



## ROAD TRAVEL REPORT: COSTA RICA



### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO...

- Costa Rica has a better safety record than most Latin American countries. However, the road crash rate is high compared to many industrialized countries.
- Road safety campaigns and increased enforcement of existing laws are helping to reduce road risk.
- Driving at night is very dangerous, due in large part to difficult road conditions, a high incidence of drunk driving, and animals and pedestrians on the road.
- Expect drivers to drive irresponsibly; allow plenty of room for other vehicles.
- Road crashes are the third leading cause of death in Costa Rica. Only 24% of drivers wear seatbelts.
- There are 10.5 fatalities per 10,000 vehicles in Costa Rica, compared to 2.0 in the US.



### ROAD REALITIES

#### DRIVER BEHAVIORS

- Driving under the influence of alcohol is a leading factor in road crashes.
- Of those killed in road crashes, 50 percent had some alcohol in their blood stream.
- Drivers may tailgate, fail to signal, and often make turns from across one or two lanes of traffic or attempt to pass on blind turns.
- Drivers do not always respect right of way.
- Red lights are treated as stop signs; drivers stop on red and proceed if no traffic is coming.
- Stop signs often are treated as yield signs; drivers slow down without stopping.
- Drivers frequently use the horn as a warning to other drivers. Visitors should follow this custom.
- It is possible to get a driving license without having adequate training.

#### GENERAL ROAD CONDITIONS

- There are 35,583 km (21,110 miles) of all-weather roads, including 412 miles of the Pan American Highway.
- Most regions are accessible by road. Less than 25% of roads are paved. Only 10% of the road network is in good condition. Large potholes are common.
- Road markings generally are poor and shoulders. Center stripes are rare.
- Traffic signs frequently are inadequate, even on main highways and are often poorly placed or obscured.
- Road conditions can change rapidly due to extreme weather and heavy rains. Check with residents or local authorities regarding current road conditions on planned routes.
- Most bridges are one-lane. Many bridges are wooden. Some have no railings. Others are unstable; may cause cars to go off the road into the water.



- Use extra caution on mountain roads, due to fog, landslides, or flooded road sections.
- Many roads leading to beaches, rural areas and out-of-the-way locations are unpaved. High-clearance rugged suspension or 4WD vehicles may be necessary.
- Roads to major tourist beaches are currently being upgraded. Ask at hotel for status of specific roads.
- Be alert for cement, asphalt or steel bumps. They often are unmarked and are extremely hazardous.
- Be alert for fallen rocks on road surface and *vados*—broad dips in the roads—that act as creek beds in heavy rains. They are dangerous if driven at high speeds.
- A branch or boulder placed on the road may indicate a road crash or a stalled car around the next curve.
- Be alert for unmarked, one-lane roads and one-lane sections of highways.
- Smaller roads are rarely marked with street signs.
- The Northern Zone is a mountainous region with many winding roads.
- The Pan American Highway links Costa Rica to neighboring countries. Several stretches can be dangerous. Buses and trucks often are overloaded.
- All-weather roads link the Central Valley’s main cities to each other and to the Caribbean and Pacific coasts.

- Be alert for bicyclist and pedestrians on roads, even on major highways, at all times of day.

■ Common traffic signs

Alto Adelante	Stop Ahead
Ceda de Paso	Give Way
Velocidad Maxima	Maximum Speed
Velocidad Minima	Minimum Speed
Mantega su Derecha	Stay to the Right
Mantenga su Izquierda	Stay to the Left
Siga a la Derecha	Continue to the Right
Siga a la Izquierda	Continue to the Left
Siga con Precaución	Continue with Caution
Derrumbes en la Via	Fallen matter on Road
Una Via	One Way Traffic
Doble Via	Two Way Traffic
Trabajos en la Carretera	Men Working on Road
No Hay Paso	No Passage
Despacio	Slowly
Sin Salida	Road has no Exit
No Estacionar	No Parking
Area de Neblina	Cloudy, Misty, Foggy
Puente	Bridge
Peaje	Tool Both
Parada de Buses	Bus Station
Parada de Taxis	Taxi Stop
Parqueo	Parking Lot
Semáforo	Traffic Light

