AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE
FIELD GUIDE

Costa Rica

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on Central America (CENTAM).

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Costa Rican society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

Please scroll over images to view captions.

ECFG Republic of Costa Rica

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing.

For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature

in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains –which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

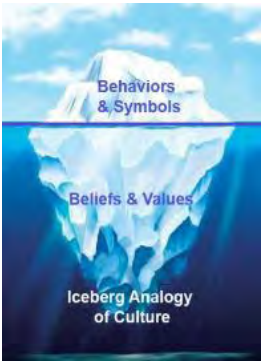
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through CENTAM, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

CENTAM occupies a narrow isthmus that connects the continents of North and South America and comprises 7 countries: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Archaeological finds suggest nomadic hunter-gatherers inhabited the region as early as 9,000 BC. Eventually, these groups adopted small-scale agriculture, and beginning around 2,500 BC, erected permanent farming settlements.

Around 1,000 BC, the Maya civilization emerged in southern Mexico and Guatemala, flourishing over subsequent centuries as it spread across Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and parts of Nicaragua. At their civilization's height from 250-900 AD, the Maya exceled in mathematics, astronomy, agriculture, and art, constructing magnificent cities featuring massive stone pyramids, temples, and palaces. Although Maya society and culture encompassed nearly the entire CENTAM isthmus by the 10th century, the Maya remained politically fragmented. The Maya world was characterized by independent, adversarial city-states competing for power and resources.

In the early 16th century, Spanish explorers arrived on the Panamanian coast, while others entered the CENTAM isthmus from Mexico. Seeking wealth and enhanced social status, along with an ambition to spread Catholicism, the Spanish swiftly and violently subdued the Maya and other indigenous communities. By 1540, the Spanish had consolidated rule over most of CENTAM as conflict, disease, and famine decimated the region's indigenous population. Uniting all CENTAM territories except Belize and Panama as the Kingdom of Guatemala, the Spanish ruled the region for the next 300 years. Meanwhile, Panama became part of the Spanish-ruled Viceroyalty of Peru, while most Belizean territory came under British control.

In the late 18th century, mounting unrest over colonial tyranny led to nationalist independence movements. All the CENTAM states but Belize and Panama briefly united as the Federal Republic of Central America in 1821. Politically fractured, the union quickly disintegrated, and within 2 decades, most CENTAM territories had become independent nations. Panama was a part of Colombia until it gained independence with the support of the US in 1903. Meanwhile, Belize remained under British control well into the 20th century.

Following independence, the CENTAM nations grappled with decades of political upheaval, poor governance, and poverty. By the 1960s, right-wing military dictators ruled over much of the region. Years of profound economic disparities and government-sponsored abuse flamed insurgencies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, eventually flaring into brutal civil wars. As part of its anti-communist agenda, the US was highly influential, even actively involved, in many of these conflicts. By contrast, Costa Rica and Belize experienced relative peace. Costa Rica even abolished its military amid other progressive political, social, and environmental reforms.

By the mid-1990s, civil conflict across the region had significantly reduced. Since then, most CENTAM governments have supported mostly stable democratic systems, expanded economic opportunities, and invested in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Despite these improvements, the CENTAM nations remain in various stages of development. Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama have seen the greatest stability and economic growth. By contrast, residents of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua continue to face high rates of poverty, unemployment, and violence.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. All CENTAM states except Belize are presidential republics led by an elected President and legislature. By contrast, Belize is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic parliamentary government led by an elected Prime Minister and legislature. The United Kingdom's hereditary monarch serves as Belize's head-of-state.

While El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua emerged from years of repressive dictatorial rule and protracted civil war by the 1990s, they and the other CENTAM states continue to face challenges to the democratic process. Corruption is widespread, contributing to instability and stifling political and economic progress. In some states, corruption engenders public distrust of democratic institutions and public officials and results in frequent and occasionally violent public protests.

Moreover, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (collectively known as the "Northern Triangle") struggle to curb the illicit drug trafficking industry and high rates of gang violence. In stark

contrast to the other states' internal volatility, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama enjoy minimal violence within stable democracies marked by peaceful and transparent democratic elections.

While some bilateral tensions exist, notably Guatemala's claim to over 1/2 of Belize's territory, most states cooperate in strong regional alliances focused on economic, security, and governance issues. The Northern Triangle nations, for example, work closely to halt the movement of narcotics across borders and diminish the power and influence of organized crime networks. All CENTAM states actively cultivate relations with the US and rely on substantial US military and financial assistance to address regional security and economic concerns.

CENTAM is ethnically diverse. ***Mestizos*** (people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry) comprise about 72% of CENTAM's population, some 20% claim European (white) ancestry, and about 8% are Amerindian or members of indigenous communities. The region is also home to smaller numbers of people of mixed African descent and other minorities. The ethnic makeup of each CENTAM nation varies. For example, a majority of Guatemalans identifies as indigenous, yet few Salvadorans and Costa Ricans do. White and *mestizo* populations hold most of the wealth, political power, and social prestige. By contrast, Amerindians and those of African ancestry generally lack political representation, suffer disproportionately high rates of poverty and disease, and are subject to discrimination and social stigmatization.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. The region's early inhabitants followed a variety of indigenous

religious traditions, worshipping spirits and deities who inhabited the natural environment. The Maya enjoyed a particularly rich and complex belief system that included ancestor veneration and the worship of over 250 gods.

The Spanish introduced Christianity to CENTAM in the early 16th century, forcefully converting the indigenous population to Catholicism, while suppressing traditional beliefs and practices. As a result, Catholicism spread quickly, and the Catholic Church became entrenched in daily life, fundamentally influencing education, social services, and colonial policy. After independence, Church power fluctuated as various political factions supported or opposed Catholicism's influence in the social and political spheres. Meanwhile, Protestantism grew in popularity in British-controlled Belize. In the 20th century, Protestant evangelical movements thrived across the region following the arrival of North American missionaries.

In the latter half of the 20th century, ongoing violence prompted clergy to advocate on behalf of victimized populations and assume influential roles in the resolution of regional conflicts. Across the region today, some religious organizations remain politically involved while others focus on providing important social services. While the Roman Catholic Church still enjoys a privileged status in most countries, all nations but Costa Rica name no official religion and explicitly separate church and state.

The region's population is overwhelmingly Christian: 55% of CENTAM residents identify as Roman Catholic, while 30% are Protestant. Many CENTAM Christians fuse elements of indigenous beliefs with Christian rites and traditions.

Some 9% of regional residents claim no religious affiliation, while some 6% are adherents of traditional beliefs or followers of other faiths, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Baha'I (a belief

system that recognizes the essential worth of all religions and the unity and equality of all people).

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are valued greatly within CENTAM. While the traditional family unit consists of a husband, wife, and their children, Central Americans also maintain strong connections with extended family members. Accordingly, extended kin are influential in family matters, typically live nearby, and are important sources of physical, emotional, and financial support. Children often live with their parents until they marry, though some choose to stay longer. In poorer families, children contribute to the family income from an early age by performing tasks like washing cars, shining shoes, or selling food and trinkets. By contrast, children of wealthy families have comparatively fewer responsibilities.

Urbanization has resulted in changes to family life. Urban residents tend to marry later and have fewer children, resulting in more diverse urban family structures. In the Northern Triangle and other areas, widespread poverty and social instability have significantly disrupted traditional family life, forcing some members to migrate within the country or leave CENTAM altogether.

While close kin ties mean family members have some influence over children’s choice of spouses, men and women generally choose their own partners. Both Spanish traditions and Roman Catholic teachings strongly emphasize the value of marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates have risen in some areas.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

CENTAM's traditional Spanish and Indigenous cultures privileged men as providers and leaders, while casting women in subordinate roles. ***Machismo*** (strong masculine behavior and pride) remains an important element of male identity in the region. While today women and men have equal rights before the law, inequalities between the genders remain.

Women often face discrimination in hiring and promotion, and although they face some barriers to their participation in the political sector, the number of women serving in public office across the region has steadily increased in recent years. Today, women hold a considerable proportion of national and local government positions, and Nicaragua, Panama, and Costa Rica have had female Presidents. Female participation rates in the national legislatures of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua are higher than the US.

Gender-based violence is widespread in some areas. Women are often reluctant to leave abusive partners or report incidences of gender-based violence, considering the abuse to be a private matter. Among reported cases, the prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Abortion laws across the region are highly restrictive and, in recent years, have caused significant public debate. Although homosexuality is legal in every CENTAM nation, laws on same sex marriages varies, some countries have constitutional bans whereas Costa Rica legalized it.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

As a result of centuries of Spanish colonialism throughout the region, Spanish is an official language in every CENTAM country except English-speaking Belize. Despite the prominence of Spanish, the region is linguistically diverse: 26 languages are spoken in Guatemala, 10 in Honduras, 15 in Panama, 14 in Costa Rica, 11 in Nicaragua, 9 in Belize, and 5 in El Salvador. Though most of these languages are indigenous to the region, a few are so-called creole languages combine vocabulary and grammar from indigenous or African languages with English or Spanish.

Some of the region's most widely spoken indigenous languages are Mayan, notably K'iche', Q'eqchi', and Kaqchikel. The systematic suppression of indigenous communities during the colonial era contributed to the demise of many of the region's indigenous languages. In some regions, government-sanctioned violence against indigenous residents in the 20th century prompted many native speakers to abandon their heritage, notably also their languages, to avoid persecution. Despite recent revitalization efforts, some of the region's native languages remain nearly extinct. English is taught in schools across CENTAM as a second language and is especially popular among the educated elite and in the business community.

While communication patterns vary among ethnic groups, CENTAM residents generally demonstrate courtesy, respect, honesty, and patience in interpersonal relations. When conversing, Central Americans tend to be warm, friendly, and eager to extend hospitality, particularly when speaking with family and friends. By contrast, some indigenous groups, such as the Maya, are more reserved in their communication styles, especially with strangers.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers. Education in early CENTAM societies was primarily an informal transfer of skills, values, and beliefs from parents to their children. Scholars believe the Maya employed a more formal education system in which religious leaders taught medicine, history, math, and science to elite children.

During the colonial era, Roman Catholic religious orders became the primary providers of education. While these institutions eventually established schools and universities throughout the region, educational infrastructure remained limited through the 19th century. Moreover, Catholic orders provided only limited instruction to indigenous inhabitants, largely restricting secular education in subjects like math, science, and the humanities to a small population of male Spanish elites.

In the early 19th century, CENTAM states began to expand educational offerings to women and indigenous groups, eventually establishing free and compulsory public-school networks. Today, enrollment rates in primary education are high across CENTAM. Adult literacy rates have risen in recent decades and range from about 83% in Guatemala to 96% in Panama. Challenges to the education systems include uneven access to secondary and post-secondary education, particularly in rural areas, a lack of government funding, and low teacher salaries. In some areas, gang violence and poverty significantly disrupt children's access to education.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in most CENTAM societies, establishing and maintaining relationships with others often takes precedence over accomplishing a task. Consequently, business tends to move more slowly in CENTAM than in the US. To build relations with business partners, Central Americans often engage in a ***sobremesa***, a period of coffee and conversation at the end of a meeting that may include personal questions about family, relationships, or other light topics.

Concepts of personal space in CENTAM also differ from those in the US. Generally, Central Americans stand closer when conversing than Americans. Moreover, while men shake hands in greeting and parting in a similar style to the US, CENTAM women typically greet both men and women with a kiss on the cheek.

The rhythm of daily life changes during national holidays and local celebrations, when most businesses shorten their operating hours and residents engage in various festivities such as parades, feasts, and religious ceremonies. While the CENTAM states observe a variety of public holidays, popular ones include Christmas, Easter, indigenous celebrations, and independence days.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of CENTAM's forms of artistic expression – including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater – reflect a rich combination of Spanish, indigenous, and African influences as well as modern global trends.

Salsa, calypso, and Spanish reggae are prominent musical genres across the region, while jazz is especially popular in Panama. Meanwhile, Afro-Caribbean culture influences music and dance along CENTAM's Caribbean coast. In Belize and Honduras, coastal residents enjoy the rhythmic and drum-based ***punta***, a modernized interpretation of the Garifuna ethnic group's songs and dance. By contrast, Panamanians enjoy the ***congo***, a dance with African roots whereby performers portray a fight with the devil.

Central Americans are skilled in various traditional handicrafts and folk art such as weaving, woodworking, and ceramics, among many others. Maya artisans are famed for their vibrant, woven textiles, while members of Panama's Guna ethnic group weave ***molas***, intricately cut and sewn panels featuring geometric patterns. In El Salvador, artists mimic indigenous weaving techniques to create baskets, hats, and other items from palm leaves. Visual arts traditionally reflected indigenous and Christian motifs but today often incorporate brightly colored rural landscapes.

In the 20th century, poetry became the region's most popular and politically influential literary genre. Today, the work of Rubén Darío, Nicaragua's national poet, is celebrated across Latin America. The region also has produced critically acclaimed novelists, who have chronicled the region's tumultuous history while living in exile abroad. Soccer is by far the most popular sport throughout CENTAM. Residents closely follow local, regional, and international teams, and many enjoy playing in amateur settings in their spare time.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While CENTAM cuisine reflects the region's ethnic and geographic diversity, most dishes tend to be simple and prepared from fresh, seasonal ingredients. Corn is CENTAM's primary staple and prepared in a variety of ways but most commonly as the ***tortilla*** (round, flat bread of ground corn). Rice and black beans are also featured at most meals. Chicken, beef, and pork are prevalent forms of protein in interior regions, while an assortment of seafood is more readily available to residents living along CENTAM's coasts. In addition to native vegetables, the region's residents also enjoy numerous fresh fruits year-round, often juicing or blending them into refreshing drinks.

The overall health of the region's population has improved significantly in recent decades, evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Nevertheless, non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are on the rise and today account for most deaths in the region.

Moreover, communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and hepatitis are prevalent in some rural regions, particularly in areas where residents have limited access to clean water and modern sanitation.

CENTAM nations face several challenges to providing healthcare to their populations. Significant disparities in access to modern healthcare exist between urban and rural areas, where facilities tend to be understaffed, ill-equipped, and limited to basic health services. In some remote rural regions, residents lack access to modern healthcare and instead rely on traditional medicine to treat diseases and ailments.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the region's larger and wealthier communities produced luxury items such as ceramics, art, and woven textiles for local consumption and regional trade, while also practicing subsistence agriculture.

After their 16th century arrival, Spanish colonists developed an agricultural economy centered on the production of various cash crops for export to Europe, primarily on large estates with forced indigenous or African slave labor. The region's first cash crops included cacao and indigo, yet by the 19th century, tobacco, sugar cane, cotton, and bananas dominated exports.

Following independence, conflict and political instability largely hampered economic growth. In the early 20th century, several states came under the economic control of large, multinational corporations that reaped large profits but did little to improve the conditions of the working populations.

By contrast, coffee production in Costa Rica allowed the nation to largely avoid economic downturns, while the 1913 construction of the Panama Canal (a shipping route crossing the CENTAM isthmus) amplified Panama's strategic and economic importance. Today, several states have diversified their economies across numerous sectors, including manufacturing, food processing, transportation, and agriculture. Belize, Costa Rica, and Guatemala have also developed robust tourism industries.

The economic outlook in CENTAM is varied. While all the states struggle with substantial unemployment and poverty, their economies differ significantly. For example, Panama's GDP per capita is CENTAM's highest and more than 5 times that of CENTAM's lowest, Nicaragua and Honduras. While some 22% of Panamanians live below the national poverty line, rates in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Honduras are 25%, 24%, and 64%, respectively. Nevertheless, wealth is unequally distributed in all

the states. Across the region, residents of indigenous or African heritage are much more likely to live in poverty than white or *mestizo* residents.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Since the end of the colonial period, CENTAM states have developed their transportation and communication infrastructure at different rates. As a result, the quality of roads and modern technology varies throughout the region.

Roads form the primary transportation infrastructure across CENTAM, though regularly maintained, paved roadways are generally limited to cities and major highways. Unpaved, poor-quality roads coupled with mountainous terrain and aggressive driving habits make road travel dangerous in some areas. Violent crime and social unrest also threaten some travelers.

While modern information technology is available across CENTAM, Internet usage is highest in Panama, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, where more than 1/2 of the population are regular users. Many CENTAM residents access the Internet primarily through mobile phones.

The region has abundant renewable energy resources. In 2022, renewable sources accounted for almost 98% of electricity production in Costa Rica, 75% in Panama, 66% in Guatemala, and 52% in Honduras compared to just 23% in the US.

The US, European Union, and Canada are the region's largest trading partners. Moreover, the US, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica belong to the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), which liberalizes trade among its members.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize CENTAM society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Cosa Rica.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Located on the narrow Central American isthmus connecting North and South America, Costa Rica was home to several Indigenous populations before becoming a Spanish colony in the mid-16th century. Lack of economic opportunity caused Costa Rica to remain sparsely populated during this period. In the 19th century, the country gained its independence and built a thriving economy based on coffee and bananas. In the 20th century, the coffee and banana industries fueled economic growth, which led to the creation of a strong welfare system. Besides a dictatorship from 1917-19 and civil war in 1948, Costa Rica has been a democracy since the early 20th century. Today, it is one of Latin America's most prosperous and stable countries.

