

COSTA RICA - ULTIMATE ECOTOURISM DESTINATION FOR NATURE LOVERS



Today, Costa Rica is regarded as an established ecotourism destination. While the country benefits from the rich biodiversity and pleasant climate, the development of ecotourism relied highly on the governmental activities, conservation NGOs as well as small entrepreneurs. Decades-long political stability also helped the development of the sector.

Costa Rica is more than a vacation destination; for many it is an interactive sensory experience. The country has an intense array of environmental attractions on offer – majestic volcanoes, misty cloud forests, stunning river valleys, and hundreds of beaches along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. **As such, the country has become an immensely popular ecotourism destination.** Costa Rica has a fascinating ecological story, woven into the history of a peaceful and family-oriented culture.

Since 1970s, the local government together with several NGOs has been successfully building a national image of a natural paradise. The national park system quickly expanded creating 70 protected areas. Many Costa Rican entrepreneurs supported the areas by offering conservation education to the visitors as well as community development and jobs. Thanks to their help, the areas remained sustainable parks attracting growing numbers of tourists.

In 1970, Costa Rica welcomed 155,000 visitors; in 1990 the number increased to 435,000, and in 2000 the country managed to attract 1.1 million tourists, many of them having nature in mind when choosing the Central American nation as a holiday destination. A survey revealed that by the late 1990s the average foreign visitor spent two-thirds of his or her time in Costa Rica in the protected areas. The tourism revenues also increased substantially from US\$21 million in 1970 to \$1.15 billion in 2000.

The first tour operators and private reserve proprietors created the commercial market in 1980s with strong environmental principles. Tikal Tours and GeoTur were one of the first tour operators focusing solely on presenting the country as a perfect ecotourism destination. Today, **Anywhere Costa Rica** is highly popular among green-minded travelers. Besides offering bilingual guides and customized itineraries, the company holds numerous certification including those from the International Ecotourism Society and Certification for Sustainable Tourism. They are well known for supporting programs committed to local community, culture and preservation of the nature.

In 2007, the Costa Rican government announced its plans to turn the country in the first carbon neutral country by 2021. Currently, Costa Rica is practically synonymous with the term 'ecotourism destination'. It offers twenty separate 'life zones', some 850 species of birds, 1260 of trees, 237 of mammals, and 361 of reptiles. Moreover, the country is home to more bird species than all the United States.

One of the most popular destinations for eco-travelers in Costa Rica is **Manuel Antonio National Park**, which is the most visited park in the whole country. Besides the troops of monkeys and a rainforest the visitors can look forward to humpback whales who pass there every year to nurse the newborns.

The Tortuguero National Park is another attractive ecotourism destination. It is famous for its sea turtle nesting grounds as well as lush islands divided by canals, lagoons, and wetlands. Chirripo National Park, on the other hand, is home to the tallest mountain of Costa Rica, which is also the biggest attraction in the region. To climb on the top of the mountain hikers need an official guide and a reservation through the park system.

Thanks to lush landscapes, extensive national parks, rich biodiversity and ecologically friendly policies, Costa Rica is positioned as the 'queen of ecotourism' and for a good reason. Any nature lover will find the country a perfect place for sustainable holiday with the wilderness and the community in mind.

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