SOME GOOD ROADS IN COSTA RICA

ROAD	CONDITIONS
ROAD TO PLAYA DEL HERMOSA & PLAYA PANAMA (LIBERIA-COMUNIDAD-SARDINAL)	In very good condition.
SAN JOSÉ TO LIMON (HIGHWAY 32—THE GUÁPILES HIGHWAY)	Well-maintained.
PALMAR NORTE TO DOMINICAL	Good paved road.
UVITA TO DOMINICAL	Recently paved; in good condition.
SAN ISIDRO TO DOMINICAL	In good condition.
ZARCERO-SAN CARLOS (CIUDAD QUESADA)-LA FORTUNA-ARENAL LAKE AND VOLCANO ARENAL NATIONAL PARK	In good condition; clearly signposted.



**URBAN TRAVEL**

- Urban road maintenance varies from fair to poor.
- The roads of many larger cities and towns are laid out on a grid, with an *Avenida* Central running east-west and a *Calle* Central, running north-south. Roads (*avenidas*) paralleling the *Avenida* Central have odd route numbers if located to its north and even route numbers if located to the south. Roads (*calles*) paralleling the *Calle* Central have even route numbers if

located to its west and odd, if located to the east. A dead-end road off an *avenida* or *calle* is indicated by a route number with *bis* at the end.

- When receiving or giving directions, include local landmarks nearest the destination. Residents, especially taxi drivers, may not be able to find specific street numbers.
- Park in guarded parking lots when possible.

SAN JOSE:	CONDITIONS	USEFUL INFORMATION
	<p>Driving is not recommended. Drivers often drive irresponsibly.</p> <p>All roads are one-way, many are unmarked by a road sign. Traffic frequently gridlocks. Roads are often in poor condition; potholes and cracks are common.</p> <p>Roads around the La Coca-Cola—the largest local bus station—are narrow, winding, and crowded with market traders.</p> <p>Narrow, poorly maintained sidewalks increase risks for pedestrians.</p> <p>Traffic lights are hung about 5 meters above your head and are difficult to see. Watch the traffic and other pedestrians to see when it is safe to cross.</p> <p>Drivers seldom stop for pedestrians. If the light begins to change, move quickly. Avoid jaywalking.</p> <p>Pickpocketing is a problem, especially near the Tilarán terminal (for buses to and from Monteverde).</p> <p>Car theft and burglary are problems. Use a guarded parking lot in the city center.</p>	<p>Distances are short. Walking is sometimes faster than taking a bus or taxi when traffic is congested.</p> <p>Lacks a central bus station. Schedules are available at ICT tourist office.</p> <p>Buses to the suburbs are available; fares are inexpensive. Board buses from the front. Have correct change or small bills. Buses tend to be crowded.</p> <p>Bus stops in city center are clearly marked with a sign stating line up (<i>Haga fila</i>). Use bell to exit bus.</p> <p>Vertical electronic bars count passengers when boarding; do not stop between bars or you will be counted twice; driver will be responsible for a double fare.</p> <p>Taxis are relatively easy to find downtown San José, unless it is raining. Fares are inexpensive. Hotels often will call for a taxi upon request.</p> <p>Licensed taxis are red with a yellow triangle on the side and San José Publico (SJP) license plates.</p> <p><i>Avenida</i> Central is a pedestrian-only street located near the Cultural Plaza.</p> <p>Cycling in city center is not recommended. Provisions for cycling are good in the suburbs or the Parque la Sabana.</p> <p>Bus service is available to neighboring countries.</p> <p>Juan Santamaría International Airport serves the city. Taxis and buses are available to San José or Alajuela. Airport taxis are orange, have set fares, and can be called or hailed.</p>
PUERTO LIMÓN:	CONDITIONS	USEFUL INFORMATION
	<p>Traffic can be congested. If possible, arrive during the day to get oriented.</p>	<p>Highway 32 (the Guápiles Highway) links the city to of San Jose. Is well-maintained.</p> <p>Inter-city buses are available to major cities and towns.</p> <p>Taxis are readily available, especially near bus stops. They can be hired for long-distance journeys to Cahuita and Puerto Viejo.</p>