Early History

Before the Spanish arrival in the 16th century, Indigenous peoples inhabited what is now Costa Rica for at least 10,000 years. The Corobicí, Boruca (or Brunka/Brunca), Nahua, Caribs, and Chorotegas were the five main Indigenous groups (see *Political and Social Relations*). These groups spoke distinct languages and frequently battled each other to gain territory. The Chorotegas were the largest group and lived on the Nicoya Peninsula near present-day Nicaragua. Meanwhile, the nomadic Caribs roamed the Caribbean coast. These Indigenous people sustained themselves by hunting, fishing, and growing maize, squash, tubers, and beans.

Spanish Arrival

In 1502, Christopher Columbus became the first European to reach present-day Costa Rica. Columbus arrived in what is now

Puerto Limón and encountered the Caribs, whose attacks forced the explorers to abandon their initial expeditions along the coast. Some scholars suggest that the gold worn by the Caribs led Columbus to call the area ***Costa Rica*** (Rich Coast), while others dispute the name's origins. Nevertheless, it proved misleading, as the next explorers failed to find any substantial reserves.

The next successful expedition to Costa Rica occurred in 1519, when the Spaniard Gil González Dávila explored the Nicoya Peninsula. Despite mapping the area, Dávila failed to establish a settlement due to hostile natives and the harsh climate.

First Spanish Settlements: In 1561, the Spaniard Juan de Cavallón founded the first lasting settlement in Costa Rica at Garcimuñoz. Cavallón's successor Juan Vásquez de Coronado began expanding the colony farther inland to the ***Valle Central*** ("Central Valley," see *Political and Social Relations*). The fertile soil of the *Valle Central* allowed settlers to grow food for further exploration. In 1563, Coronado established the town of Cartago in the *Valle Central* which later became the colonial capital of Costa Rica.

In 1565, Coronado sailed to Spain to seek additional support from King Phillip II. Although the King named him permanent ***Adelantado*** (Governor) of Costa Rica and pledged greater financial assistance, Coronado died in a shipwreck before returning to the colony.

In 1568, Coronado's successor, Governor Perafán de Ribera, attempted to extend Spanish control over the Talamanca region on the Caribbean coast. However, the Indigenous groups of Talamanca resisted the Spanish and forced them to abandon the campaign in 1572. At the end of Perafán's governorship in 1573, the colony had fewer than 60 families, and the Spanish exercised limited control outside of the *Valle Central*.

Colonial Society

By the late 16th century, war, disease, human trafficking, and famine had decreased the size of the Indigenous population. Slave traders resorted to kidnapping and explored northwestern Costa Rica looking for potential slaves to backfill a personnel gap resulting from high mortality rates during transit. Most of the Indigenous survivors integrated into colonial society by converting to Christianity and relocating to Spanish towns. By 1700, the population of Costa Rica was around 20,000.

Besides the approximately 2,500 Spaniards, the colony mostly consisted of ***mestizos*** (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) and ***criollos*** (Spanish people born in the Americas). Much of the small black population, which had been brought to the colony as slaves, integrated into society through intermarriage. The mixed-race descendants of the African slaves, known as ***mulattos*** (mixed African and Spanish) were typically free and lived in colonial towns (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Colonial Economy: The absence of a large Indigenous population in Costa Rica prevented the ***encomienda*** (tribute based on forced Indigenous labor) system from developing as extensively as it did in neighboring colonies. Additionally, since the Spanish did not find significant gold and silver reserves, they could not afford to import large numbers of slaves. Consequently, Costa Rica's colonial economy consisted of free peasants engaged in subsistence agriculture (farming to produce food for personal consumption) on small plots. Along with the lack of plantations and mines, Costa Rica's poverty prevented an aristocracy from developing. Instead, colonial society was relatively equal.

Due to increased foreign demand for tobacco and cacao from the region during the 18th century, an export economy emerged.

Profits from these crops funded the development of new cities like San José, Heredia, and Alajuela. San José grew to rival Cartago as the colony's commercial hub.

Independence

Throughout the colonial period, Costa Rica was a province of the Captaincy General of Guatemala which also governed the rest of Central America on behalf of the Spanish King. Despite being part of the Spanish Empire and under Guatemala's colonial jurisdiction, Costa Rica had significant autonomy.

In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain and replaced the Spanish king with his brother Joseph Bonaparte. The absence of a legitimate king in Spain undermined the Spanish empire's authority in the Americas, which allowed several former colonies to gain independence. In 1821, the Captaincy General of Guatemala declared independence for all Central America, Costa Rica included. That same year, Agustín de Iturbide established the independent Mexican Empire and demanded that the Central American provinces join it.

Ochomogo War: Central America's independence movements divided Costa Rican society. While leaders in the cities of Cartago and Heredia wanted to join the Mexican Empire, those in San José and Alajuela preferred to unite with the other Central American territories.

In 1823, the opposing cities fought a civil war known as the Ochomogo War. After 1 day of fighting, the armies from San José and Alajuela won. Costa Rica joined Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua in the United Provinces of Central America.

Federal Republic of Central America (1824-38)

In 1824, the United Provinces of Central America changed its name to the Federal Republic of Central America. Although

Guatemala was the capital, each state had political autonomy within the federation. From 1824-33, Juan Mora Fernández was ***jefe supremo*** (head of state) of the Free State of Costa Rica. During these years, Costa Rica remained free of the civil wars that devastated the rest of Central America, and in 1838, it left the Federal Republic of Central America.

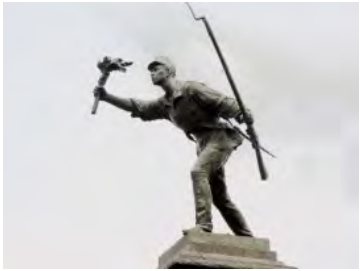
The League War: Costa Rica's absence from civil war ended in 1835, when head of state Braulio Carrillo refused to transfer Costa Rica's capital from San José to Alajuela. Carrillo's refusal violated the Ambulance Law passed by the Costa Rican Congress, which mandated that the capital rotate between the principal cities every 4 years. In response, the cities of Cartago, Heredia, and Alajuela formed the ***Liga de las Tres Ciudades*** (League of the Three Cities) and launched a civil war against Carrillo. Within a month, Carrillo defeated the *Liga* and permanently established San José as the capital, ending the Ambulance Law.

Coffee Boom

In the years after independence, Costa Rican farmers planted coffee trees, and by the 1840s, coffee was Costa Rica's main export, and the industry boomed due to demand in Europe. The Costa Rican government used profits from the coffee trade to improve education, infrastructure, and institutions. At the same time, a class of wealthy coffee growers known as ***cafetaleros*** (coffee barons) emerged and gained political power. In 1849, cafetalero Juan Rafael Mora Porras became President and promoted the coffee industry (see *Economics and Resources*).

War Against William Walker: In 1856, American mercenary William Walker became President of Nicaragua through a coup.

In response, President Mora raised a Costa Rican Army to expel Walker from Nicaragua. In the first battle, a soldier named Juan Santamaría sacrificed himself to light Walker's barracks on fire. Today, Santamaría is Costa Rica's most notable national hero, and the country's main airport bears his name (see *Technology and Material*).



Later, in 1857, forces from other parts of Central America joined the Costa Ricans to defeat Walker. Known as the ***Campaña Nacional*** (National Campaign), the war helped create a Costa Rican sense of national pride. Despite President Mora's leadership in the war, a coup led by rival coffee grower José María Montealegre removed him from office in 1859. With the support of the military, the wealthy Montealegre family controlled Costa Rican politics for over a decade.

Guardia Dictatorship

In 1870, Tomás Guardia Gutiérrez overthrew the Montealegre-backed President and became Dictator. Guardia diminished the political influence of the *cafetaleros* by breaking up large coffee plantations, taxing wealthy coffee growers, and suppressing political opposition. Guardia also ordered the construction of a railroad linking the *Valle Central* to Puerto Limón. The American businessman Minor Cooper Keith stepped in and built the railroad with migrant workers from China, Italy, and Jamaica (see *Political and Social Relations*). Working conditions were difficult, and many migrant workers died in its construction

Banana Boom: During railroad construction, Keith formed the United Fruit Company and started several banana plantations. After the railroad's completion, many Jamaican workers stayed in the country to work on the plantations. In the 1890s, the banana industry experienced a boom with high demand in the US, and Puerto Limón became a shipping hub. This boom created economic growth and attracted investment in areas

outside the *Valle Central* for the first time (see *Economics and Resources*).

Democratization

In 1889, President Bernardo Soto held Costa Rica's first fair election. Compared to previous elections, more citizens had the right to vote, and the opposition had greater freedom to campaign. Nevertheless, when Soto's preferred candidate lost the election, he refused to step down. In response, citizens protested until Soto conceded the Presidency to the winner, José Joaquín Rodríguez Zeledón. Despite being democratically elected, Rodríguez dissolved Congress and ruled as a Dictator. In 1894, Rodríguez arrested the opposition candidate and installed his ally, Rafael Iglesias Castro, as the new President.

The 1902 election resulted in the return of honest competition between candidates. Ascensión Esquivel Ibarra of the newly formed ***Partido Unión Nacional*** (National Union Party, or PUN) won. President Esquivel improved education and strengthened democratic institutions. Despite these reforms, wealthy landowners regained political power in the early 20th century.

Tinoco Dictatorship

The outbreak of World War I in 1913 closed European markets and created an economic crisis in Costa Rica. As a result, President Alfredo González Flores increased taxes and reduced government spending which decreased his popularity.

In 1917, wealthy coffee grower Federico Tinoco Granados removed President González Flores through a military coup. While initially popular, Tinoco lost support because of his repressive policies. A threat from the US of armed invasion and widespread student protests forced Tinoco to resign in 1919.

Return to Democracy

The 1920 election restored democracy and brought Julio Acosta García to the Presidency. In the 1920s and 1930s, the office alternated between candidates of the PUN and the ***Partido Republicano Nacional*** (National Republican Party, or PRN, see *Political and Social Relations*).

The Great Depression created economic hardship for Costa Ricans and worsened disparities between the country's rich and poor. Middle-class citizens demanded better social welfare and wanted to diminish the power of wealthy landowners in politics. Consequently, leaders created new political parties, notably the Catholic ***Partido Reformista*** (Reformist Party) and the Communist-based ***Bloque Obrero y Campesino*** (Workers and Peasants Bloc), that appealed to workers.

In 1940, PRN candidate Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia became President. While in office, Calderón laid the groundwork for an expansive state welfare system and established protections for workers (see *Time and Space*). While the social reforms won Calderón support from the middle class, they alienated wealthy landowners.

1948 Civil War

Upon the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Calderón declared war on Japan, Germany, and Italy. The decision to join the war was unpopular, and Costa Rica's economy declined. In 1942, landowner José Figueres Ferrer criticized the Calderón government in a radio speech, which resulted in his exile to Mexico. While there, Figueres, who became known as "Don Pepe," plotted to overthrow the Calderón government.

In 1944, Teodoro Picado Michalski became President and operated as a puppet for Calderón. That same year, Figueres returned from exile and began training an Army on his farm. In the 1948 election, Calderón ran against the PUN candidate Otilio Ulate Blanco. Calderón lost the election but refused to step down. In response, Figueres mobilized his Army to remove

Calderón from office, and his Army defeated Calderón's forces in 44 days. The 1948 civil war was the bloodiest event in Costa Rica's history, resulting in around 2,000 deaths.

Figueres Interim Presidency

Immediately after the war, Figueres became interim President. He drafted a new Constitution that abolished the military, allowed women to vote, and expanded the welfare system (see *Political and Social Relations*). He also created the ***Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones*** (Supreme Electoral Tribunal) to ensure fair elections and peaceful transitions. Figueres' reforms, particularly abolishing the military and creating electoral safeguards, brought stability to Costa Rica that has continued to the present day. Moreover, these reforms helped define present-day citizens' patriotic values: "there will be more teachers than soldiers" and "mothers are fortunate to know their children will never go to war."

Ulate Presidency

After 18 months as interim President, Figueres transferred the Presidency to Ulate, who served from 1949-1953. Revenues from high coffee prices and the reopening of banana plantations allowed Ulate to maintain the country's social welfare system. Ulate used loans from the US and World Bank to improve the country's infrastructure, particularly through the construction of a modern airport and hydroelectric dam. By the end of Ulate's Presidency in 1953, Costa Rica had one of Central America's best infrastructure systems.

Figueres and the PLN

Figueres capitalized on his role in the 1948 civil war to win the presidential election in 1953. He formed the ***Partido Liberación Nacional*** (National Liberation Party, or PLN) which promoted social welfare and the creation of a large bureaucracy. The

Costa Rican economy continued to grow, ensuring support for Figueres from the poor and middle classes. Nevertheless, high taxes and increased government spending caused the wealthy to oppose Figueres and the PLN. The Dictators of Nicaragua, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic opposed Figueres because of his criticism of their regimes.

1955 Invasion from Nicaragua: Since 1948, Calderón had been plotting to overthrow the Figueres regime from Nicaragua. Given their opposition to Figueres, the Dictators of Nicaragua, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic funded and armed Calderón's movement.

In 1955, Calderón's forces crossed into Costa Rica from Nicaragua, occupying the town of Villa Quesada, about 60 miles northwest of San José. Although Calderón expected his invasion to trigger a popular uprising against Figueres, most citizens disapproved of Calderón's actions. Many Costa Ricans volunteered to form a citizen army to expel Calderón and his insurgents. Additionally, the US sold four P-51 Mustang fighters to Figueres' forces. US Airmen trained Costa Rican commercial airline pilots to fly the P-51s, which proved decisive in defeating Calderón's insurgents.

In 1958, Figueres' presidential successor, Mario Echandi Jiménez, pardoned Calderón and allowed him to return to Costa Rica. Despite losing some support for his role in the invasion, Calderón remained an influential politician. Thousands of voters gathered to greet Calderón upon his return from exile, and he was elected to Congress in 1958.

Economic Growth and PLN Dominance

The PLN won the next election in 1962, and the economy boomed. Coffee and banana plantations dramatically increased their productivity using fertilizers and disease-resistant crops. The middle class continued to grow, and the number of public-sector jobs increased. The government invested in public works, particularly new schools, hospitals, roads, and hydroelectric

dams. President Francisco Orlich attracted foreign investment by joining the ***Mercado Común Centroamericano*** (Central American Common Market, a free trade bloc consisting of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua). By the 1970s, Costa Rica had some of the highest living standards in Latin America, largely due to redirecting funds from military investments.

In 1970, Figueres returned as President and sought to improve social welfare programs established in previous governments. Figueres' policies increased the country's debt. Nevertheless, voters elected another PLN candidate, Daniel Oduber, President in the next election. Oduber pursued left-wing policies, particularly land redistribution, high taxes, and the creation of state-owned companies. He also deepened Costa Rica's relationship with communist countries. Suspicions about communism helped elect anticommunist candidate Rodrigo Carazo Odio in the 1978 election.

Sandinistas in Nicaragua

In 1978, a socialist group of Sandinistas fled to Costa Rica after attacking the Nicaraguan National Guard. President Carazo Odio granted the guerrillas asylum and provided them with arms. With Carazo Odio's support, the Sandinistas launched more attacks on Nicaragua's Somoza government from Costa Rica. In 1979, the Sandinistas forced President Somoza to step down and formed a new Nicaraguan government which Costa Rica recognized.

Public opinion in Costa Rica soon turned against the Sandinista government. Many Costa Ricans disapproved of the Sandinistas' warm relationship with the Soviet Union and their calls for revolution across Central America. Additionally, large numbers of Nicaraguan refugees and rebels arrived in Costa Rica, straining the country's public services.

While Costa Ricans generally disapprove of foreign intervention, public opinion also began to turn against the US support for the Contras, a group of primarily former Nicaraguan National Guardsmen that opposed the Sandinistas.

Economic Crisis in the 1980s

Decades of high government spending led to an economic recession in the 1980s. Costa Rica experienced inflation, unemployment, and poverty. Civil wars in other parts of Central America brought tens of thousands of migrants to Costa Rica, which overwhelmed the government. After taking office in 1982, President Luis Alberto Monge Álvarez of the PLN cut government spending to deal with the economic crisis.

In response to the influx of migrants from Nicaragua, Monge Álvarez's successor, President Óscar Arias Sánchez, proposed a plan to end the Contra War between the Sandinista government and anti-Sandinista rebels. Leaders from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua signed Arias' plan. Although never fully implemented, the plan laid the basis for peace in Central America. In 1987, Arias Sánchez won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts.

