

# *Experiencing Costa Rica's Pura Vida*

When Christopher Columbus sailed along the east coast of a new land more than 500 years ago, he encountered natives adorned in gold and other jewelry and he dubbed the area "rich coast" – *Costa Rica* in Spanish.

Today, Costa Rica's riches and ecological diversity are more precious than what Columbus observed because they can be experienced and enjoyed by most everyone.

A small Central America country, Costa Rica encompasses just under 20,000 square miles about twice the size of Massachusetts, yet it offers visitors an opportunity to experience ***pura vida*** – the pure life in paradise to be found in one of Earth's most diverse ecosystems. In fact, a quarter of the country benefits from some form of environmental preservation.

For example, **La Amistad National Park** provides a uniquely biodiverse experience featuring cloud forests, glacial valleys and a rare tropical alpine grassland. It's also home to Cerro Chirripó, the country's highest mountain.

Most major tour operators offer various travel itineraries ranging from five to more than ten days exploring the three primary regions of the country. Don't overlook smaller, lesser-known tour companies with long-standing roots in the country and the ability to customize a vacation to the traveler's precise needs and desires. They also may provide the best connections to local excursions and day-trip experiences.

Travelers seeking a health and wellness vacation will find various spa resorts and accommodations ranging from modest to luxury budgets in the Arenal volcano and hot springs area. A typical action-packed day might include hiking a lush rain forest, visiting a butterfly garden and **Maleku Indian village**, enjoying a swim at the Fortuna waterfall and viewing the volcano. The more adventurous and adrenaline-driven traveler might opt instead for ziplining across the rainforest canopy, rappelling a waterfall or rafting Class II-III white water.

On my last visit to **Puerto Limón**, via a Caribbean cruise port call, we enjoyed a Tortuguero Canal boat tour, a rainforest hike and banana plantation visit – all in a single day – with time remaining to shop for local souvenirs before returning to the ship. Meanwhile, from the Pacific coast port of **Puntarenas**, I recommend exploring for crocodiles on the Terraba River – just keep your hands inside the boat.

Most of us would certainly enjoy a little beach or poolside R&R at an all-inclusive **Guanacaste** resort near the country's northwest coast. A few resorts there offer golf vacations and most offer daily excursions into the rainforest, sunset cruises on the Pacific and many other tours of the region. The closest international airport is Liberia.

Costa Rica's other major international airport serves the capital city of **San José**. Visitors arriving in the capital should spend at least a day exploring the city, including a few hours at the **Jade Museum** noted for conservation of Central America's archaeological heritage and pre-Columbian art.

January and February are considered the best months to visit Costa Rica avoiding the rainy season and holiday crowds, while May to November offers vacationers plenty of outdoor adventure activities at low-season prices interrupted only by tropical rain showers from time to time.

Once you experience the *pura vida* of Costa Rica, you definably will want to revisit this biodiverse country.



*Costa Rica invites travelers who respect the environment to visit and enjoy one of the most diverse and protected ecosystems in the world.*