**RURAL TRAVEL**

- Rural road maintenance varies from fair to poor.
- Rural roads tend to be narrow and winding.
- Many roads wind through steep volcanic valleys or mountainous areas.
- Intersections are often unmarked.
- There are a high number of slow, heavy vehicles in the traffic mix. Drivers often pass trucks irresponsibly.
- Slow-moving trucks tend to drive down the center of the road.
- Top off gas tank regularly in areas where gas stations are scarce.

**PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL**

- In larger cities, drivers seldom yield to pedestrians, but are more likely to yield to pedestrians in smaller towns.
- Generally there is no separation of pedestrian, bicycle and motorized traffic.
- Dense, fast-moving traffic makes it difficult for pedestrians to cross roads safely, particularly outside of San José.
- Pedestrians may encounter uneven surfaces, open drainage ditches, holes, sharp objects (such as broken off sign posts), metal garbage receptacles, objects protruding from buildings, and telephone pole support cables on roads and sidewalks.
- Pedestrians account for 78 percent of road fatalities.

**NIGHT TRAVEL**

- Poor road conditions and the high incidence of driving under the influence of alcohol make driving at night dangerous.

- Vehicles often break down and are difficult to see in the dark.
- Be alert for animals laying on the road surface. Animals are attracted by the warmth of the road surface and are difficult to see at night. In mountainous regions frequent fog and rain add to night travel risk on rural roads and roads.
- Be alert for pedestrians and cyclists.

**SEASONAL TRAVEL**

- Flash floods, mudslides and washouts may occur during the rainy season. In some areas, entire concrete bridges collapse and are swept away. Landslides are especially common on the highway between the Caribbean city of Limon and San José.
- Roads can be rutted, slippery and difficult to negotiate during the rainy season.
- The annual rainfall on the Osa Peninsula ranges from 160 to 280 inches. During winter (April to November) daily rains are common. There are generally heavy afternoon and evening showers. Rains can be torrential and may cause flooding. Many areas, including Corcovado National Park, can become inaccessible.
- Heavier traffic on public holidays increases road risk. Public holidays in Costa Rica include the following: January 1, New Year's Day; March 19, Feast of San José (St Joséph); Good Friday; April 11, Anniversary of the Battle of Rivas; May 1, Labor Day; June 11, Corpus Christi; August 2, Our Lady of Los Angeles; September 15, Independence Day; October 12, Columbus Day; December 25, Christmas Day.

**SEASONAL CONDITIONS IN REGIONS OF COSTA RICA**

REGION	RAINY SEASON	DRY SEASON
GUANACASTE REGION	November through April	Rainfall is not generally a problem in the remaining months
NORTHERN ZONE	Late February to early May (may have wet spells during the dry season)	Mid-April through December



SEASONAL CONDITIONS IN REGIONS OF COSTA RICA (CONTINUED)

REGION	RAINY SEASON	DRY SEASON
MONTEVERDE REGION:	Fog and rain occur most of the year in higher regions	
CENTRAL PACIFIC REGION	May to November. Can be very humid any time	
SAN JOSE AND THE CENTRAL VALLEY		December to April
SOUTHERN PACIFIC ZONE	Mountainous region with high humidity and dense vegetation	
CARIBBEAN COAST ZONE	July and December—heaviest rains January and November—higher winds and some rain	Mid-August through early November are the driest months; February through May have light rains
TALAMANCA	Mountainous, rainforests	

POLICE ENFORCEMENT

- Speed limits, seat-belt laws and other traffic laws are not always enforced. When enforced, police may use radar.
- Transit Police (*Transitos*) are responsible for traffic enforcement. Police cars or motorcycles are light blue with blue lights.
- Police commonly wave motorists to the side for roadside inspection of license, vehicle registration, and insurance information.



