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# Life in Costa Rica



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### General Facts

The Republic of Costa Rica is a country in Central America, bordered by Nicaragua to the north, Panama to the east and south, the Pacific Ocean to the west and south and the Caribbean to the east. The country has a total area of 51,100 km<sup>2</sup>. Although the country is small and it covers only 0.03% of the surface of the globe, it proudly shelters a 6% of the existing biodiversity in the entire world. More than 25% of the country is composed of conservation and natural protected territory.

Costa Rica is also an attractive country for investment and it offers great potential for the establishment of important multinational companies, thanks to the outstanding academic level of its population, as well as the high standard of modern services and social and political stability.

Costa Rica is composed of seven provinces: San Jose (its capital), Alajuela, Heredia, Cartago, Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Limon. These provinces are divided into 81 cantons. San Jose, Alajuela, Heredia and Cartago comprise the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA). Approximately 62% of the countries' total population and 65% of the national total labor force reside in the GMA.

Costa Rica takes pride in having more than one hundred years of democratic tradition, and more than half a century without an army. The army was abolished in 1948, and the money the country saves by not expending in military issues is invested in improving the Costa Ricans' standard of living, which has fostered a culture of social peace.

## Climate

In general, the climate in Costa Rica is very pleasant not only during the dry season, which extends from December to April but also during the rainy season, which runs from May to November.

Costa Rica has a tropical climate with an average temperature of 22 degrees C (72 degrees F) that increases considerably on the coastal areas. The changes in temperature are considerable and due to the short distances in this relatively small country, they can all be experienced in just one day.

Due to factors such as the geographical location, the weather conditions, the formation of mountain chains, mountains, and valleys, this country experiences different microclimates that give a home to different types of vegetation.

## Government

The Costa Rican State comprises three powers: executive responsibilities are vested in a president, legislative power is vested in the Legislative Assembly, and judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court.

There are two vice presidents as well as a cabinet appointed by the president. The president, vice presidents, and 57 Legislative Assembly delegates are elected for four-year terms.

The Supreme Electoral Body, the Office of the Comptroller General, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic and the Office of the Ombudsman are institutions that enjoy full independence.

Costa Rica is one of the most politically stable countries in Latin America, as the following table shows:

Governance Indicator	Percentile Rank (0-100)	Latin American Ranking (18 countries)
Voice and Accountability	75.8	2
Political Stability	70.3	2
Government Effectiveness	65.7	3
Regulatory Quality	67.6	2
Rule of Law	65.6	3
Control of Corruption	72.9	3

Percentile Rank (0-100): 0 is the lowest ranking and 100 is the highest

Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2010

Other social and political indicators are:

Index	Source	Year of Publication	Countries Sampled	World Ranking	Latin American Ranking
Environmental Performance	Yale University	2010	163	3	1
Press Freedom	Reporters Without Borders	2010	178	29	1
Global Peace	- Institute for Economics & Peace - The Economist Intelligence Unit	2011	153	31	2
Quality of Life	International Living	2011	192	45	5
Human Development	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	2010	169	62	6
Economic Freedom	- The Heritage Foundation - The Wall Street Journal	2011	183	49	7
Corruption Perception	Transparency International	2010	178	41	3
Democracy	The Economist	2010	167	24	2

## Medical Services

Costa Rica has positioned itself among the countries with the highest public healthcare development in Latin America.

The Costa Rican Social Security Service (CCSS) is a public service institution that has accomplished important goals regarding health issues, including pensions and social security. In Costa Rica, the life expectancy at birth is 79 years. Costa Rica is the 3<sup>rd</sup> country in Latin America with the lowest infant mortality rate and ranks among top countries with greater life expectancy in the world.

Data also shows that there are approximately 230 medical doctors per every 100,000 inhabitants, one of the largest ratios in the continent.

The country also has a strong private health system, with hospitals and clinics of great prestige and reputation.

## Housing

The best housing areas are found within the Greater Metropolitan Area. Apartment rentals start at US\$600 and can reach US\$6,000 for high-end housing (monthly). These latter are usually located within a gated community and include fees for gardeners and security personnel.