Economic Recovery

In 1990, Rafael Ángel Calderón Fournier, the son of former President Calderón, became President, and the economy showed signs of recovery. The son of President Figueres, José María Figueres Olsen, succeeded President Calderón Fournier in 1994. During his Presidency, the tourism industry boomed, and technology companies invested in the country. Intel, one of the world's largest semiconductor manufacturers, built a factory in Heredia in 1997 (see *Economics and Resources*).

Corruption Scandals: In 2004, several government officials, including former Presidents Calderón Fournier and Figueres Olsen faced allegations of corruption. Calderón Fournier and

former cabinet members actually received prison sentences. Since 2004, corruption has been a major issue for voters (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Costa Rica in the 21st Century

In 2010, voters elected Costa Rica's first female President, Laura Chinchilla. That same year, Nicaragua dredged the San Juan River, which forms the country's border with Costa Rica (see *Political and Social Relations*). Costa Rica considered the act to be a violation, and President Chinchilla sent armed police to defend the border. A ruling by the International Court of Justice ordered both sides to remove police and military personnel from the area. Despite preventing an armed conflict, the ruling did not forbid Nicaragua from dredging the river.

New Political Parties

Widespread frustration with the PLN allowed Luis Guillermo Solís of the newly formed ***Partido Acción Ciudadana*** (Citizen Action Party, or PAC) to win the Presidency in 2016. Rodrigo Chaves Robles, the founder of another new party called the ***Partido Progreso Social Democrático*** (Social Democratic Progress Party, or PSD) defeated José María Figueres Olsen in the 2022 presidential election. President Chaves promised to improve the economy and tackle corruption. Today, Costa Rica faces increasing crime rates, a significant debt burden, and inequities between urban and rural areas. Additionally, as North American and European ex-patriots continue to move to Costa Rica in search of retirement destinations or investments, the housing market prices are steadily increasing compounded by an inventory shortage, making affordable options limited for many. Despite these problems, Costa Rica remains one of the most stable and developed countries in Latin America.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths are usually an unverifiable story which embody a culture's values and explain

the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of local heritage and identity. Costa Rican myths, legends, and folktales exhibit both Indigenous and Christian elements.

Bribri Creation Myth

The Bribri are an Indigenous people living in the Talamanca region of southeastern Costa Rica. Their creation story begins in an empty world without soil. ***Sibú*** (Creator God) had seeds that would grow into the first humans (see *Religion and Spirituality*). While searching the universe for a way to plant his seeds, *Sibú* discovered an ecosystem filled with ***tapirs*** (small, pig-like animals found in the jungle).

Sibú instructed a vampire bat to suck the blood of a *tapir* and return to the barren planet. *Sibú* used the *tapir* blood to fertilize the planet. After three more trips by the bat, *Sibú* planted the seeds of the first humans.

Because of this myth, the *Bribri* consider the *tapir* a sacred animal. Only certain people can hunt *tapir*, and each village has one woman trained to cook the animal.

Turrialba Volcano Creation

The Indigenous Huetar people of Costa Rica created myths to explain the origins of volcanos. One such myth involves the Turrialba volcano in the Cartago province.

The myth begins with a woman named Cira, who fell in love with a warrior from a rival tribe. Cira's father forbade her from marrying someone from a different tribe, so Cira snuck away at night to meet her lover.

One night, Cira's father and a group of warriors followed Cira. When the father found Cira kissing the warrior, he ordered the lovers to be killed. Before the warriors could fire their arrows, the earth transformed into a volcano. The lovers hid inside the volcano, and black smoke prevented the archers from seeing them. Today, the Turrialba volcano is a romantic tourist destination because of this myth.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Costa Rica
República de Costa Rica
(Spanish)

Political Borders
Nicaragua: 192 mi
Panama: 216 mi
Coastline: 802 mi

Capital
San José

Demographics
Costa Rica's population of some 5 million is growing at an annual rate of around 0.5%. Nearly 80% of the population lives in urban areas, with about 1.5 million people residing in Costa Rica's capital city, San José. The population mainly lives in the Central Valley, which includes the cities of San José, Cartago, Alajuela, and Heredia.

Flag

Officially adopted in 1906, ***La Bandera de Costa Rica*** (Costa Rica's flag) spans back to 1848. The French Revolution inspired the current flag replace the previous light blue and white flag of the Federal Republic of Central America (see *History and Myth*). The flag has five horizontal bands from top to bottom of blue, white, red (double width), white, and blue. Blue represents the sky and opportunity, white peace and wisdom, and red blood shed for freedom and the people's vibrancy. On the hoist side of the red band is Costa Rica's coat of arms, which includes three smoking volcanoes, the ocean, a ship, and seven stars representing the country's seven provinces (see "Government" below).

Geography

Costa Rica is located on the narrow isthmus (land strip surrounded by water) connecting North and South America. It borders Nicaragua to the North; the Caribbean Sea to the East; Panama to the Southeast; and the Pacific Ocean to the West. Slightly smaller than West Virginia and the 129th largest country, Costa Rica's total land area is nearly 19,730 sq mi.

Despite its small land area, Costa Rica is one of the world's most biodiverse countries. It has four main geographical regions, the Central Valley, the coastal plains, the mountain ranges, and the wetlands. Costa Rica has various ecosystems including tropical rainforests, cloud forests, mangrove forests, wetlands, coral reefs, and others. Over 25% of the country's land area is protected as national parks, wildlife reserves, and refuges managed by the ***Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación*** (National System of Conservation Areas).

Costa Rica is part of the Central American Volcanic Arc, a 932- mi volcano chain that stretches from Guatemala to Panama and formed due to tectonic-plate movement. The country has over 200 volcanic sites and 5 active volcanos: Irazú, Poás, Arenal, Rincón de la Vieja, and Turrialba (see *History and Myth*). In addition to volcanos, four mountain ranges run through the country: Central Volcanic Mountain Range, Talamanca Mountain Range, Tilarán Mountain Range, and Guanacaste Mountain Range. The Tilarán Mountain Range contains the famous Arenal Volcano and Lake Arenal, the largest lake in the country. ***Cerro Chirripó*** (Mount Chirripo) is the country's highest peak at an elevation of 12,536 ft.

Climate

Costa Rica is located entirely in the tropical climate, with mostly hot and humid weather. There are several different microclimates throughout the country, influenced by elevation variance. The Central Valley, home to San José and most of the population (see "Demographics" above), has a mild climate with an average temperature around 67°F year-round. The coastal

lowlands, including the Caribbean and Pacific Coast, have an average temperature of 81°F year-round. Costa Rica has two seasons, ***invierno*** (winter, or the wet season) and ***verano*** (summer, or the dry season). The wet season, called the green season in the tourism industry, occurs generally between May-November, bringing frequent afternoon rainfall. The dry season typically occurs from December-April, featuring sunny days and wind. Precipitation varies by region. The Pacific Northwestern area of Guanacaste is the driest region, while some parts of the Caribbean Coast experience rain year-round but less from September-October.

Natural Hazards

Most of Costa Rica's weather events, such as flooding and rising tides, are generated by wind and rain. In November 2024, some areas of the country experienced rainfall levels 8-10 times the usual amount for the month in only 6 days. Tropical and subtropical cyclones and their associated storm surges are a risk to the Caribbean Coast. In 2016, Hurricane Otto caused 10 deaths and nearly US $192.2 million in damage. Earthquakes are a frequent occurrence, with around 800 minor quakes per year and a major earthquake occurring nearly every 4 years. Volcanic activity varies in intensity and frequency. A 1968 eruption of Arenal Volcano destroyed a nearby village and killed 78 people.

Environmental Issues

According to the World Bank Group, temperature extremes in Costa Rica have increased between 0.36-0.54°F per decade since 1960. Additionally, the number of warm days and nights have increased by 2.5% and 1.7% per decade, respectively, compared to a decrease in cold days and nights by 2.2% and 2.4% per decade, respectively. Along with an increase in temperature, sea-level rise and land degradation are a concern. By 1987, Costa Rica had lost around half of its forest cover, although government intervention that pays local communities to protect the natural ecosystem has reversed the country's deforestation. Currently, almost 60% of the land is forest cover. The government has also implemented other environmental

initiatives, including a National Decarbonization Plan launched in February 2019. In a 2024 environmental performance index, Costa Rica ranked 40 of 180 countries, higher than neighboring Nicaragua (75) but lower than the US (35).

Government

Costa Rica is a democratic republic that divides into 7 ***provincias*** (provinces), subdivided into 84 ***cantones*** (cantons), and further into some 478 ***distritos*** (districts). The provinces have no government, but instead, are utilized as statistical entities and electoral districts for the legislative assembly (see "Legislative Branch" below). The only subnational government in Costa Rica are the 84 ***gobierno municipals*** (municipal governments), corresponding to the 84 cantons. Each municipal government includes an ***Alcaldía*** (mayor), two ***Vicealcaldías*** (vice mayors), ***concejo municipal*** (municipal council), and ***concejos municipals de distrito*** (municipal district councils). Residents vote to fill these roles in popular elections every 4 years. The independent ***Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones*** (Supreme Electoral Tribunal), considered a functional fourth branch of government, oversees elections nationwide.

Costa Rica's current Constitution was adopted in 1949 following José Figueres' rebellion and subsequent civil war (see *History and Myth*). The Constitution outlines the government, division of powers, and citizens' rights. Constitutional amendments have further expanded civil rights and enhanced local governance.

Executive Branch

The President is the head-of-state and government. Presidential responsibilities include directing policy, representing the nation abroad, and ensuring compliance with laws. The President appoints a ***gabinete*** (cabinet) filled with government sector ministers. President Chaves has a 40-person cabinet. The current President, Rodrigo Chaves Robles, took office in May 2022.

The President serves alongside two Vice-Presidents, whose responsibility is to replace the President in temporary or permanent absence. Both entering office in 2022, the First Vice-President is Stephan Brunner Neibig and the Second Vice-President Dr. Mary Munive Angermüller. The President and Vice-Presidents are elected by popular vote on the same ballot for 4-year terms. They must secure at least 40% of the vote, or a run-off election is held between the two candidates with the most votes. Since 2003, Presidents can serve an unlimited number of non-consecutive terms.

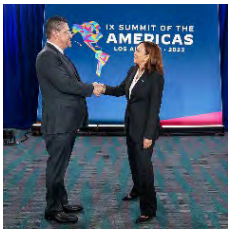
Legislative Branch

Costa Rica's ***Asemblea Legislativa*** (Legislative Assembly) is a 57-seat unicameral (single chamber) legislature. The *Asemblea* is responsible for drafting and approving laws, treaties, the state budget, and overseeing the government. It also appoints the Magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice (see "Judicial Branch" below), and other positions assigned by the Constitution. Members of the *Asemblea*, called ***Diputados*** (Deputies), are directly elected in seven multi-seat constituencies corresponding to the country's provinces. The election is by a closed-list proportional representation system, whereby electors select a party rather than individual candidates. *Diputados* serve 4-year terms and unlimited non-consecutive terms.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Corte Suprema de Justicia*** (Supreme Court of Justice), appellate courts, district courts, and other specialized courts. The Supreme Court is the highest court, overseeing the government and all law. The responsibilities of the Supreme Court are divided among its three chambers: ***Sala Primera*** (First Chamber), ***Sala Segunda*** (Second Chamber), ***Sala Tercera*** (Third Chamber), and ***Sala Constitucional*** (Constitutional Chamber, or Fourth Chamber). The first three chambers oversee appeals and review administrative, civil, and criminal cases. Established by a constitutional amendment in 1989, the Constitutional Chamber,

has specific jurisdiction over all constitutional matters, including ensuring protection and compliance of constitutional standards. The Supreme Court is composed of 22 magistrates of which 5 are in each of the 3 chambers and 7 in the Constitutional Chamber. Magistrates are elected by a supermajority of the *Asemblea* to 8-year terms, with the possibility of indefinite re-appointment.



Political Climate

Costa Rica's political structure is considered one of Central America's fairest. In a 2024 political transformation index, Costa Rica ranked 7th of 137 countries, higher than all other countries in Central America and only behind Chile and Uruguay for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Costa Rica has universal and compulsory suffrage (see *Sex and Gender*) for citizens aged 18 and older, though not all Indigenous people had citizenship until the 1990s.

After the 1949 Civil War (see *History and Myth*), Costa Rica had a two-party political system of the centrist ***Partido Liberación Nacional*** (National Liberation Party, or PLN) and the center-right ***Partido Unidad Social Cristiana*** (Social Christian Unity Party, or PUSC). In the early 21st century, the two-party system collapsed, attributed to discontented Costa Ricans abandoning the traditional parties. Today, the country has several dominant political parties. In 2020, 86 of them fielded candidates in the municipal elections. In 2022, over 25 political parties participated in the first round of the presidential elections. President Rodrigo Chaves of ***the Partido Progreso Social Democrático*** (Social Democratic Progress Party) won some 53% of the vote, while the PLN won the most seats in the legislature (19). As of 2022, six parties have representatives in the *Asemblea Legislativa.*

Costa Rican politics is characterized by democracy and peace, yet the country faces various political challenges. There have been multiple high profile corruption cases involving bribery, misuse of public funds, and influence peddling. In 2004, former Presidents Rafael Ángel Calderón and Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, along with other high-ranking officials, were arrested on bribery

charges (see *History and Myth*). Since 2023, the Prosecutor's Office has investigated multiple allegations against President Rodrigo Chaves for campaign financing inconsistencies, abuse of authority, and other crimes. In a 2023 corruption perceptions index, Costa Rica ranked 45 of 180, lower than US (24) but higher than neighboring Nicaragua (172). Low political participation, legislative gridlock, and attacks on media (see *Technology and Materials*) are other issues plaguing Costa Rica's political environment. President Rodrigo Chaves' government has sought to tackle some of Costa Rica's persistent challenges such as the economy, corruption, crime, and government bureaucracy (see "Security Issues" below).

Defense

Costa Rica's military was abolished constitutionally in 1949 (see *History and Myth*). Instead, civilian police, park rangers, and coast guard organizations are responsible for Costa Rica's internal security, maritime and air dominance, counter-narcotics operations, and border security (see "Security Issues" below). The US and Colombia provide monetary assistance and training to Costa Rica for policing and internal security rather than traditional military operations. For example, in 2021 US forces provided UH-60 training on insertion and exfiltration techniques, and the US Border Patrol helped train the first Costa Rican search and rescue dive team in 2018. Most of the equipment of Costa Rica's comes from donations primarily from the US and China along with other countries.

Gendarmerie and Paramilitary: Comprising about 9,950 civilians, Costa Rica's internal security forces include Special Forces, the ***Fuerza Pública de Costa Rica*** (Public Force of Costa Rica), a Coast Guard Unit, and an Air Surveillance Unit. The *Fuerza Pública* includes 9,000 personnel organized into 11 regional directorates and controlled by the ***Ministerio de Seguridad Pública*** (Ministry of Public Security). The Coast Guard is composed of 550 personnel divided into 9 patrol and coast combatants. The Air Surveillance Unit has 400 individuals.

COSTA RICA

Public Force of Costa Rica

Chief of Police

Commisioner

Commandant

Captain

Senior Superintendent

Superintendent

Sergeant

Inspector

Constable

Security Issues

Crime: In recent years, violent crime has been Costa Rica's most pressing security issue. As of November 2023, there were over 800 reported homicides for the year, of which at least 68 victims were women (see Sex and Gender). It is the most violent year on record in Costa Rica. Also in 2023, the homicide rate was 17.2 per 100,000 residents, the third highest in Central America, behind Belize (21.5) and Honduras (31.1). The cantons of San José and Limón had the highest occurrence of homicide that year, with 91 and 83 victims, respectively. Authorities recorded incidents of torture, gang murders, and hitmen assassinations.

Drug-trafficking in Costa Rica has contributed to the rising violence, accounting for almost 80% of the country's killings according to former Security Minister Gustavo Mata. While once only a transit point for Latin American narcotic-trafficking, Costa Rica is now a prominent transit and storage point for narcotics headed for the US and Europe. In 2022 and 2023, Costa Rican authorities seized 50 metric tons and 43 metric tons of narcotics, respectively. Much of it was cocaine, which is smuggled through the Port of Moín, the country's main commercial port located in Limón. Furthermore, authorities have noted an increase in homegrown Costa Rican gangs, reporting more than 1,000 people linked to organized crime activities and 340 criminal gangs in the country.

In response to rising violence and drug-trafficking, the Costa Rican government has increased security efforts. The *Ministerio de Seguridad Pública* launched the ***Política Nacional de Seguridad Pública: Costa Rica Segura Plus 2023-2030*** (National Public Security Policy: Costa Rica Sage Plus 2023-2030) to be the country's tool against drug-trafficking and organized crime. The policy is focused on strengthening intelligence activities and restructuring police management. In 2023, the Segura Plan hired 700 new police officers and invested US $1.2 million in new patrol cars.