ROAD REGULATIONS

- Traffic drives on the right.
- A national driver's license or International Driving Permit (IDP) is required. An IDP is a legal identification document that translates driving license information into 11 languages, including English, and can only be used as a supplement to a valid driving license. IDPs are available through AAA. Phone: 1-800-222-4357; website: <http://www.aaa.com>.
- Speed limits:
  - Most primary roads 88 km/hr (55 mph).
  - Secondary roads 60 km/hr (38 mph) or less.
- Seat belts are required.
- Warning triangles are required to indicate road crashes or broken down vehicles.
- Vehicles brought into the country must have the title document, emergency triangles, fire extinguisher and headrests on the driver and passenger seats.
- Liability insurance is required.
- Laws regarding vehicle inspection are enforced.
- If a traffic light is red and there is a stop sign on the same pole, stopping is absolutely required. Driver may not continue until light turns green.
- If involved in a road crash:
  - Contact Traffic Police (Phone: 222-9330). Contact Red Cross (Phone: 128) or emergency rescue services (Phone: 911).



- Do not move vehicle until arrival of police and INS inspector (state insurance company representative; phone: 800-800-8000).
- Do not leave the road crash scene, as the other driver may tamper with the evidence. Make a statement only to the police.
- Make a sketch of the road crash scene, exchange information with other drivers, and get the legal identification numbers (cedulas) of witnesses.
- Police cannot keep any documents unless you are driving while intoxicated. Ask the police to test the other driver if driving under the influence of alcohol seems to be a factor.
- Police cannot collect fines on the spot for road crashes. They will issue a “green ticket,” which the driver must take it to nearest municipal office or traffic court within eight days. Make certain that the police report is on record. **Then** make a statement regarding the road crash. (Failing to make a statement often results in being declared at fault.)
- Rental agency will handle subsequent process.



## ROAD WATCH

### SOME DANGEROUS ROADS IN COSTA RICA

ROAD	CONDITIONS
<b>THE PAN-AMERICAN HIGHWAY</b>	Generally is in good condition. Mountainous sections are prone to landslides. Many sections steep gradients. Fog and hairpin turns are factors in many road crashes. Heavy bus and trucks traffic.
<b>PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY BETWEEN SAN JOSE AND SAN ISIDRO</b>	Large potholes in some sections. Heavy bus and truck traffic. Fog and rain are common. Avoid night travel.
<b>PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY FROM SAN ISIDRO DE EL GENERAL TO CARTAGO</b>	Named <i>Cerro de la Muerte</i> (hill of death). Is badly potholed; has steep curves. There are many fatal head-on collisions, partly due to bus and truck drivers driving irresponsibly.
<b>PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY BELOW CARTAGO</b>	Passes through Costa Rica’s largest cloud forest.
<b>SOUTHERN NICOYA PENINSULA</b>	Road network is sparse; some villages lack road access. Most roads are in very poor condition. Few are paved; potholes are frequent. Road signs are often lacking. Roads may be impassible in the rainy season. In dry season, they are dusty. Deep ruts are common. Drivers must ford rivers where bridges are lacking. 4WD is recommended. Ask residents about road conditions. Gas stations are rare.
<b>ROADS FROM LIBERIA TO RINCON DE LA VIEJA NATIONAL PARK</b>	Roads are unpaved. If possible, avoid driving during the rainy season (May-Nov.). 4WD and great caution is necessary.
<b>JUNTAS TO THE TILARAN-SANTA ELENA ROAD</b>	Road to Juntas from the Canas-Largeto road is paved. Road narrows and climbs steeply from Juntas to the Tilaran-Santa Elena Road. This section is unpaved. Surface consists of dirt (mud during rains) and large rocks. 4WD recommended.

(Continued on next page.)



