private beach with locally made cane lounge chairs. While we were there, a monkey sat up high targeting people below, dropping the almond buds on people's heads, creating quite a delightful commotion. Dinner can be pricey but the food is good and definitely worth visiting for the ambience.

<http://www.florblanca.com/nectar/>

### 9. TRY A YOGA OR PILATES CLASS WITH A LOCAL GURU

While in Santa Teresa, take a yoga or Pilates class at the glamorous Flor Blanca with local yoga guru Steph-ano. Classes run throughout the hours of 9 am to 4pm. The open studio sits directly on the beach and offers a constant breeze throughout the space. This class is one of the best I've done in the world.

<http://www.florblanca.com/activities/yoga/>



### 10. GET UP-CLOSE-AND-PERSONAL WITH RAINFOREST ANIMALS



If you are traveling with children, make sure to visit Cabuya and Rainsong Sanctuary. This animal rescue group gives you the chance to hold and pet local rainforest animals.

[www.rainsongsanctuary.com](http://www.rainsongsanctuary.com)