Prison Conditions: The overcrowding and subsequent deterioration of conditions in Costa Rica's prisons is another security concern. In 2022, incarceration rates per 100,000 inhabitants was 345, almost double the rate in 2000 (193) and the third highest in Central America. According to the US Department of State, the prison population exceeds the designed capacity by 12%. There is inadequate space for resting, deteriorating mattresses, and a lack of access to health services. Drug abuse is common in the prisons, with inmates having easy access to narcotics.

Costa Rica's prisons are administered by the ***Ministerio de Justicia y Paz*** (Ministry of Justice and Peace) and the ***Dirección General de Adaptación Social*** (General Directorate of Social Adaptation). The Ombudsman (an oversight body of the *Asemblea Legislativa)* monitors and reports on prison conditions. Additionally, the government permits monitoring by local and international human rights organizations. Initiatives are in place to expand prison capacity and improve conditions in accordance with international standards. Costa Rica has implemented reforms such as ratifying the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture and classifying torture as a criminal offense in 2022.

Foreign Relations

Generally, Costa Rica maintains relations with LAC countries, Europe, and the US. It is a member of international organizations, notably the United Nations (UN), Inter-American Development Bank, World Trade Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and World Bank. Costa Rica proclaimed neutrality in 1993, and its foreign policy prioritizes peace and human rights. The country is home to both the Inter-American Human Rights Court and UN University of Peace are in San José. In 2018, the Escazú Agreement, which addresses climate change, was adopted in Escazú, Costa Rica and has been signed by 24 LAC countries.

Costa Rica participates in regional political and economic organizations. It is a founding member of the ***Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana*** (Central American Integration

System, or SICA) along with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize, and the Dominican Republic. SICA provides the institutional framework for Central American Integration. Costa Rica is also a member of the Central American Common Market (CACM), an economic bloc. Founded in 1960, CACM also includes Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Since 2009, Costa Rica has been a party to the Dominican Republic- Central America- United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). CAFTA-DR aims to boost trade and economic relations between the US and member countries (Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), a reliance on the US that divided Costa Ricans and resulted in a referendum to eventually ratify CAFTA-DR.

Relations with China:
In June 2007, Costa Rica became the first Central American country to establish official diplomatic relations with China, ending 60 years of recognizing Taiwan. China and Costa Rica have entered into investment and trade agreements, including the Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement; Costa Rica-China Free Trade Agreement; and the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2017, China commissioned a 66-mi expansion of Route 32, the primary road connecting San José and Limón. The project is anticipated to be complete in 2025, postponed from the original completion date of 2020 due to increased costs and bureaucratic hurdles. In 2022, Costa Rica's exports to China totaled nearly US $430 million, while Chinese exports to Costa Rica totaled over US $3 billion, up from US $763 million in 2007. The trade imbalance is a direct result of Costa Rica's 2007 policy change favoring China over Taiwan.

Relations with the US: Diplomatic relations between Costa Rica and the US began in 1851. The countries have robust ties due to shared values of human rights and democracy coupled with Costa Rica's strategic Central American location. The US is Costa Rica's largest trading partner, accounting for around 40% of its imports and exports. In 2023, two-way trade in goods between the countries totaled almost US $20 billion, primarily

consisting of medical equipment, fruit, and machinery. In 2023, the US announced a partnership with Costa Rica to support its semiconductor industry, enabled by the CHIPS and Science Act.

In 2023, US foreign assistance to Costa Rica totaled more than US $86 million. This aid to Costa Rica aims to help counter drug-trafficking and transnational crime (see “Security Issues” above), support economic development, strengthen governance, and monitor migration (see “Ethnic Groups” below).

In collaboration with the US, Costa Rica conducts background checks on migrants passing through its boarders to identify potential security threats. Since 2018, the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration has provided nearly US $90 million in humanitarian assistance for refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants in Costa Rica. In February 2025, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Costa Rica, and other Central American countries, focusing on migration, security, and countering Chinese influence.

Relations with Nicaragua: Costa Rica and Nicaragua have had a tumultuous relationship, consisting of periods of cooperation, disputes, and conflict. The two countries share a common history (see *History and Myth*), as both were a part of the Spanish colonial administrative division, the Captaincy General of Guatemala, and the post-independence Federal Republic of Central America. During the 19th and 20th centuries, relations between the two countries were strained by regional wars and internal political struggles. The two countries have disagreed over the San Juan River (see *History and Myth*), which is a natural border between the countries. Upheld by the 1858 ***Trato de Jeréz-Cañas*** (Treaty of Limits), Nicaragua has ownership of the river, while Costa Rica can use the river for commercial activity.

Today, Costa Rica and Nicaragua work together on trade and security through their shared membership in regional organizations such as the SICA and the CACM. There is a

consistent flow of goods, services, and people between the countries. Nicaraguans are the largest foreign-born population in Costa Rica, numbering over 400,000 people (see “Ethnic Groups” below). Since 2018, tensions surrounding Nicaragua’s repressive political situation, particularly under the dictatorship of Daniel Ortega, have escalated between the countries. In 2021, then-Costa Rican President Carlos Alvardo expressed to the UN concern about human rights violations occurring in Nicaragua. Costa Rica has provided asylum and humanitarian support to those fleeing violence and persecution in Nicaragua.

Ethnic Groups

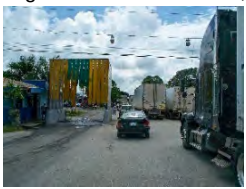
According to the country’ most recent census in 2011, about 84% of Costa Ricans have European or mixed heritage, 7% Afro-Costa Rican (including mixed race), 2% Indigenous, and 7% other ethnic groups. Costa Rica’s large ***mestizo*** (people of mixed European and Indigenous) population is attributable to its time as a Spanish colony and European immigration post-independence (see *History and Myth*). In 2015, a constitutional amendment defined Costa Rica as a multiethnic and pluricultural republic, which differs from earlier initiatives focued on erasing the country’s Indigenous and mixed-race history.

Prior to Spanish colonization (see *History and Myth*), Costa Rica’s territory was inhabited by at least 500,000 Indigenous people organized in chiefdoms. Spanish colonization brought disease and slavery to Costa Rica, resulting in the death of most of this population. Today, Costa Rica has eight recognized native ethnic groups: Bribris, Cabécares, Guaymies (or Ngöbes), Malekus, Borucas (or Brunka/Brunca), Térrabas, Huetares and Chorotegas. They primarily reside in the 24 autonomous territories established by the 1977 Indigenous Law and subsequent legislation.

Afro-Costa Ricans constitute only about 7% (6% mixed and 1% black) of Costa Rica's 5 million population. Some of the population descends from ancestors who were enslaved in Costa Rica as domestic servants for Spanish colonists in the 17th and 18th century. However, most Afro-Costa Ricans are

descendants of Caribbean workers who came to Costa Rica for the Atlantic Railroad and banana plantations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Until 1949, social restrictions limited the mobility of Afro-Caribbeans throughout the country. Following the change in laws with the 1949 Constitution, Afro-Caribbeans could move around the country and integrate into Costa Rican society. Today, the majority of Afro-Costa Ricans reside on the Caribbean Coast. A third of the population resides in the city of Limón, where the community has remained in distinct ***barrios*** (neighborhoods). In Limón, Creole English remains a dominant language (see *Language and Communication*).

Over 10% of Costa Rica's population is foreign born, which is one of the highest immigration rates in the Americas. Costa Rica has received humanitarian migrants, temporary migrants, digital nomads, and North American and European Union retirees. Nicaraguans are the largest immigrant population, making up roughly 75% of the immigrant population. Other countries of origin include Colombia, the US, Venezuela, El Salvador, Panama, and China. In general, Costa Rica provides protection and aid to those in need.



Since 2016, Costa Rica has experienced an increase in migrants from Venezuela and neighboring Nicaragua. According to the International Organization for Migration, approximately 529,300 people entered Costa Rica in 2023, a 130% increase from 2022. While many migrants are in-transit, Costa Rica also has experienced an increase in asylum and refugee status requests. In June 2023, government officials said there were over 250,000 pending asylum requests. In September 2023, President Chaves declared a national emergency due to the migration influx on the southern border with Panama. About 3,000 migrants on their way to the US were arriving daily.

Social Relations

Like in other Spanish colonies, early Costa Rica had a strict, hierarchical class- and race-based system that continues to influence its society. Historically, official policy encouraged immigration from Europe and the creation of the country's

mestizo population. Today, Costa Rican society divides along ethnic, rural-urban, and rich-poor lines. European descendants control much of the country.

In 1869, Costa Rica made primary education state-financed and universal for all sexes, earlier than any other country in LAC, England, and many US states (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Today, Costa Rica's adult (aged 15 and above) literacy rate is 98%, higher than the LAC average (95%). In the 1940s, Costa Rica created the ***Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social*** (Costa Rican Social Security Fund), the University of Costa Rica, and a progressive labor code. In 2020, state investment in services such as health, education, social protection, and housing was the largest share of public spending at a combined 25% of GDP. Nearly all Costa Ricans have access to basic services such as electricity, sanitation, and safe water. Some 70% of the economically active population is covered for health services and 63% for pensions.

Despite investment in social services, the poverty rate has remained around 20% since 1994. In 2023, 22% of households lived below the poverty line. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified economic issues, whereby the poverty level reached over 26% in 2020. In 2023, Costa Rica's score on an inequality index, the Gini Index (a lower value shows a more equitable society), was 46.7, a large increase from the country's score in 1990 (38). This rise in poverty is due to the rising cost of living over the last 10 years, in part due to North American retirees relocating to the country.

Costa Rica's legal framework and government initiatives were designed to secure the rights of Afro- descendants, Indigenous, women, and other minorities. Nevertheless, disparities persist. Afro-Costa Ricans, Indigenous, and Nicaraguan migrants often receive unfair treatment and are underrepresented in politics and economics. The government has not enforced Indigenous land ownership leading to disputes, violence, and lawsuits. In 2021, an Indigenous-rights organization reported that these communities and individuals in Costa Rica had been subjected to at least 63 violent attacks.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Costa Rica's population is predominantly Christian. According to a 2023 survey, some 48% of residents identify as Roman Catholic, 27% non-religious (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic), 20% Protestant, and less than 5% follow other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Jehovah's Witness, Judaism, Islam, and others.

Costa Rica's Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) recognizes Catholicism as the state religion. The government contributes to the Catholic Church's maintenance, which also receives legal recognition as a concordat (an agreement between the Catholic Church and a secular government) granting it special rights and exemptions. The Constitution also recognizes the right to freely practice other religions that do not impede universal morality and proper behavior in society. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church has greatly influenced Costa Rican culture, attitudes, and history.

Early Religion

Before the arrival of European ***conquistadores*** (conquerors, see *History and Myth*), Costa Rica's Indigenous peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) led rich spiritual lives. The Bribri, primarily based in the Talamanca region (see *History and Myth*), practiced animistic pantheism. This meant they believed god, or divinity, lived in every aspect of the natural world – animals, plants, and water. They also believed ***Sibú*** (Creator God) created humans, animals, and plants from corn seeds. *Sibú* is often depicted as a wise and kind figure, who blessed the Bribri with their beliefs, customs, morals, and language.

The Bribri believed *Sibú* constructed the universe in a giant cone-shaped house with a ceiling made of the sky. The house divided into four realms with humans inhabiting the first level, while animal and plant spirits inhabited the second. Evil spirits,

who caused disease and suffering occupied the third level, which they occasionally left to descend upon the lower levels to cause harm. *Sibú* lived on the highest level, along with various nature gods such as those controlling the moon, rain, and wind. These gods included ***Térraba*** (moon goddess), who governed fertility, life, death, and rebirth, and ***Dichi*** (rain god), who nourished crops and created the balance of life on Earth.

The Bribri practiced numerous rituals during birth, milestones, and death. ***Awa*** ("shaman," spiritual healers) possessed knowledge and wisdom passed down through multiple generations. They led rituals comprising songs, chants, and the consumption of medicinal plants like the sacred cacao drink, ***cacaowa*** ("drink of the gods," see *Sustenance and Health*). According to legend, cacao formed from a woman's body, which *Sibú* turned into a tree.

As a result, only women were allowed to prepare and serve *cacaowa*. Likewise, roles such as the ***oko*** (mortician) could only be performed by men. Similar to *awa*, the *oko* led funeral rituals, prepared sacred food, and were the only people allowed to touch the deceased's body.

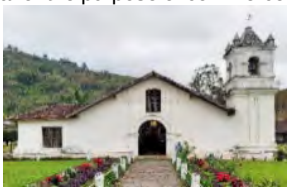
Introduction to Christianity: Spanish *conquistadores* brought Christianity to Costa Rica in the 16th century. The Spanish believed in a holy duty to convert Indigenous Costa Ricans, which gave them an ideological justification for their conquests. However, the country's lack of gold, territorial disputes, and resistance from native tribes hindered the establishment of a permanent Spanish settlement (see *History and Myth*).

In 1534, Pope Clement VII (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church) authorized the opening of the Diocese of León, which included the region of present-day Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Despite limited interest in the rural area, some Catholic churches emerged and efforts to spread Catholicism continued. While some Indigenous populations accepted Catholicism, others maintained their traditional beliefs and practices, often in private.

Under Spanish colonial rule, the Spanish crown offered privileges such as land ownership and political offices to the Catholic Church. However, due to the country's rural landscape and native tribes' fierce resistance to colonization, the Catholic Church did not have as much influence or control over Costa Rican life as it did in other parts of the Spanish Empire.

Religion in the 19th Century

After Costa Rica gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the country drafted its first Constitution, the Pact of Concord (see *History and Myth*). The Constitution upheld Catholicism as the country's official religion and banned all others. Due to the newly generated wealth from coffee cultivation (see *Economics and Resources*), the government began encouraging foreign immigration. A stipulation to the Constitution permitted foreigners who entered Costa Rica for the purpose of commerce or transit to practice their religion, though they could not proselytize (attempt to convert others to one's faith).



In 1850, Pope Pius IX authorized the creation of the Diocese of San José, and Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente became the country's first native Bishop. Lafuente sought to strengthen the foundation of Costa Rican society by formalizing Catholic Church and State relations. In 1852, he established an agreement between the Holy See (the central government of the Catholic Church) and the Costa Rican government, which granted the Catholic Church more legal autonomy. Lafuente's achievements included the foundation of a major seminary, the opening of a school for children, and financing the construction of the country's first public hospital, the ***San Juan de Dios Hospital*** (St. John of God Hospital).

During the mid-late 19th century, the Catholic Church's influence in secular affairs declined. While the government continued to provide support for the Catholic Church, European secular ideologies influenced a new government (see *History and Myth*). In 1871, the intent was to promote democracy and reduce the Catholic Church's authority. To this end, Costa Rica adopted a

new Constitution granting religious toleration. Likewise, Lafuente's death the same year left the seat vacant until German priest Bernardo Augusto Thiel became Bishop in 1880. Liberal and anticlerical President Tomás Guardia Gutiérrez (1870-76 and de facto 1877-82, see *History and Myth*) declared Thiel a political threat and banished him. In 1884, anticlerical reforms further diminished the Catholic Church's influence by secularizing education, requiring the Church to sell all land holdings, and banishing religious orders such as the Catholic's Jesuits.

Religion in the 20th Century

Throughout this period, democratic governance and religious diversity increased. Migrants introduced faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Lutheranism, and Islam. Some political parties inspired by Catholic social teaching, which emphasized individual dignity and rights, emerged. In the 1920s, Costa Rican Vice President and Catholic Priest Jorge Volio Jiménez founded the Reformist Party (see *History and Myth*). His reforms focused on rural development, housing, social security, and improved sanitation.

In the 1940s, Calderonism, a political ideology that combines Catholic social teaching and socialism, developed under the leadership of President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia (see *History and Myth*). This populist ideology appealed to the working class. In addition, the "people's priest," Víctor Manuel Sanabria Martínez became Archbishop. Martínez sought to reestablish the Catholic Church's stronghold by educating Catholic followers and developing more church operations.

He created the Catholic Action Program, which provided economic aid to poor communities and taught Catholic doctrine. During the 1948 Costa Rican Civil War (see *History and Myth*), Martínez helped mediate peace. Following the war, the 1949 Constitution established Roman Catholicism as the official state religion and mandated the government's support of its operations. However, it also granted Costa Rica full religious freedom.

During the 1970s-80s, the Catholic Church in Rome remained neutral as Costa Rica faced economic and political instability, though local clergy did have great influence on the populace. In the 1990s, Protestant groups experienced a surge in membership. Many converts were former Catholics who sought community, a different style of worship, or a more personal connection to God. Nevertheless, by 2000, about 74% of Costa Ricans remained Catholic. Likewise, the Catholic Church continued to influence the government well into the 21st century.

