

COSTA RICAN ECOTOURISM



Eco tourism is one of the fastest developing sectors of the tourism industry and Costa Rica is among the leading players in this business. The country has a lot to offer to eco tourists. There are beautiful beaches, wildlife reserves as well as both active and dormant volcanoes. A visitor can admire local rain forest, tropical canals and lagoons or e.g. mountain ranges. All these things make the country extremely popular with ecotourists who can watch wildlife in national parks and protected areas around the country.

The tourism industry is highly important to the Costa Rica's economy. It generates some \$1.9 billion annually. There were approximately 1.9 million foreign visitors in 2007. Most of them are from the U.S. (54%) and the E.U. (14%). The country really is cashing on its environmental riches.

There is a plan to make the ecotourism even more profitable and attractive for visitors. The ecotourism is often connected with rather simple accommodation. Tourists do not expect to get something more than a decent bed in a bug-free room with a semiprivate bathroom. In Costa Rica it should change. There should be built an \$800 million, 650-acre luxury resort in Guanacaste, on the Pacific Coast of the northern part of the country.

The ecotourism, nevertheless, does also have its opponents. Groups of environmentalists claim that ecotourism not only is not helpful but that it can even harm the environment. They claim that it is unwise to bring unlimited numbers of tourists into the protected areas and encourage the construction of high-rise hotels and resorts. There are also doubts that an economy centered on tourism can be sustained. On the other hand, the pressure from the ecotourism sector helped to stop the clearing of the land for farming, logging, mining, or industrial development.

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