There are little real estate restrictions for foreigners; the Law ensures the same rights for foreigners as for citizens, which means that there are no special conditions for the acquisition of properties in the country.

## Quality of Life

According to the *Quality of Life Index (Liveability Survey) 2009* made by The Economist Intelligence Unit, San Jose is ranked as the 4th city in Latin America with the best quality of life.

San Jose's global score is 75.2%, which is above the Latin American average of 69.4%, and also Asia and Australia's average of 71.8%

City / Country	Rank
Vancouver, Canada	1
Minneapolis, US	44
San Francisco, US	52
New York, US	56
Buenos Aires, Argentina	62
Santiago, Chile	64
Montevideo, Uruguay	66
San Juan, Puerto Rico	67
<b>San Jose, Costa Rica</b>	<b>73</b>
Shanghai, China	79
Sao Paulo, Brazil	92
Panama City, Panama	98
Mexico City, Mexico	105
Bogota, Colombia	112
New Delhi, India	113

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011

## Schools

Education became free and mandatory since 1870.

According to the Ministry of Public Education, there are 9,918 institutions. This is the result of adding 2,809 preschools, 4,077 elementary schools, 5 night elementary schools, 843 high schools, 2,184 special education institutions. There are 59 tertiary education institutions.

There are also many private schools that are bilingual (English, German, French or Hebrew), and offer worldwide recognized programs such as the Advances Placement (AP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB). In addition, most of them have been internationally certified by the Southern Association of Schools (SACS), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), or the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA).

There are over 200 private schools registered at the Ministry of Education, some of which are internationally certified, for example:

School	Certifying Organization
American International School of Costa Rica	SAC
Falcon International School	SAC
Lincoln School	SAC
Marian Baker School	SAC
British School	NEASC
Blue Valley	NEASC
Country Day School	MSA

*SACS – Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*

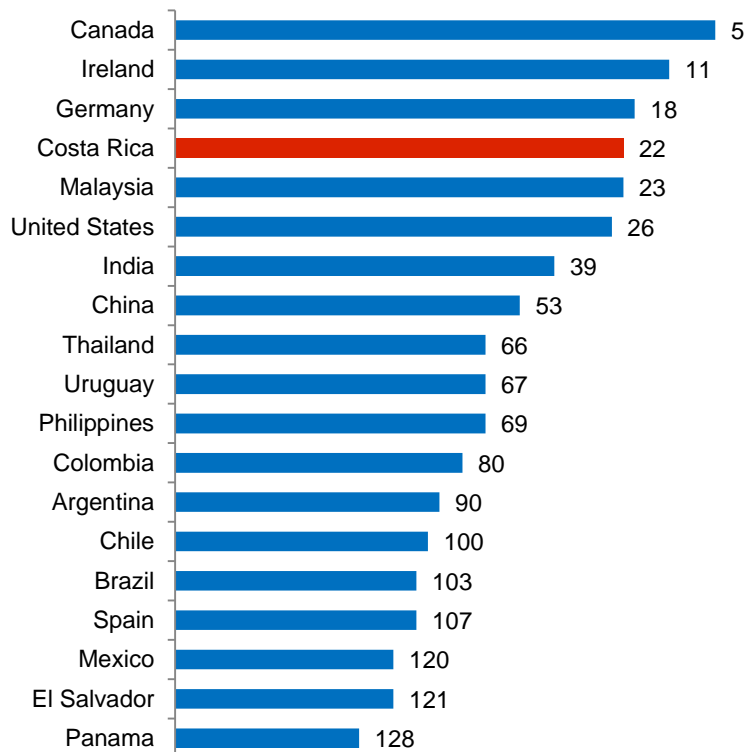
*NEASC New England Association of Schools and Colleges*

*MSA – Middle Status Association of Colleges and Schools*

Other recognized schools are Humboldt School (which offers English and German recognized by the German Government), Franco Institute (bilingual program in French with recognition from the Government of France) and Weizman School (Hebrew and English).

Costa Rica's educational system is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> the highest in Latin America. (See chart below).

## Quality of the Educational System Rank



Source: World Economic Forum.  
The Global Competitiveness Report 2010 - 2011