Religion Today

While Costa Rica's current Constitution grants Costa Ricans religious freedom, and society is largely tolerant of diverse religions, the Roman Catholic Church remains an important historical and cultural institution. Costa Rica is the only country on the North and South American continents that officially recognizes Catholicism as the state religion. The Catholic Church is not registered as an association yet receives privileges like tax exemptions, state funding, and authority to conduct weddings without a lawyer. Since 2018, members of Protestant groups have advocated for a bill that would grant non-Catholic groups special recognition as defined religious organizations.

Catholicism: Today, Catholicism is intertwined with the everyday lives of many Costa Ricans. Even some who identify as non-religious engage in Catholic ceremonies and celebrations. Rites of passage such as baptism, first communion, and confirmation are part of many Costa Ricans' cultures. Costa Rica is also home to various unique Catholic traditions. Every year, about a million pilgrims travel to the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels in Cartago to pray to the image of the Virgin of Angels. While the annual event officially begins on August 2, many begin the 13-mile hike from San José to Cartago in late July. Along the road, campsites and Red Cross stations provide aid. Once pilgrims complete their journey, they are greeted by festive music, food, dance, and vendors selling goods around the Basilica.

Costa Rica's patron saint (a Catholic church-designated heavenly protector) is ***La Virgen de los Ángeles*** (The Virgin of the Angels), also known as ***La Negrita*** (the Beloved Black Lady), another name for the Virgin Mary. Many Costa Ricans believe a young ***mestizo*** (mixed) girl, Juana Pereira, discovered her in 1635 when she found a small doll. Pereira tried to take the doll home twice but discovered each time it vanished, only to reappear at the same place. Many witnessed the girl's story as a miracle and built the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels in the statue's honor at the site of her discovery.

Other Christian Churches: Protestantism is the second most common Christian denomination in Costa Rica, with over 1 million members, many of whom live in the Limón province. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons, estimate the country is home to some 50,000 members. Likewise, Jehovah's Witnesses estimate some 32,000 members live in Costa Rica, primarily along the Caribbean Coast. Other Christian minorities include Mennonites, Lutherans, Orthodox Christians, among others.

In the 1950s, Quaker families from Alabama established a small community in the central region of Monteverde. Costa Rica's lack of an Army appealed to Quakers, who practiced pacifism. In addition, the country's lush and undeveloped landscape provided suitable farmland, where the Quakers could establish dairy farms. While there are only around 1,000 Quakers in Costa Rica today, their presence has played a key role in the country's environmental conservation efforts. Early Quakers realized the importance of the cloud forest among Monteverde's mountains as a vital source of water for drinking and irrigation. Consequently, they advocated for its preservation which resulted in the establishment of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, a protected nature area consisting of over 10,500 acres. Today, the area is internationally regarded as a model for biological conservation.

Other Religions: Various non-Christian religious minorities live in Costa Rica. In the early 19th century, Chinese immigrants (see *Economics and Resources*) introduced Buddhism. While many of these immigrants converted to Catholicism due to the country's conservative society, some continued to practice Buddhism. In 1974, the Japanese Embassy sponsored the building of one of the country's first Buddhist centers, the ***Casa Zen*** (Zen House) in San José. In 1989, President Oscar Arias Sánchez (see *History and Myth*) invited the Dalai Lama (leader of Tibetan Buddhism) to participate in a peace conference. Following the visit, followers founded the Costa Rican Tibetan "Cultural Association" to promote Tibetan culture and Buddhism. In 2004, the Dalai Lama again visited Costa Rica to meet with President Abel Pacheco and church leaders to discuss demilitarization, providing aid to the poor, and conservation efforts. As of 2020, Costa Rica is home to some 100,000 practicing Buddhists that account for about 2% of the population.

Beginning in 1561, Judaism was practiced by ***conversos*** (crypto-Jews, Jewish people who practice Judaism in secret), who were forced to publicly accept Christianity but secretly continued to practice their Jewish faith. Jewish communal life did not begin in Costa Rica until after the early 20th century and was not fully accepted until after Costa Rica's cooperation with the Allied Powers during World War II (see *History and Myth*). Today, the country is home to about 2,500 practicing Jews.

Experts estimate between 1,000-1,500 Muslims live in Costa Rica. In recent years, Muslim leaders state that a lack of societal awareness regarding Islamic religions contributes to negative stereotypes. As a result, some Muslim communities have hosted student groups to raise awareness and understanding of their faith. Other religions having a few practitioners in Costa Rica are Taoism, the Bahá'í Faith, Hinduism, and others.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is the center of Costa Rican life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Values like friendship, peace, and loyalty are important to Costa Rican culture.

Residence

Costa Rica began to urbanize in the 19th century, though rapid movement into cities did not occur until the 1960s (see *Economics and Resources*). As of 2023, some 83% of Costa Ricans live in urban areas with 27% living in greater San José, the capital. While electricity and indoor plumbing are widely available, some homes lack access to safe sanitation services. In recent years, gated communities have become more common for upper-class citizens due to an increase in crime (see *Political and Social Relations*). These communities often provide private security, fitness centers, pools, and other resort-like amenities.

Urban: City dwellers tend to reside in high-rise apartments, private homes, or townhouses constructed from concrete, cement, or steel. Many apartment buildings feature organic design elements like teak-wood furniture and large, glass windows to let in natural light. Most houses are one-story and consist of 2-3 bedrooms, a dining room, kitchen, and laundry room. The latter often features a sink for rinsing clothing, because most washing machines are semi-automatic. These machines require the manual transfer of clothing between washing, rinsing, and drying. Many urban homes also feature an outdoor space-like shaded seating or an area for barbequing.

Rural: Country homes tend to be small consisting of 1-2 bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and a bathroom. Stone, wood, or cement building materials are common. Rural homes typically have a tin roof made of metal that is capable of withstanding

harsh weather conditions such as rain, wind, and hail. While most rural homes have electricity and running water, ***ducha*** (water heaters attached to shower heads) are often used to heat showers. Additionally, homes tend to have spanish-style ceramic tile floors that are durable and easy to clean..

Family Structure

In Costa Rica, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head-of-household, while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and childcare. In urban areas, traditional attitudes are changing, and more women are working outside the home (see *Sex and Gender*). Likewise, in middle- and upper-class urban families, men and women increasingly share domestic tasks. While many traditional households consist of multiple generations, younger Costa Ricans more commonly live with just their nuclear (immediate) family. Nevertheless, most Costa Ricans see their extended family often, typically spending time together on Sundays (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Children

Costa Rican families tend to be smaller today than they have been traditionally, although rural families usually are larger. Overall, Costa Rican parents are having fewer children, averaging three-five (see Sex and Gender). Parents' involvement in their children's lives generally continues into adulthood. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, often help with childcare, and most adults are expected to take care of their elderly parents later in life. In rural areas, boys often start to work at a young age to supplement their family's income, while girls help with household chores, prepare meals, and rear children

Birth: A few weeks before a woman's due date, family and friends typically hold a ***té de canastilla*** (baby shower), similar to those in the US. Attendees usually bring gifts, food, and entertainment to celebrate the baby's arrival. Traditionally, at the end of the party, the parents give guests a ***recuerdo*** (souvenir), which is typically a small knickknack stamped with the family's

name and date of the party. After birth, mothers spend time alone with their baby during a period known as ***la cuarentena*** (the 40-days). During this time, the mother receives support from family members to minimize her physical activity and to focus on healing and bonding with her newborn.

Naming: While naming conventions vary (see *Language and Communication*), Costa Ricans typically give their children two last names in keeping with Latin American tradition. The first one traditionally comes from the father, while the second from the mother.

Rites of Passage

Many Costa Ricans observe the Roman Catholic rite of passage of baptizing their children within a few months after birth (see *Religion and Spirituality*). They also acknowledge other significant Catholic traditions, like first communion and confirmation, that mark life's milestones. Some Costa Rican 15-year-old girls have a ***fiesta de quince*** (15th birthday party) to celebrate their transition into adulthood. Family and friends gather to honor the girl with festivities like dance, food, and music.

Dating and Courtship: Costa Ricans typically begin dating in their teens, though more conservative families expect girls to wait at least until age 18. While many residents marry around their early 30s, the age in rural areas tends to be younger (see *Sex and Gender*). Many urban couples cohabitate before marriage, which is generally accepted today.

Weddings: Traditionally, the night before the wedding, grooms serenade their bride-to-be with a musical ensemble. Costa Rican weddings generally consist of two events: a civil ceremony performed at a municipal office to receive a marriage certificate and a religious one at a church. Brides typically wear white dresses, often with Spanish influences such a mantilla-style (lace) veil. Grooms typically wear a tuxedo or suit, similar to grooms in the US.

After the ceremonies, Costa Ricans typically hold an extravagant wedding party. The ***casado*** (marriage meal, see *Substance and Health*) comprising a protein, rice, black beans, salad, and plantains is typically served. Traditionally, following dinner, guests dance ***el Baile del Billete*** (the Dance of the Bill), during which they place bills of cash into the couple's clothing in exchange for a dance. After the wedding, many couples receive a ***Portal*** (a nativity figurine scene depicting the birth of Jesus Christ), which they display each Christmas and on other important religious dates. The *Portal* is a symbol of prosperity, longevity, and happiness in marriage.

Divorce

This life event is common stigma in Costa Rica and does not carry stigma. A mutual divorce takes around 3-6 months to complete, although granted immediately if a couple has been legally separated for 1 year or have lived separately for 3 years without legal recognition. As of 2022, the divorce rate in Costa Rica is 2.7 per 1,000 inhabitants, higher than neighboring Panama (1.2), Nicaragua (0.8), and the US (2.3).

Death

Costa Ricans typically hold a ***velorio*** (wake) in the home of the deceased, placing body in an open casket until the time of burial. During this time, friends and relatives visit to pay their respects, often bringing food, flowers, and sympathy cards. While acquaintances of the deceased usually only visit for a short period of time, close friends and family members typically hold an all-night vigil the night before the burial. This vigil consists of prayer, food, and music. Funerals often occur in a church and consist of a mass service, sermon from a priest, prayers, and Bible readings. After the funeral, mourners follow a hearse that transports the coffin to the deceased's final resting place, usually a cemetery. Traditionally, for the final part of the journey, six close friends or family members of the deceased carry the coffin on their shoulders. Most burials are in mausoleums, which are an above ground cement box, where family can honor their loved one, visit, and lay flowers.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Following the16th-century colonization, the Costa Rican social system was patriarchal, meaning men held most power and authority. While Costa Rica has made progress towards securing women's rights, gaps persist. Women take a more active role in caregiving, and society generally favors men. In a 2022 gender inequality index, Costa Rica ranked 58 of 165 countries, higher (worse) than the US (44), while lower (better) than neighboring Nicaragua (97) and Panama (95).

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Traditionally, women in Costa Rica assumed most household responsibilities. Today, women remain the primary caretaker in the home, though some couples share responsibilities (see *Family and Kinship*). Costa Rican women spend an average of approximately 22% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 8% for men. This average is higher in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region for women (18%) and men (9%).

Labor Force: In 2024, some 44% of Costa Rican women worked outside the home, similar to Nicaragua (48%) and Panama (50%) but lower than the US (57%). Although, female labor force participation has increased since 1990 (35%), women are more likely to occupy part-time and informal roles. As of 2024, around 38% of women worked in the informal sector, making them less likely to have formal work arrangements, benefits, and other safety nets. Additionally, women are less likely to work in science, engineering, technology, and math fields. In 2023, women occupied roughly 47% of senior and middle management positions, lower than Nicaragua (54%) but higher than the US (44%).

Gender and the Law

Costa Rica's 1949 Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees that all persons are equal before the law and condemns discrimination. In 1998, Costa Rica created the

Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Women's Institute, or INAMU), which leads the country in promoting and protecting women's rights. Coordinated by INAMU, Costa Rica's ***La Política Nacional para la Igualdad Efectiva entre Mujeres y Hombres 2018-2030*** (National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2018-2030) is the country's policy framework for gender equality. At the global level, Costa Rica has ratified many commitments regarding women's rights, specifically the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1986 and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women in 1994.

Costa Rica's Labor Code (1943) and Constitution (1949) prohibit sex-based discrimination in the workplace, ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work, have access to advancement opportunities, and cannot be unfairly dismissed. The code entitles mothers to 4 months of parental leave that can be taken before or after childbirth. During the leave, the country's social security system funds a portion of the mother's salary. A 2022 reform to Costa Rica's Labor Code allows fathers 8 days of paternity leave, giving 2 days per week for the first month. Despite these and other laws, female discrimination and a pay gap between genders persist. In 2022, the difference between the median earnings of men and women was the second lowest (best) of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development countries at some 1.4%. The minimum legal age of marriage in Costa Rica is 18, and child marriage is prohibited.

Gender and Politics

In 1949, Costa Rica granted women universal suffrage, and in 1950, women voted for the first time when Bernarda Vásquez casted her vote. In the 1953 national elections, the first three women were elected to the ***Asemblea Legislativa*** (Legislative Assembly, see *Political and Social Relations*). From 2010-14, Laura Chinchilla Miranda served as Costa Rica's first female President. Generally, women in Costa Rica are represented in politics, holding 47% of seats in the *Asemblea Legislativa*. This is higher than the US (29% in the House and 26% in the Senate)

and Panama (23%). Since 1996, Costa Rica has required by law that 40% of political party candidate lists contain women. A 2009 Electoral Code change stated that all delegations, party lists, and other peer bodies must be composed of 50% women and 50% men, with the difference between the two no more than one.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Nearly 36% of Costa Rican women aged 16-69 years had experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. In 2022, Costa Rica had a femicide (murder of a woman because of her gender) rate of 0.7 per 100,000 females, lower than the LAC average (3.6) and the US (2.9). In 2023, there were at least 68 homicides of women, the highest year on record. Costa Rican law criminalizes domestic violence and rape. The country's ***Ruta de Genero*** (Gender Route) initiative created ***puntos violeta*** (violet points), locations where women can register complaints, receive legal advice, and obtain psychological support.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2022, Costa Rica's birthrate declined from 6.7 births per woman to 1.5, slightly below the US rate (1.7) and LAC average (1.8). The significant decline in Costa Rica's fertility is likely due to increased access to reproductive healthcare and increased female participation in the workforce. Costa Rica's adolescent fertility rate was 26 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2022, significantly lower than the LAC average (52) but higher than the US (14). Since 1970, Costa Rica has permitted abortion if the pregnancy poses a serious health risk to the women's life.

Homosexuality in Costa Rica

In 2020, Costa Rica became the first Central American country to legalize same-sex marriage. A combination of executive orders and workplace policies prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Costa Rica. US service members are subject to local laws with regards to this practice.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica and the language of business, government, education, and the media. A small percentage of the population speaks Limonese Creole or other Indigenous languages. English proficiency levels are improving outside of tourist areas.

Spanish

Spaniards brought their language to Costa Rica in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*). Today, some 99% of Costa Ricans speak ***español*** (Spanish), which uses the same alphabet as English with an additional consonant – ñ (pronounced like the "ny" in the word canyon).

While mutually intelligible with other Spanish dialects, Costa Rican Spanish contains unique words and grammatical structures. For example, the word "***siempre***," normally translated as "always," can mean "still" in Costa Rica. Similarly, Costa Ricans sometimes use "***regalar***" to express "to give," although it means "to give as a gift" in other Spanish-speaking countries.

Costa Rican slang words, known as ***tiquismos*** (Costa Rica-isms), like "***mae***" (dude), "***qué chiva***" (amazing), and "***¿Al chile*****?** (really?) are common in everyday speech. "***Pura vida***" (pure life) is a popular expression used to greet, thank, and respond positively to questions in informal settings.

Costa Ricans add "-tico" to the end of words to make them more affectionate or smaller. For example, ***un gato*** (a male cat) becomes ***un gatico*** (a little cat or kitty). Because of this unique grammatical form, Costa Ricans are known as "***Ticos***."

Other Languages

Some of the approximately 69,000 Indigenous people in Costa Rica speak their respective native languages. Of the six main Indigenous languages, the most spoken are Cabécar (between 13,000-15,000 speakers), Bribri (about 7,000 speakers), and Ngäbere (about 2,800 speakers). Costa Rica's Constitution protects Indigenous languages.

Additionally, around 55,000 Costa Ricans speak Limonese Creole, an English-based dialect similar to Jamaican English. Jamaican railroad workers brought the language to the Puerto Limón area in the late 19th century (see *History and Myth*). As of 2024, the Costa Rican Constitution does not recognize Limonese Creole as a protected language. Other languages spoken in Costa Rica include Chinese (at least 4,500 speakers) and Arabic (about 3,600 speakers).

English

While not widely spoken among Costa Ricans outside of tourist areas and parts of San José, English proficiency has improved in recent years through government support. As of 2019, around 90% of primary school students had access to English classes. Despite the government's efforts, only about 35% of public high school graduates from the class of 2022 achieved intermediate English proficiency. Rates of English proficiency tend to be higher among private school students and wealthy Costa Ricans (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

As of 2024, around 120,000 US citizens lived in Costa Rica. Although a few Americans in Costa Rica learn Spanish, most continue to speak English, which has caused some resentment among the populace (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Costa Rica requires not only knowledge of Spanish, but also the ability to interact effectively using language within the context of the culture. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Costa Ricans tend to be polite and indirect communicators. Their use of ***indirectas*** (indirect comments) helps them to give feedback or opinions in a gentle manner. They are usually patient listeners and speak more slowly and softly than Americans. Costa Ricans tend to pause often during prolonged conversations with acquaintances.