**SOME DANGEROUS ROADS IN COSTA RICA (CONTINUED)**

<b>ROAD</b>	<b>CONDITIONS</b>
<b>TILARAN TO SANTA ELENA</b>	Steep, rocky, mountainous road. Many sharp turns; one turn is on the edge of a steep, sheer cliff. Driving at night not recommended
<b>QUEPOS TO OROTINA</b>	High and mountainous route; longer travel times.
<b>JACÓ TO QUEPOS ROAD</b>	Paved; potholes are plentiful. Lacks line markings and safety signs. Be alert for narrow one-way bridges, pedestrians, cyclists, horses, and other animals. Night travel is not recommended.
<b>PARRITA TO QUEPOS SECTION OF THE JACÓ TO QUEPOS ROAD</b>	Wide paved road; lacks center line markings. Single-lane bridges are marked with road markings and 55-gallon yellow drums.
<b>“COSTANERA SUR” (PACIFIC COSTAL HIGHWAY) FROM QUEPOS (MANUEL ANTONIO NATIONAL PARK) SOUTH TO DOMINICAL</b>	Dirt or gravel road; difficult driving. Road is being upgraded. Be alert for constructon zones. Has many narrow, one way bridges.
<b>UVITA TO PALMAR NORTE</b>	Rough dirt road; travel is possible only during dry season . 4WD necessary.
<b>OROSI TO TAPANTI NATIONAL PARK</b>	Very rough surface. Frequent rains.
<b>HEREDIA TO BARVA NATIONAL PARK AND BRAVA VOLCANO</b>	Very rough surface for the final 2 miles.
<b>BAGACES TO PALO VERDE NATIONAL PARK</b>	25 km of rough road.
<b>ROADS IN ARENAL NATIONAL PARK</b>	4WD vehicles are recommended in rainy season; high clearance vehicles are useful in drier seasons.
<b>CÓBANO TO MONTEZUMA</b>	Final hill down to Montezuma is extremely steep. Driving should not be attempted in an ordinary car when road is wet.
<b>ROUTE TO "PARQUE NACIONAL LA CANGREJA": SAN JOSÉ-CIUDAD COLÓN-PURISCAL-SANTA MARTA-MASTATAL</b>	Pavement ends about 15 miles beyond Puriscal (Santiago de Puriscal). Night travel is not recommended.
<b>GUÁPILES HIGHWAY (HIGHWAY 32)</b>	<p>One of Costa Rica’s busiest highways. Traffic is seldom congested, due to passing lanes on mountains.</p> <p>Built in a region of high mountains, steep cliffs and frequent landslides. Many sections are steep and winding. The stretch through Braulio Carillo National Park has many sharp curves.</p> <p>Often fog-bound. Frequent rains, especially in July and December. Rainfall is lowest in mid-August to the first week of November. Costa Rica tourism and travel bureau, “Atlantic / Caribbean Coast Travel Tips: How to Get There,” 7/6/09</p> <p>Possible detour: Highway 4.</p> <p>Also known as the Braulio Carillo Highway. Links San José, Guápiles and Limon.</p>