Costa Ricans generally avoid confrontation. Instead of openly expressing disagreement, they tend to reveal their true opinions through humor or suggestion. For example, although a Costa Rican suggests "***otro día***" or "***más adelante***" ("later on" or "further ahead") when prompted for a timeline, they rarely mean the next day. Instead, "*otro día*" or "*más adelante*" serves as an ambiguous placeholder for next week, next month, or never.

Similarly, Costa Ricans often use other *indirectas* to express "no" gently, while hinting about their opinion on the matter. Similarly, a person's tone and body language are often more important than the literal meaning of their words.

In formal business meetings, Costa Ricans value direct eye contact, which signals respect and attentiveness. Close friends,

regardless of gender, may touch on the arm during conversation. Costa Ricans tend to stand closer to each other while talking than Americans (see *Time and Space*). They typically consider fidgeting and putting feet on furniture disrespectful and impolite.

Greetings

Upon meeting someone for the first time, a spoken greeting is customary regardless of sex or social stature. Men greet male friends and relatives with a handshake or hug. Women usually greet female friends and family with a light kiss on the cheek. Men and women who know each other typically embrace and give a kiss on the cheek.

Greetings are usually accompanied by the phrases "***buenos días***" (good morning), "***buenas tardes***" (good afternoon), or "***buenas noches***" (good evening). "*Buenas noches*" is typically used only after the sun has set. These greetings tend to be shortened to "***buenas***." In informal settings, "*pura vida*" is another common greeting that can be used at any time of day.

Names

A typical Costa Rican name contains one or two first names and two last names. The two last names indicate family heritage. For example, in the full name of former President José Figueres Ferrer, Figueres is his father's family name, while Ferrer his mother's (see *History and Myth*).

In daily life, Costa Ricans use their full name, especially on official forms and documents. Married women usually keep their maiden name. Costa Ricans often use nicknames with friends that reference personal characteristics such as height, weight, or ethnicity.

Forms of Address

While forms of address depend on age, status, and relationship, they are generally formal and courteous. When addressing

someone older or of higher standing, Costa Ricans place ***don*** (sir) or ***doña*** (madam) in front of the first name. In more formal settings, ***señor*** (Mr.) and ***señora*** (Mrs.) are added before a person's last name.

Spanish uses different "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality and respect required. Costa Ricans use the polite ***usted*** (you) with most people, including family, friends, and sometimes even pets. The use of *usted* in Costa Rica is not an indication of formality.

Rather, it is a unique characteristic of the country's Spanish. Although less common than *usted* in conversation, the familiar ***vos*** (you) or ***tú*** (you) may appear in written material. Foreign nationals should use *usted* with all conversation partners.

Conversational Topics

After initial greetings, Costa Ricans typically engage in conversation about family, current events, and sports, especially ***fútbol*** ("soccer," see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Foreign nationals should avoid discussing politics, religion, and sensitive topics like Costa Rica's relationship with Nicaragua (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Gestures

Costa Ricans often use gestures in conversation. They beckon by extending an arm and moving their fingers towards themselves with their palm facing downward. To point, Costa Ricans purse their lips or point with their chin in the direction of an object. They also wrinkle their noses to indicate confusion.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Spanish Words and Phrases

English	Spanish
Hello	Hola
How are you?	¿Cómo está? / ¿Qué tal?
I am well	Estoy bien / Pura vida
Excuse me	Disculpe / Perdón
Yes / No	Sí / No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You are welcome	Con mucho gusto
I'm sorry	Lo siento
I don't understand	No entiendo
I do not speak Spanish	No hablo español
What is your name?	¿Cuál es su nombre? / ¿Cómo se llama?
My name is ___	Me llamo ___
Where are you from?	¿De dónde es?
I am from the US	Yo soy de los Estados Unidos
Goodbye	Adiós / Chao
Good morning/day	Buenos días / Buen día
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes
Good evening	Buenas noches
What does ___ mean?	¿Qué significa ___?
What is this?	¿Qué es esto?
How much does it cost?	¿Cuánto cuesta?
I would like a ___	Quisiera un/una ___
How do you say ___?	¿Cómo se dice ___?
…in English?	…en inglés?
…in Spanish?	…en español?
What do you want?	¿Qué quiere usted?
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
Yesterday	Ayer
Today	Hoy
Tomorrow	Mañana
Where is the bathroom?	¿Dónde está el baño?
Car	Carro / Auto
Plane	Avión
Bus	Autobús / Bus
Left / Right / Straight	Izquierda / Derecha / Directo
When does the bus come?	¿Cuándo viene el autobús?
Does Uber pick up here?	¿Uber recoge aquí?
Can I order a taxi?	Me gustaría pedir un taxi

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98% (2021 estimate, combined males and females)

Early Education

Before the arrival of Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*), Indigenous communities transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations through stories, music, and myths. The Bribri and Maleku peoples (see *History and Myth*) emphasized the central role nature played in their everyday lives. Elders taught children about animals, folklore, medicinal plants, and rituals. In addition, children learned by watching and participating in tasks such as farming, hunting, gathering, and other life skills.

Spanish Education

In the Spanish colonial era (see *History and Myth*), the primary focus of education was to impart basic literacy and instruction in Roman Catholicism. Various Roman Catholic orders established missions and schools to teach the Indigenous peoples (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The Catholic Church oversaw the construction and maintenance of some parish schools, primarily located in and around San José. Nevertheless, the country's challenging terrain and the Spanish Crown's loss of interest due to the country's lack of resources limited the Catholic Church's influence (see *History and Myth*).

Education After Independence

Following Costa Rica's independence in 1821, the government sought to increase school enrollment and expand secondary education In 1843, ***Casa de Ensenanza de Santo Tomas*** (School of St. Thomas), which opened in 1814 to provide students with primary instruction in religion, math, and writing; expanded to become the country's first university, the ***Universidad de Santo Tomás*** (University of Saint Thomas).

To increase student enrollment across all levels, the government passed laws mandating primary school attendance. Because the government did not enforce these laws, utilization remained low. Between 1844-47, amendments to the Constitution established a centralized education system. The government passed legislation that guaranteed the right to education for all. In 1869, President Jesús Jiménez Zamora enacted the ***Ley de Instrucción Pública*** (Public Instruction Law), which made primary education tax-financed and compulsory for all children aged 6-15.

During the latter half of the century, the country's educational and political development were closely intertwined (see *History and Myth*). Influenced by liberal ideologies, the government sought to reduce the Catholic Church's influence and make education more secular. In 1886, the government established a degree of separation of Church and State, creating religious neutrality in education. This neutrality meant students learned about multiple religions, rather than just Catholicism, and were not forced to adhere to it if their parents asserted, they follow a different religion. In 1888, the *Universidad de Santo Tomás* closed due to its ties to the Catholic Church, ending all access to higher education in the country for over 50 years.

Education in the 20th Century

Major developments took place in the 1940s under Rafael Ángel Calderón's government (see *History and Myth*). The *Universidad de Santo Tomás* re-opened as the ***Universidad de Costa Rica*** (University of Costa Rica), with the goal of producing educated political leaders to run the country. Following the abolition of its Army (see *Economics and Resources*), Costa Rica reallocated much of its budget to education. In 1957, the government passed the Basic Law of Education, which established goals, objectives, and guidelines for a national education system.

In the 1960s, primary education reforms introduced courses to help prepare students for higher education, offering both academic and vocational tracks. Teacher training programs also expanded to equip more educators for secondary education. In

1970, further reforms aimed to increase access to educational institutions for students in rural areas. This period saw the establishment of technical centers such as the Costa Rican Institute of Technology and the ***Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje*** (National Learning Institute). These institutions provided students with practical skills for the workforce.

In the 1980s-90s, Costa Rica experienced an economic crisis that significantly reduced educational funding. Between 1980-85, secondary enrollment dropped by about 10%. To raise the adaptability and quality of the workforce, educational objectives shifted to technology and the English language. In the 1990s, then-President José María Figueres Olsen (see *History and Myth*) added computer science and English to the national curriculum. Costa Rica continued to face high dropout rates and inequality in education throughout the early 2000s.

Modern Education System

Today, education in Costa Rica is compulsory for all citizens between the ages of 4-17. Most students attend free government-run schools for these 13 years, although some enroll in private, often religious, or bilingual schools. In 2022, about 9% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, significantly lower than neighboring Nicaragua (16%) and Panama (13%), but equivalent to the US.

While all public and many private schools follow a national curriculum, quality of education tends to be much higher at private schools. Many rural public schools lack funding, while urban public schools tend to be only slightly better. All public and private schools require uniforms to reduce economic and social differences among students, which are a significant investment for some rural families.

Most schools run from February-December, and operate two daily shifts, whereby students attend either morning or afternoon classes. This system allows for existing school infrastructure to serve large quantities of children, particularly in urban areas. However, critics denounce the system for the burden it presents to teachers and the reduced time students spend in class. In addition, many students in rural and low-income communities

were particularly impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, lacking access to internet services for remote learning (see *Technology and Material*). In a 2022 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science among 80 participating countries, Costa Rica ranked 56th, below the US (18) but similar to Mexico (51).

The Costa Rican Ministry of Education oversees all school accreditation and is tasked with ensuring that educators meet national benchmarks. Since 2009, the government has aimed to revise the curriculum towards a skill-centered model, but lack of teacher training and resistance have hindered its implementation. Despite increased educational spending since the pandemic, reductions to the social expenditure budget have negatively impacted student retention rates. In 2021, Costa Rica spent about 6.2% of its GDP on education, higher than the Latin America and the Caribbean average (4.2%) and the US (5.4%).

Pre-Primary Education: Children under the age of 1 may attend public or fee-based ***ciclo materno infantile*** (maternal and child cycle). During this cycle, children develop basic skills like socialization through play-based learning and other activities. This cycle is mandatory for children aged 4-5. The ***ciclo de transición*** (transition cycle), similar to kindergarten in the US, is compulsory for children aged 5-6. Costa Rica mandates 2 years of pre-primary education to promote learning skills in early education, which students will use throughout higher learning.

While pre-primary instruction is mainly in Spanish, some private schools offer instruction in English or other languages. Learning at this level emphasizes storytelling, arts, playing, communication, and other skills that prepare children for primary education. In 2021, about 95% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary school.

Primary Education: ***Primaria*** (primary) education begins at age 7 and comprises grades 1-6. Most schools follow the national curriculum, which covers Spanish, mathematics, social studies, arts, religion, English, and natural sciences. Students

are graded on a scale of 0-100 and must earn a minimum 65% in each course to advance to the next grade. At the end of basic education, students receive ***diploma de conclusion de ensenanza pimaria*** (primary education completion diploma). In 2018, about 97% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in *primaria.*

Secondary Education: ***Secundaria*** (secondary) education is divided into two stages: the general cycle (grades 7-9), and ***educación diversificada*** (diversified education, grades 10-12). The first 3 years of *secundaria* are a continuation of primary school and consist of general education courses. During their final 3 years, students choose among three study paths: academic, artistic, or technical. Each program typically takes 2-3 years. Especially in rural areas, not all programs are offered at every school. While each path has core curricula similar to that of primary school, technical studies generally dedicate a significant portion of the school day to vocational training. Upon completion of *educación diversificada*, students receive a ***bachillerato*** (baccalaureate), similar to a high school diploma in the US. In 2018, about 82% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in *secundaria.*

Post-Secondary Education: Costa Rica has a large network of public and private universities. To determine admission, each institution typically administers its own entrance exam. The *Universidad de Costa Rica* is the country's highest-ranking public university, offering over 100 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Other public universities include the ***Universidad a la Distancia*** (Distance Learning University) and the ***Tecnológico de Costa Rica*** (Costa Rica Institute of Technology). The ***Instituto Centroamericano de Administración de Empresas*** (Central American Institute of Business Administration) and the University for Peace cater to international students and offer classes in English. As of 2023, about 19.6% of the population over 25 had completed post-secondary education, and about 2.9% received a PhD or its equivalent.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Costa Ricans tend to view interpersonal connections and friendships as vital to business. They typically value punctuality in business, while having a more relaxed attitude towards it socially.

Time and Work

The work week in Costa Rica generally runs from Monday-Friday, with most business occurring between 8am-5pm. Though hours vary by store size and location, most shops are open Monday-Saturday from 9am-6pm. On Sundays, most shops are closed, but some are open in the morning. Larger shopping centers and department stores have longer hours, often from 8am-8pm, 7 days a week. Supermarket chains tend to be open from 7:30am-10pm every day. Bank hours vary by location but generally extend weekdays from 9am-4pm. Most post offices are open Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm and on Saturday from 8am-12pm. Government offices are usually open on weekdays from 8am-4pm. Some small businesses close for lunch between 12pm-2pm.

Working Conditions: The maximum legal workweek is 48 hours with an 8-hour limit per workday. Costa Rican law ensures a range of protections and benefits for workers, such as sick leave, overtime pay, retirement benefits, and healthcare (see *Sustenance and Health*). Mothers may take 1 month of paid maternity leave before giving birth, and 3 additional months after the birth. Fathers receive 8 days of paternity leave to be used within the first 4 weeks of a child's birth (see *Sex and Gender*). As of 2025, the minimum wage for unskilled workers was 12,237 colones per day (about US $24, see *Economics and Resources*). Costa Rican law mandates workers receive an annual ***aguinaldo*** (Christmas bonus equivalent to 1 month of pay). As of 2024, about 39% of the employed population worked in the informal sector, which

typically has lower wages and weaker enforcement of labor laws than the formal sector (see *Economics and Resources*).

Time Zone: Costa Rica adheres to Central Standard Time (CST), which is 6 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 1 hour behind Eastern Standard Time (EST). Costa Rica does not observe daylight savings time.

Date Notation: Like the US, Costa Rica uses the Western (Gregorian) Calendar. Unlike in the US, Costa Ricans typically write the day first, followed by the month and year. are

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- April 11: Juan Santamautría Day (see *History and Myth*)
- March/April: Holy Thursday
- March/April: Good Friday
- March/April: Easter Sunday
- May 1: Labor Day
- June: Father's Day (3rd Sunday)
- July 25: Annexation of Nicoya Day
- August 2: Virgin of Los Ángeles Day
- August 15: Mother's Day
- August 31: Afro-Costa Rican Culture Day
- September 15: Independence Day
- December 1: Army Abolition Day
- December 25: Christmas

The dates of holidays listed with 2 months are contingent on when Easter Sunday occurs, which is the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox.

Time and Business

Costa Rica's business culture emphasizes personal relationships and trust. Many Costa Ricans prefer to establish a friendly relationship with someone before conducting business. In meetings, participants usually engage in substantial casual conversation before turning to business matters. Costa Rica's relaxed attitude towards time (see *Language and Communication*) often results in business proceeding at an unhurried pace.

Public and Personal Space

Although it depends on the nature of the relationship, Costa Ricans generally stand closer to one another than North Americans. Generally, a space of less than two feet is normal.

Touch: In professional settings, a handshake is the most appropriate greeting. Friends may hug or exchange cheek kisses (see *Language and Communication*).

Eye Contact: During business conversation, Costa Ricans maintain direct eye contact to demonstrate attentiveness and respect.

Photographs

Some churches, museums, and government installations prohibit photography. It is illegal to publish photos of people without their consent. Permission is particularly important when photographing children and when posing with wildlife.

Driving

Road, traffic, and weather conditions can sometimes make driving in Costa Rica challenging. Roads often have potholes, and landslides can occur during the rainy season (see *Political and Social Relations*). Some drivers also disregard traffic laws, and traffic congestion often occurs in San José. Like North Americans, Costa Ricans drive on the right side of the road. In 2023, Costa Rica had 17 road fatalities per 100,000 people, higher than the US average (12.2) but lower than the 2019 Central American average (18.5).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Costa Rican clothing, arts, and recreation reflect the country's rich history, a blend of European, African, and Indigenous traditions, and cultural diversity.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Typically, traditional dress is worn only during dance performances, mostly by folk dancers, people working at tourist sites, and children on Annexation Day. Clothing, styles, colors, and patterns frequently vary by ethnicity, gender, and geographic location. On the Caribbean coast, clothing tends to reflect African influences with ornate patterns and headwraps.

Women's traditional dress typically consists of a white ruffled blouse with colorful trimming, ***gola*** (long colorful skirt), and leather sandals. Many women wear their hair in braids adorned with flowers or ribbons. Men's traditional dress typically consists of a white shirt, pants, ***chonete*** (wide-brimmed hat, worn in rural areas mainly), red sash belt, and red handkerchief tied around their neck. The *chonete*, also known as the "farmer's hat," is especially important in Costa Rican culture for its symbolism of manual labor under the sun.

Indigenous dress is also often only worn on special occasions and varies by region. Both men's and women's dress typically comprises elements similar to other Costa Rican fashion. Jewelry made of metal, stone, wood, jade, shells, and other natural materials is also common.

Modern: In urban areas, many residents follow the latest Western fashion trends. Men typically wear jeans or pants, shirts, and comfortable shoes. Women often wear jeans or skirts with a blouse or t-shirt, or dresses. Older people tend to dress more formally. In business settings, Costa Ricans typically prefer formal styles such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits. During

rodeos or other popular equestrian events, many residents dress as ***vaqueros*** (cowboys). This attire typically includes jeans, plaid shirts, belts with large buckles, boots, and hats.

Recreation and Leisure

Ticos (Costa Ricans, see *Language and Communication*) often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are sharing meals (see *Sustenance and Health*), playing sports and games, and going to the beach. Many rural residents often attend town ***bailes*** (dances), where they drink and dance with friends. Sundays are typically reserved for spending time with family.

Holidays and Festivals: Costa Ricans hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, which tend to reflect the country's Catholic roots (see *Religion and Spirituality*), African or Indigenous traditions, and historical events.

Costa Rica hosts various ***fiestas*** (festivals) annually. Residents typically celebrate ***Semana Santa*** (Holy Week) in February or March (see *Time and Space*), which coincides with the starting of Lent (a 40-day period of prayer and spiritual reflection). The ***Fiestas de Puntarenas*** (Puntarenas Festivals) is the country's largest celebration comprised of music, food, and processions of dancers in colorful costumes. Additionally, the port city of Limón hosts a Carnival celebration known as ***Día de las Culturas*** (Culture Day). The *fiesta* occurs on October 12th and includes parades, Caribbean music, food, and art.

Other notable *fiestas* are ***Día Nacional del Boyero*** (National Oxcart Driver Day), held the second Sunday of March in San Antonio de Escazú, a suburb of San José. The festival celebrates Costa Rica's rich agricultural heritage by honoring the ***boyeros***, traditional oxcart drivers who transported goods across the country. Celebrations include a parade of brightly colored wooden ***carretas*** (oxcarts), food, music, blessing of the oxen, and performances of folktales. Likewise, between December 31st and January 2nd, the ***Danza de los Diablitos*** (Dance of the Little Devils) takes place at the

Boruca reserve in Puntarenas Province to celebrate the traditions and heritage of the Borucas, an Indigenous people. Celebrations include music, dancing, processions, and performances. Participants typically dress as ***diablos*** (devils) and wear wooden masks.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Costa Rican history. On September 15th, Costa Ricans celebrate the ***Día de la Independencia*** (Day of Independence), which commemorates the country's declaration of independence from Spanish rule in 1821 (see *History and Myth*). On the eve of the holiday, many children throughout the country participate in ***Desfiles de Faroles*** (Lantern Parades). During the parades they carry handmade lanterns to symbolize traveling to spread the news of independence across Central America. Other associated traditions include fireworks, music, flag-flying, and eating traditional foods (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Sports and Games

Costa Ricans participate in a wide variety of sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, swimming, cycling, track and field, boxing, and horseback riding. The country has accessible beaches, and surfing has become especially popular. Costa Rica hosts the International Surfing Association World Surfing Games and World Surf League events.

Costa Rica participates in other international competitions such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and Pan American Games. Swimmer Silvia Poll won the country's first Olympic medal, capturing the silver one in 1988 with the women's 200-meter freestyle.

Her younger sister, Claudia, won the country's first gold medal in 1996 in the same division. As of 2025, the Poll sisters are the country's only Olympic medalists. Other notable athletes are boxer Yokasta Valle who is a three-division world champion in the mini flyweight, light flyweight, and atomweight classes. Sprinter Nery Brenes made it to the semi-finals of the 400-meter sprint event at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He also won a gold

medal at the 2012 International Amateur Athletic Federation World Indoor Championship, where he broke the national record in the 200-meter dash with a time of 20.43 seconds.

Soccer: ***Fútbol*** (soccer) is Costa Rica's most popular sport, with youth learning through pick-up games at school and amateur leagues. Costa Rica's national team nicknamed ***La Sele*** (The Selection), or sometimes called ***Los Ticos*** (The Ticos), has qualified for four World Cups. *Fútbol* player Keylor Navas is one of the country's most celebrated athletes and widely regarded as the greatest Costa Rican player of all time. He has won multiple league titles and goalkeeper of the season awards.

While playing for the national team, Navas qualified for three FIFA World Cups (2014, 2018, 2022) and two Concacaf Gold Cups (2009, 2013), the Americas and Caribbean's premier club tournament. Other notable players are Rónald Gómez, nicknamed "The Bullet" for his ability to score long-distance goals, and Hernán Medford, who scored Costa Rica's first goal in an FIFA World Cup against Sweden in 1990.

Games: Costa Ricans play a variety of games. A popular one is ***bolinchas***, also known as ***canicas*** (both terms meaning marbles), whereby players try to knock each other's marbles out of a circle. The player who retains the most marbles in the circle at the end of the game wins. Other popular games similar to those played in the US include ***cuerda de saltar*** (jump rope), ***escondido*** (hide and seek), and ***rayuelas*** (hopscotch).

Music and Dance

Indigenous and African rhythms along with European harmonies influence traditional Costa Rican music. Indigenous groups like the Boruca, Bribri, and Chorotega (see *History and Myth*) used music for rituals and ceremonies (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Following the arrival of Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*), rural folk music developed. ***Tambito***, a form of folkloric dance music, features lyrics of rural lifestyles and Indigenous traditions. Typically accompanied by instruments like drums,

flutes, and guitars, *tambito* is regarded the national rhythm of Costa Rica.

Additionally, ***Marimba*** is a music style that combines African, Spanish, and Indigenous rhythms. The word *marimba* also refers to the type of xylophone that musicians play, along with percussion instruments like drums, ***quijongo*** (a stringed instrument), and ***güiro*** (an open-ended instrument with grooves that produce a rasping sound when scraped). Today, the *marimba* is considered the national instrument of Costa Rica. To recognize and celebrate the instrument's importance to Costa Rican culture, November 30 is National *Marimba* Day.

In the 1950s-60s, ***swing criollo***, a dance similar to swing dancing in the US, gained popularity. Many dance companies condemned the dance due to its association with immorality and seedy night clubs. Nevertheless, in the early 21st century, the dance became recognized as an important folk dance that shaped Costa Rican identity. Today, it is one of the country's most popular dances, often featured at festivals. Other popular dances are ***bachata*** (a three-step dance with the hips used on the fourth beat), ***cumbia*** (a pair dance with fluid and circular movements), and salsa.

Ticos widely regard the ***Punto Guanacasteco*** (Point Guanacaste) as Costa Rica's national dance. The musical tradition originated in the northwestern province of Guanacaste as a dance to honor the traditional rite of courtship between men and women. It is accompanied by a fast-paced tempo usually played with Spanish guitars, *Marimba,* and lyrics of Costa Rican folktales. Dancers dress in traditional clothing and form pairs to begin a two-step dance in a large circle. Women flare their long colorful skirts and twirl, while men fan their hats and wave their handkerchiefs to create an energetic, colorful ensemble.

Today, Costa Ricans listen to an array of foreign and local musical styles like pop, ***soca*** (a blended style of soul and calypso music), reggae, reggaeton, jazz, and rock. One of Costa Rica's most famous artists is singer-songwriter Debi Nova. Her

2004 song “One Rhythm” was featured on the 2005 FIFA video game soundtrack and reached the top of the US Billboard chart for dance songs. Another notable artist is composer and pianist Benjamín Gutiérrez. In 1963, Hugo Mariana, the conductor of the National Symphony of Costa Rica, commissioned Gutiérrez to write his most famous concerto, ***Concierto para Violín y Orquesta*** (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra).

Literature

With roots in Indigenous oral traditions, Costa Rica has a rich literary history. Local literature developed slowly until the 19th century. Following Costa Rica’s independence from Spain, publications began focusing on social commentary, local customs, and the nation’s history. One of the country’s first novelists, Manuel Argüello Mora, wrote ***La Trinchera*** (The Trench, 1856), which tells the story of his uncle, President Juan Rafael Mora Porras. The novel fictionalizes Juan Rafael’s Presidency and attempt to overthrow Nicaraguan forces (see *History and Myth*). It embodies common themes of Costa Rican literature like resilience, cultural identity, and historical reflection.

Between 1890-1920, a group of liberal intellectuals known as the Olympus Generation produced nationalistic literature. Carlos Gagini sought to strengthen Costa Rican identity through historic novels like ***Erizo*** (The Hedgehog, 1922). The story describes the national war during the 1850s (see *History and Myth*) and feat of the soldier Juan Santamaría. Additionally, his novel ***El Árbol Enfermo*** (The Sick Tree, 1918) tells the story of a North American man seducing and betraying a woman, emphasizing the importance of resisting external influences.

Another notable author from this period is Carmen Lyra, considered one of the country’s cultural icons. In 1920 she published ***Cuentos de mi Tía Panchita*** (Stories of my Aunt Panchita), a collection of traditional Costa Rican folktales.

In the 1940s, Costa Rica experienced a rise in poetry focused on themes of social problems, land distribution, and foreign corporations. Poet and journalist Fabián Dobles is considered

one of the founders of modern Costa Rican literature. His poetry explored themes of nature, love, poverty, and social justice. His work ***Can Ese que llaman pueblo*** (The One They Call The People, 1942) explored workers' rights and social injustices. Poet and feminist Yolanda Oreamuno explored themes of love, identity, and humanity. Her novel ***La Ruta su Evasión*** (The Route of his Escape, 1948) follows the Mendoza family through its female characters who face illness, abuse, and infidelity.

During the latter half of the 20th century, literature in Costa Rica focused on themes of modernization, industrialization, and political instability. José León Sánchez Alvarado's ***Isla de los Hombres Solos*** (Island of Lonely Men, 1968) described inhumane treatment in a Costa Rican prison, which Alvarado himself experienced while incarcerated. In 1974, a Mexican film producer adapted Sánchez's novel into a film.

During the 1980s, literary themes expanded with authors like Laureano Albán writing about experiences outside the country. His novel ***Herencia del otoño*** (Autumn Heritage, 1980) recounted his time in Spain experiencing the seasons, which he had never seen in Costa Rica.

In recent years, authors like Larissa Rú have explored the fantasy and horror genres. In 2022, Rú won the national prize for Costa Rican literature for best short story for her horror novel ***Monstruos bajo la Lluvia*** (Monsters in the Rain).

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Costa Rica also has a rich history of arts and crafts, such as wood carving, pottery, painting, weaving, and jewelry. In Guaitil, the pottery capital of Costa Rica, the contemporary Chorotega people craft ceramic pieces using traditional methods and natural pigments – typically orange, gray, white, and black. Additionally, the creation of clothing utilizing traditional techniques such as backstrap loom weaving, a method of weaving on a loom attached to the waist, is central to some Indigenous communities.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

In Costa Rica, meals are often important social events. Costa Rican cuisine reflects the country's Indigenous, Spanish, and African heritage.

Dining Customs

Most Costa Ricans eat three meals and at least one snack per day. ***Desayuno*** (breakfast) is heavy and followed by ***almuerzo*** (lunch) around noon. Costa Ricans usually eat ***cena*** (dinner) between 7pm-9pm. In the late afternoon or early evening, many Costa Ricans pause for ***cafecito*** (coffee time). *Cafecito* often includes a snack, though the afternoon break is taken whether or not one drinks coffee. Common snacks include cookies, bread, and ***chorreadas*** (corn pancakes) served with ***natilla*** (a condiment similar to sour cream).

When invited to a Costa Rican home, guests usually arrive 15-30 minutes late (see *Time and Space*) and bring flowers, wine, liquor, breads, pastries, or sweets as a gift. Presents should be wrapped, and Costa Ricans usually open them immediately. Guests should wait to begin eating until everyone is seated and the host says, "***buen provecho***" (enjoy). Diners should keep their hands visible and elbows off the table. Guests should sample all foods offered to them, as declining food is considered impolite. Costa Ricans tend to finish everything on their plates and avoid wasting food. After the meal, guests usually linger for conversation, drinks, and dessert.

Diet

Costa Rican cuisine blends fresh ingredients with Indigenous, Spanish, and African influences. Generally, meals contain rice, beans, corn, root vegetables, meats, fish, and dairy. ***Sofrito*** ("sautéed," onions, peppers, and garlic simmered in oil) is used as the base of many dishes. Costa Ricans usually regard ***gallo***

pinto (“spotted rooster,” rice and beans with onions, peppers, and cilantro) as their national dish.

Beans, eggs, pork, beef, and fish are common protein sources in Costa Rica. Additionally, rice, plantains, coconut milk, and produce like avocados, peppers, onions, and tomatoes appear in many dishes. While wheat bread is available, Costa Ricans typically have corn tortillas with meals. Common garnishes are lime, cilantro, cumin, and ***pico de gallo*** (“rooster’s beak,” a mixture of chopped onion, tomato, cilantro, and lime juice). Most households have ***Salsa Lizano*** (“Lizano Sauce,” a brown condiment similar to Worcestershire sauce), which is used to flavor many dishes, especially *gallo pinto*. Another common accompaniment found in restaurants is ***chilera*** (pickled vegetables) which contains onions, cucumbers, carrots, and spicy peppers in vinegar.

Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Costa Rica is typically large and nutritious. The most common breakfast is *gallo pinto* served with extras such as eggs, avocado, plantains, bacon, and corn tortillas. Lighter alternatives are cereal, yogurt, fruit, bread, and cheese, particularly ***queso Turrialba*** (“Turrialba cheese,” a mild cheese made from cow’s milk). Most people drink coffee with breakfast (see “Beverages” below).

Costa Rican lunches usually include rice, beans, meat, and vegetables. The most typical Costa Rican lunch is ***casado*** (married) which contains rice, beans, salad, plantains, and a protein – usually pork, beef, egg, or cheese. Unlike in *gallo pinto*, the rice and beans are separated in *casado*. Other options include ***arroz con pollo*** (rice with chicken), ***sopa negra*** (black bean soup), and ***picadillo*** (cooked chopped vegetables). Seafood dishes are common on the Caribbean and Pacific

coasts. Options include ***rondón*** (“run down,” a spicy soup made from fish and coconut milk) and ***ceviche***, which consists of raw fish and shellfish marinated in lime juice with onion, cilantro, and peppers. Although *ceviche* is usually served in a bowl, some informal restaurants sell ***caldosas*** (brothy) which are bags of potato chips filled with *ceviche*.

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. Options include ***olla de carne*** (“pot of beef,” a beef and vegetable stew) and ***gallos*** (“Costa Rican tacos,” fried corn tortillas filled with meat, cheese, or avacado). International dishes like pizza, pasta, burgers, and sushi are also popular. ***Tamales*** (corn and pork dough cooked in banana leaves) are commonly eaten on Christmas.

Many Costa Rican desserts contain milk, sugar, coconut, and fruit. Options include ***arroz con leche*** (“rice with milk,” a pudding made with rice, sweetened milk, cinnamon, and raisins), ***tres leches*** (“three milks,” sponge cake made with heavy cream, evaporated milk, and condensed milk), and ***flan de coco*** (“coconut flan,” a custard made with sweetened milk and shaved coconut). Ice cream and chocolates are also popular.

Beverages

Coffee has been a major part of Costa Rica’s economy and culture since the early 1800s, when it was first grown in the country (see *History and Myth*). Today, Costa Rican coffee farmers produce some of the world’s highest quality Arabica beans. Most Costa Ricans drink multiple cups of coffee each day. The traditional method of brewing coffee uses a ***chorreador*** (dripper), which is a wooden stand with a cotton filter. As the brewer pours hot water through the filter, coffee trickles into the mug, which is usually made of enamel***.*** Another common warm drink is ***agua dulce*** (“sweet water”), which is made by mixing hot water with a type of unrefined cane sugar

called ***tapa de dulce*** ("sweet cap"). Soda, milk, and juices made from fresh fruits – particularly mango, pineapple, papaya, and passion fruit – are common non-alcoholic beverages.

Generally, beer is the most commonly consumed alcohol. Pilsen, Bavaria, and Imperial are Costa Rica's most popular domestic beer brands. ***Guaro*** (a cane sugar liquor) is the most popular spirit in Costa Rica. The government-produced brand, ***Cacique*** (Chieftain) is Costa Rica's bestselling liquor. Rum and coffee liqueurs are also popular and used in cocktails. When toasting, Costa Rican's raise their glasses while saying "***salud***" (health).