**SOME DANGEROUS ROADS IN COSTA RICA (CONTINUED)**

<b>ROAD</b>	<b>CONDITIONS &amp; USEFUL INFORMATION</b>
<b>TUNNEL ZURQUI</b>	Located on the Guápiles Highway, shortly before Braulio Carillo National Park. Also known as "The Tunnel of Death." Has a high frequency of serious and fatal crashes. Lighting is poor. The road is narrow and has many sharp curves.  Reflectors were installed in the tunnel and on sections of road leading to it June 2009. Travelers say the reflectors have reduced road risk at night.
<b>ROADS IN CORCOVADO NATIONAL PARK</b>	Dirt tracks requiring 4WD. Inaccessible during rainy season.
<b>ROUTE 21 (SAN PABLO-JICARAL-LEPANTO-PLAYA NARANJO-PAQUERA-TAMBOR)</b>	From Playa Naranjo to Paquera is gravel and dirt; in very poor condition. Extremely muddy during rainy season. Has been upgraded from Paquera to Tambor.
<b>PARRITA TO MASTATAL (VIA LA VASCONIA, LA FILA, &amp; SAN MIGUEL)</b>	Rough route; high clearance vehicle recommended even in dry season. 4WD necessary in rainy season.  Parrita-Vista del Mar-La Gloria-Guarumal-Puriscal-Mastatal is a longer, smoother alternate route and is navigable by two-wheel drive vehicles.
<b>TILARAN TO MONTEVERDE VIA QUEBRADA GRANDE</b>	Paved to Quebrada; 40 kms to Monteverde is gravel. Heavily potholed; very difficult drive in rainy season. High clearance or 4WD vehicle recommended.
<b>LAS JUNTAS TO MONTEVERDE</b>	Paved within 14 km of Las Juntas; gravel for remaining 24 kms to Monteverde.
<b>SARDINAL TO MONTEVERDE</b>	First 12 km, under construction. Last 26 kms is gravel.
<b>ROAD FROM THE LAGARTO RIVER TO SANTA ELENA &amp; MONTEVERDE</b>	Dirt/gravel road; 4WD recommended. Impassable in rainy season.
<b>PALMAR NORTE TO SIERPE</b>	First three miles, paved; remainder is gravel/dirt. Has many potholes.
<b>ROAD FROM CARTAGO TO IRAZU VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK</b>	Winding, mountainous road; in good condition.
<b>SANTA ROSA NATIONAL PARK: MAIN ROAD FROM UPPER CAMPING GROUNDS TO THE BEACH</b>	Pothole-filled, dirt road with a long, steep descent. May not be passable even in the dry season.
<b>PARAISO-OROSI -TAPANTI NATIONAL PARK</b>	Winding road with steep descent. Road from Orisi to Tapanti National Park has a well maintained dirt/gravel surface.
<b>CAHUITA TO PUERTO VIEJO</b>	Many large potholes; pavement is lacking in some sections. Road conditions worsen near Puerto Viejo.



## ROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

### TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

#### BUSES

- Public transportation is well developed.
- Public transportation safety is fair; the safety record of some bus companies is poor.
- San José is the public transport center of Costa Rica. If traveling from region to region, it is often easiest to return to San José and then travel to the other region.
- Regular bus service is available to most towns; buses often are overcrowded. Overcrowding is very common on Friday night, Saturday morning and holidays.
- Three types of buses that serve Costa Rica are:
  - Local buses: Inexpensive but slow; stop often. Generally in poor condition.
  - Express buses: Run between San José and other major cities and beach towns. They are generally newer and more comfortable.
  - Luxury buses and minibuses: Serve tourist destinations. Minibuses often cater to businessmen and tourists, are more expensive than buses. Sometimes give door-to-door service.
- Buses are involved in fatal road crashes five times more often than cars and heavy vehicles.
- Flat tires, late departures, overcrowding and mechanical difficulties are common on buses.
- Bus drivers may go through stop signs at 80 mph.

#### TAXIS

- Taxis are readily available in most urban areas. Can be hailed.
- Licensed taxis are red with a yellow triangle containing the taxi's ID number on the side. (Juan Santamaría International Airport taxis are orange.)
- Taxis are metered. On shorter trips be sure the meter is activated. Negotiate fares for longer trips.
- Before boarding, give specific destination directions and ask if the driver knows where it is.

- For security reasons, make sure the cab has working door handles and locks. Do not ride in the front seat with the driver.
- Outside of San José taxis often are large 4WD vehicles. Drivers often know the area well. May act as guides.

#### RENTAL CARS

- San José has rental agencies for major companies and local firms. There are few rental agencies outside San José.
- Drivers must be at least 21 years old (25 for some agencies) and have a valid driver's license and major credit card in their name. Most agencies require a \$1,500 deposit.
- Most rental vehicles are standards. Automatics are available; reserve well in advance. If traveling off the main roads, consider a 4WD vehicle.
- C.D.W. (Collision Damage Waiver) insurance is required. C.D.W. does not cover personal possessions.
- Rental cars are fairly expensive, partly due to insurance costs. The deductible will be \$750 or more, unless additional coverage is acquired.
- Purchasing locally valid theft insurance is advisable.
- Rental cars are easy for thieves to identify. Do not leave GPS units or anything else of value in view when parked. Guarded parking lots are recommended.
- Note any pre-existing damage on the rental contract, or charges will be assessed. Check the tires. Good tires, if properly inflated, lessen the damage to vehicle suspension and axles.
- One-way rentals are not available.

#### BICYCLES AND MOTORCYCLES

Cycling is not recommended on the Nicoya Peninsula due to poor road conditions. Mountain bikes are advisable due to the terrain.



SOME DANGEROUS ROADS FOR CYCLISTS

ROADS	PROBLEMS	GOOD SECTIONS
PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY FROM SAN JOSE TO PUNTARENAS	Many steep sections; traffic is often very congested	Rest of the route north to the border with Nicaragua
PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY SOUTH OF SAN JOSE TO SAN ISIDRO EL GENERAL	Congested traffic. Steep curves and head on collisions are common on the Cerro de la Muete section.	Rest of the route south to the border with Panama
FROM SAN JOSE TO GUAPILES THROUGH BAURILLO CARILLO NATIONAL PARK	Three-lane in many places; allows vehicles to travel at higher speeds; exhaust fumes high	Past Guapilles to Limon is a bit safer for cyclists

CRIME & SECURITY

- Avoid public disturbances. Obtain information about demonstrations from the US Embassy, hotel personnel, tour guides or local news.
- Crime is increasing. Incidents are most common in downtown San José, in buses, airports, bus stations, national parks, other tourist areas and at beaches.
- Traveling during the day and in groups reduces the risk of being a victim of crime.
- Carjackings are increasing.
- Tourists are sometimes targeted for violent crime. Gang muggings have occurred on busy streets even during daytime.
- Local law enforcement agencies are under-staffed or ineffective, especially in remote rural areas.
- Theft risk is high at bus stations and places where tourists often leave cars unattended to see crocodiles, especially near the bridge at Tarcoles River on the road to Jacó.

- Credit card fraud is a growing problem. Unofficial moneychangers may give counterfeit currency.
- San José
  - The risk of theft is particularly high at the La Coca Cola bus station.
  - Pickpocketing and purse slashing are common, especially near hospitals, on public buses, and on crowded streets.
  - Avoid the district northwest of the Central Market.
  - Walking in the Parque Nacional late at night is risky.
  - Walk around street vendors rather than between the vendor and a building.
  - Do not park on the street or leave car unattended, even in front of a hotel.



EMERGENCY INFORMATION

TOURIST ASSISTANCE

- Availability of roadside assistance is fair to poor.
- To reach someone who speaks English in San José, call the following:
  - Fire—phone: 118.
  - Police, ambulance or general emergencies—phone: 911.

- Call the Red Cross (*Cruz Roja*) for an ambulance. Phone: 21 5818.
- Outside of San José, call the *Guardia de Asistencia Rural* for a medical emergency. Phone: 127.



- Tourist facilities generally are adequate. English is spoken widely.
- For tourist information contact:
  - Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (Costa Rica Tourist Board) at Edificio Genaro Valverde, Calles 5 y 7, Avenida 4, 1000 San José, Costa Rica. Mailing address is PO Box 777, 1000 San José, Costa Rica. Phone: 223 1733, fax: 223 5452 or 255 4997; website: [www.tourism-costarica.com](http://www.tourism-costarica.com).
  - Cámara Nacional de Turismo (CANATUR), Apartado 828, 1000 San José, Costa Rica. Phone: 234 6222, fax: 253 8102; email: [canatur@tourism.co.cr](mailto:canatur@tourism.co.cr).
  - For extensive information on Costa Rica's national parks, see Richard Garrigues' website at [www.angelfire.com/bc/gonebirding/crnps.html#Barracol](http://www.angelfire.com/bc/gonebirding/crnps.html#Barracol).
  - Website for maps and other useful info: [www.infocostarica.com/maps/cool\\_map\\_parques\\_pu.htm](http://www.infocostarica.com/maps/cool_map_parques_pu.htm).
  - Website for current weather conditions by city: [www.costarica.com/weather/#Costa%20Rica%20From%20the%20Sky](http://www.costarica.com/weather/#Costa%20Rica%20From%20the%20Sky).

#### **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

- Costa Rica is an earthquake-prone country. For general information about natural disaster preparedness, consult Federal Emergency Medical Assistance (FEMA). Website: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).

#### **MEDICAL CARE**

- Medical care is adequate in San José; outside San José, can be more limited.
- Response time for road crashes has been reduced greatly.
- Doctors and hospitals often require immediate cash payment for health services.
- Most prescription drugs are available. Some are sold over the counter.
- Pharmacists often prescribe drugs for minor ailments.
- For a list of local doctors and medical facilities, consult the US Embassy in San Jose at <http://usembassy.or.cr>.

- A hospital in San José: Clinica Biblica, Avenida 14 between Calle Central and Calle 1. English-speaking doctors. Phone: 506/257-5252. Emergencies: 506/257-0466.
- If medicines containing habit-forming drugs or narcotics (cough medicine, diuretics, heart drugs, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, antidepressants, stimulants, etc.) are needed, bring a prescription or written statement from physician indicating this requirement. Declare such drugs or medications at Customs. Label medicines clearly. Bring only the amount normally required.
- U.S. medical insurance is not always valid in other countries. Medicare and Medicaid do not cover medical expenses rendered outside the U.S. Medigap policies (plans C through J) cover 80 percent of what Medicare would cover in the U.S. for the first 60 days of each trip; a \$250 deductible applies. Maximum lifetime limit of \$50,000. Medicare Advantage may offer coverage for care abroad. Phone: 800-633-4227; website: [www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/11037.pdf](http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/11037.pdf).

#### **EMBASSY INFORMATION**

- Embassy of Costa Rica, 2114 S Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20008. Phone: (202) 328-6628; website is <http://www.costarica.com/embassy>.
- US Embassy is in Pavas, San José. Phone: (506) 220-3050, after-hours emergency phone: (506) 220-3127; ask for the duty officer. Website: <http://usembassy.or.cr>.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Contact the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT)

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Fax: (301) 983-3663

Website: <http://www.asirt.org>

E-mail: [asirt@asirt.org](mailto:asirt@asirt.org).



## LANGUAGE TIPS

- ***Please slow down.***  
Por favor reduzca la velocidad.  
Por-fah-vor ray-DUZ-ca la ve-lo-see-DAD.
- ***Please stop. I need to get out now.***  
Pare por favor. Necesito bajarme ahora.  
PAH-ray por fah-vor. Ne-se-SEE-tow ba-HAR-may a-ORa.
- ***Let me off at the next stop.***  
Permítame bajar en la próxima parada.  
Per-MEE-tamay sa-LEER en la PROX-eema pa-RAda.
- ***Does this taxi (this car) have seat belts?***  
Tiene este taxi/vehículo cinturones de seguridad?  
Tee-enay estay taxi/vay-EE-kulow sintu-ROW-nays day segur-eeDAD?
- ***Call for help!***  
Pida ayuda por favor!  
Pee-dah eye-YOU-da por fah-vor!
- ***Is it safe to travel by road at night?***  
Es seguro viajar por la carretera de noche?  
Ays-se-GUro via-HAR por la car-ay-TAYra day Nochay?

ASIRT is a non-profit humanitarian organization established in memory of Aron Sobel, age 25, who was killed along with 22 other passengers in a Pamukkale Bus Company crash on the roads of Turkey. © ASIRT 2009

Disclaimer: ASIRT provides this information as a service to the traveling public. This report is intended to represent general road conditions, driving environment, quality of public transportation, medical care and emergency response. It may not be totally accurate in a specific location or circumstance.