Eating Out

Restaurants in Costa Rica range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Small, informal restaurants called ***sodas*** serve typical breakfast and lunch meals, such as *gallo pinto* and *casado*. Bars often provide a complimentary ***boca*** (bite) with each drink. Common *bocas* include tortilla chips, fried cheese, fried plantains, stews, fried ***manioc*** (yuca), and ***chifrijo*** (fried pork with rice, beans, avocado, and *pico de gallo*). Roadside carts often sell ***copos*** (shaved ice), particularly near beaches. Costa Rican law requires restaurants to add a 10% service charge to every bill. Additional tips are appreciated but not expected.

Health Overview

While Costa Ricans tend to live long and healthy lives, they face high rates of circulatory disease and cancer. Between 2000-23, life expectancy at birth in Costa Rica increased from about 78 to 81 years, higher than the US (78), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC, 76), and Nicaragua (75). During the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before

age 1) decreased from about 11 deaths per 1,000 live births to 9, lower than LAC (13) and Nicaragua (12), but higher than the US (5).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. In some areas, Costa Ricans consult ***chamanes*** ("shamans" or spiritual healers), who address physical or spiritual afflictions by performing certain rituals and communicating with the spirit world (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Traditional medicine involves using plant remedies to prevent and treat disease. Some common medicinal plants are ***guanábana*** (soursop) for stomach discomfort, ***uña de gato*** (cat's claw) for inflammation, and ***dormilona*** (sleeping lady) for insomnia issues. These natural remedies are available as powders, teas, oils, and capsules. While some Costa Ricans rely solely on traditional medicine, most combine herbal remedies with modern healthcare.

Healthcare System

Costa Rica has one of the best healthcare systems in the LAC. In 1941, the government established the ***Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social*** ("Costa Rican Social Security Fund," known as the *Caja*) on the premise that healthcare is a human right. Today, the *Caja* provides healthcare to all citizens and legal residents.

Mandatory monthly contributions from employers and employees fund the *Caja*. As of 2023, employed Costa Ricans paid around 10% of their monthly salaries in *Caja* membership fees. Because of this payment structure, Costa Ricans do not have copayments when accessing public healthcare services.

The *Caja* covers most health services such as annual physicals, hospital visits, specialist appointments, and emergency care. Members of the *Caja* receive general care through ***Equipos Básicos de Atención Integral de Salud*** (Basic Comprehensive Health Care Teams, or EBAIS), which operate in clinics or through home visits, with home visits primarily for the elderly or disabled. For more specialized treatments and surgeries, the EBAIS refers patients to larger clinics or hospitals. Additionally, the *Caja* covers medication costs, dental care, and mental health services.

Despite the *Caja*'s universal coverage and high-quality services, Costa Rica's private healthcare sector is growing. As of 2024, private healthcare accounted for about 26% of Costa Rica's total health expenditure. Private healthcare offers shorter wait times and allows patients to select their doctors and hospitals.

In 2021, Costa Rica spent around 7.5% of GDP on healthcare, lower than Nicaragua (9.7%), LAC (8.3%), and the US (17.4%). As of 2022, Costa Rica had 2.6 physicians per 1,000 people, above LAC (2.4 in 2020) but below the US (3.6 in 2021).

Healthcare Challenges

The leading cause of death in Costa Rica is circulatory disease, which accounted for about 27% of deaths in 2023. Cancers and other tumors were the next leading cause of death (21%), followed by endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases (9%). For the same year, external causes such as car accidents, homicides, and suicides accounted for 11% of all deaths. From 2022-23, Costa Rica's homicide rate increased by around 38% to 17.2 people per 100,000 (see *Political and Social Relations*).

As of 2023, the Costa Rican government reported some 1.2 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in about 9,300 deaths. Approximately 84% of the population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, largely by leveraging its EBAIS network to reach the population.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Before the Spanish arrived in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*), Costa Rica had minimal economic activity. Some Indigenous groups (see *Political and Social Relations*) – notably the Caribs, Borucas, and Corobicí – were seminomadic hunters and fishers who lived in communal villages. Other Indigenous groups, such as the Chorotegas, located in the Nicoya Peninsula and Central Valley lived in well-planned towns and cultivated subsistence crops (farming for personal consumption) such as maize, squash, fruit, and tubers. Trading occurred among these groups through barter or using cacao seeds as currency.

Spanish settlers established small farming communities, primarily scattered around the Central Valley. These communities were largely independent and self-sustaining through agriculture. Due to the rapid depletion of the Indigenous population and absence of lucrative mineral resources, Spain was less economically involved in Costa Rica. Subsequently, the ***encomienda*** system (tribute based on forced Indigenous labor) and external trade did not emerge in Costa Rica as prevalent as it did in other Spanish colonies. Cacao and tobacco were exported in small quantities, sometimes through illicit smuggling.

In the 1660s, Spain closed all of Costa Rica's seaports due to frequent pirate raids, effectively halting the country's maritime trade. By 1709, money was so limited that cacao beans were designated as the official currency. As the 18th century progressed, the reopening of seaports and foreign demand for cash crops facilitated the emergence of Costa Rica's export economy. The towns of Heredia (established in 1706) and San José (established in 1736) prospered from agricultural exports. San José processed cacao and tobacco, facilitating its growth as the country's commercial center.

First introduced at the end of the 1700s, Costa Rica's coffee industry emerged in the 19th century. Head of State from 1824-33, Juan Mora Fernández (see *History and Myth*), encouraged coffee cultivation by providing land grants to farmers who would plant the crop. By the 1840s, Costa Rica was exporting coffee to Panama, South America, and Europe. Between 1850-90, coffee sales accounted for almost 90% of the country's export earnings.

During Spanish independence and statehood (see *History and Myth*), wealthy Costa Rican coffee growers, called ***cafetaleros*** (coffee barons), wielded substantial political influence. *Cafetaleros* used this to implement beneficial policies such as lower taxes and less restrictions on trade for the coffee industry. Profits from the coffee market were used to improve infrastructure, education, and state institutions.

Dictator Tomás Guardia (see *History and Myth*) initiated the construction of a railroad from the Central Valley to the Caribbean Coast to connect farmers with seaports. The railroad was completed in 1890 by an American entrepreneur, Minor Cooper Keith. Over 20 years, the railroad cost around US $8,000,000 and used some 4,000 people, notably migrants from China, Italy, and Jamaica working in harsh conditions (see *Political and Social Relations*).

At the end of the 19th century, Keith then began developing Costa Rica's banana industry (see *History and Myth*). He acquired, often by force, vast areas of Indigenous land and established banana plantations along the railroad route. Many Afro-Caribbean migrants who worked on the railroad found employment on these plantations. In 1889, Keith merged Costa Rica's banana industry with other banana companies to form the multinational United Fruit Company, which controlled the Costa Rican banana market. By 1913, bananas made up some 50% of Costa Rica's exports, surpassing coffee (35%).

World events in the first half of the 20th century exposed the vulnerabilities of Costa Rica's export-reliant economy. During World War I, the loss of the European market reduced demand and prices for coffee. As a result, many wealthy families moved their deposits to American banks. In response, President Alfredo González (see *History and Myth*) increased taxes on coffee exports and income, while reducing government expenditures. International prices of coffee continued to plummet during the Great Depression, resulting in government intervention to regulate coffee production. The economic turmoil inspired national demands for reform.

Costa Rica's democratic consolidation in 1949 (see *History and Myth*) ushered in a period of social, political, and economic reform, notably redirecting funding once allocated to the recently abolished military. At the same time, the agriculture sector was recovering due to higher productivity from the use of fertilizers and disease-resistant crops. The government used tax revenues to implement broad social welfare programs, including provisions for the nationalized banking system, public utilities, health facilities, social security, and higher education. Additionally, initiatives for new technology, education, and free trade were introduced to diversify the economy. In 1963, Costa Rica joined Central America's free trade bloc, the Central American Common Market (see *Political and Social Relations*).

In the 1980s, national spending, regional wars, and foreign market fluctuations caused an economic recession. In 1981, Costa Rica's unemployment rate was nearly 10%, while inflation was over 50%. In the same year, the public foreign debt was almost US $3 billion. In 1985, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and United States Agency for International Development provided financial assistance to Costa Rica. The assistance was contingent on the implementation of structural adjustment programs, which included privatizing state-owned enterprises, reducing government spending, removing tariffs, and shifting production toward manufactured exports.

At the end of the 20th century, Costa Rica continued to pursue market-oriented policies. In 1990, it established Free Trade Zone's to encourage Foreign Direct Investment in industrial, medical equipment, and high-tech sectors by offering several incentives. In 1997, Intel, the popular semiconductor company, opened a microprocessor manufacturing plant in Heredia. Since opening, the plant has employed over 3,500 people and invested over US $500,000,000 into the country.

At the turn of the century, Costa Rica successfully transitioned into a diversified economy that includes services, industry, and agricultural sectors. The country is renowned for its tourism sub-sector and various technology industries (see "Technology" below). Costa Rica entered into many free trade agreements with China, Central American countries, and the US (see *Political and Social Relations*). The 2007-09 financial crisis caused Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to decrease by about 1%. The ***Plan Escudo*** ("Shield Plan," a US $2.5 billion economic stimulus plan) promoted the country's recovery, and from 2009-18, its economy grew from US $31-64 billion.

Costa Rica's economy was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the economy contracted by 2.1%, while the poverty rate increased from 24% in 2019 to 30% in 2020. Since the pandemic, the country's GDP has recovered, growing by 5.1% in 2023. Additionally, Costa Rica has the second highest GDP per capita in Central America of nearly US $17,000, only following Panama (US $19,000). Despite recovery, Costa Rica faces persistent difficulties with high poverty (22%), unemployment (8%), and debt-to-GDP ratio (61%). A large portion of Costa Rica's workforce labors in the informal sector-some 44% as of 2021-contributing to the country's economic inequality (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Services

Comprising around 68% of GDP and 66% of employment in 2023, the Services sector is Costa Rica's largest. Major subsectors are tourism, technology, and banking.

Tourism: Known for its rich biodiversity, Costa Rica is Central America's most visited country. In 2024, the country hosted almost 3 million tourists, primarily from North America. Arenal Volcano, Monteverde Cloud Forest, and Tortuguero National Park are popular attractions. The subsector accounted for over 9% of Costa Rica's GDP and some 12% of jobs.

Technology: Sometimes referred to as the "new Silicon Valley," Costa Rica is Central America's epicenter for digital technologies. Prominent multinational technology companies like Intel, Microsoft, Amazon, Dell, Oracle, and IBM have operations in the country. Today, information technology services, semiconductors, software development, and biotechnology are all part of the country's technology landscape. Public initiatives, such as tax breaks, education investment, and a renewable electricity grid (see *Technology and Materials*) help support the subsector.

Banking: Costa Rica's banking subsector is highly concentrated, with 4 state-owned banks – ***Banco de Costa Rica***, ***Banco Nacional de Costa Rica***, ***Banco Crédito Agrícola de Cartago***, and ***Banco Internacional de Costa Rica*** – and 11 private banks. State-owned banks benefit from government-guaranteed liabilities and access to public institution deposits. They also capture 70% of the market for local deposits.

Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 21% of GDP and employs 20% of the workforce. Major subsectors include medical equipment, food processing, and plastic products.

Medical Equipment: In 2023, Costa Rica's medical device exports totaled over US $7.5 billion, with an average annual growth of 18% from 2017-23. After Mexico, Costa Rica is Latin America's second largest exporter of medical equipment. Some 80 firms – most notably multinational companies Abott, Boston Scientific, and Philips – operate in the country's medical device industry.

Agriculture

Previously Costa Rica's dominant sector, agriculture now comprises nearly 4% of GDP and over 14% of the labor force. Almost 4% of Costa Rica's land is arable. Fruits, coffee, dairy products, and fisheries are the principal agricultural activities.

Livestock and Farming: Costa Rica has around 1,300,000 cattle, of which some 330,000 are dairy cows, enabling the export of dairy products across Central America. Common crops include bananas, coffee, cocoa, sugar, and other tropical crops. In 2023, Costa Rica exported about US $1.2 billion worth of bananas, ranking as the third largest behind Ecuador (US $3.8 billion) and the Philippines (US $1.22 billion).

Currency

Adopted in 1896, Costa Rica uses the colón (₡ or CRC), issued in five banknotes (1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, and 20,000) and six coins (5, 10, 25, 50, 100, and 500). The colón divides into 100 ***céntimos*** (cents), which are no longer issued. From 2020-25, US $1 was worth between ₡499.54-696.78.

Foreign Trade

Exports, which totaled nearly US $30 billion in 2022, consisted of medical instruments, orthopedic appliances, bananas, tropical fruits, and other goods, sold to the US (40%), Netherlands (7%), Guatemala (5%), Belgium (5%), Nicaragua (3%), and other countries (40%). Imports totaled almost US $28 billion in 2022 and consisted of refined petroleum, plastic products, medical instruments, cars, and broadcasting equipment, from the US (39%), China (14%), Mexico (5%), Guatemala (3%), Brazil (3%), and other countries (36%).

Foreign Aid

Costa Rica is a recipient of foreign aid from the US, which primarily supports migration, transnational crime, economic development, and governance (see *Political and Social Relations)*. In 2023, Costa Rica received nearly US $86 million of official development assistance, an increase from the US foreign aid received in 2021 (US $80 million).

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

While Costa Rica's physical and telecommunications infrastructures have grown in recent decades, they continue to be underdeveloped due to economic and geographical challenges, particularly outside of the Central Valley. The media environment is free, although it has encountered growing hostility from the government in recent years.

Transportation

Most Costa Ricans travel by bus or car in cities and over long distances. In 2020, there were some 200 cars per 1,000 people, Central America's highest ratio. Buses in Costa Rica provide service around the country. Bus fares vary by service type, though local routes are generally inexpensive. There is no unified national bus service provider, resulting in fragmented schedules, routes, and terminals. Rideshare services like Uber and DiDi are common in urban areas. Taxis are available around the country. While San José has an interurban commuter rail (see "Railways" below), bus is the primary form of public transport in the capital city. Travel by foot, bicycle, and motorbike is common, nationwide.

Roadways: Almost 7,460 mi of Costa Rica's over 26,700-mi-long roadway network is paved. The ***Consejo Nacional de Vialidad*** (National Roads Council) maintains the country's 4,970 mi of national roads. Highways such as the Inter-American Highway link Costa Rica's coasts and connect it to neighboring countries. In 2020, the Inter-American Development Bank reported that nearly 50% of Costa Rica's paved roads are in poor condition, the highest percentage in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Additionally, in a 2019 global assessment, Costa Rica ranked 103 of 141 countries in road connectivity and 117 in quality of road infrastructure (see *Time and Space*).

Railways: The majority of Costa Rica's 173 mi railway infrastructure currently is not in operation following government

closures at the end of the 20th century. Since opening in 2005, the ***Tren Interurbano*** (Interurban Line) has connected San José, Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago. ***Instituto Costarricense de Ferrocarriles*** (Costa Rican Institute of Railways) operates the *Tren Interurbano* and owns the national railway infrastructure.

Ports and Waterways: Costa Rica has around 450 mi of navigable waterways, including several rivers. The ***Rio San Juan*** (San Juan River) forms part of the northern border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, flowing from Lake Nicaragua to the Caribbean Sea. While the river belongs to Nicaragua (see *Political and Social Relations*), Costa Rica has commercial and tourist access. Costa Rica's 802 mi of Caribbean and Pacific coastline are critical to trade, with the largest ports in Limón and Caldera, respectively.

Airways: Costa Rica has 129 airports, 47 of which were paved as of 2023. Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) in Alajuela is Costa Rica's primary air transit hub, serving nearly 5.7 million passengers in 2023. Avianca Costa Rica, previously known as ***Lineas Aéreas Costarricenses S.A.***, is the country's flag carrier and a subsidiary of the Avianca Group of Latin America. SANSA Airlines (officially ***Servicios Aéreos Nacionales S.A.***) and Green Airways are popular domestic airlines.

Energy

In 2023, oil comprised nearly 51% of Costa Rica's total energy supply, followed by geothermal, solar, and wind (26%); hydroelectric power (15%); biofuels and waste (8%); and coal (0.3%). Nearly 95% of electricity production is from renewable sources: hydropower (70%), geothermal (12.4%), and wind (12.1%) being the most important. Costa Rica is the second largest producer of geothermal energy in the LAC, following Mexico. The country imports most of its oil and gas requirements, which is administered by the ***Refinadora Costarricense de Petróleo*** (Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery).

Media

Costa Rica's media landscape is diverse, though a few firms wield substantial influence. Media tends to be concentrated around San José, which is home to some 57% of outlets. The Costa Rican press is protected by a range of legally endowed freedoms, notably a constitutional right to free speech. While an open information environment facilitates journalism, since 2022, the government has increased verbal criticism of media, specifically targeting the traditional outlets La Nación, CRHoy, and Teletica. Costa Rica ranked 26 of 180 countries in a 2024 world press freedom index, placing third among LAC countries, following Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Print Media: San José-based *La Nación*, *La República,* and *Diario Extra* are the country's most widely circulated newspapers. *El Financiero,* a part of Grupo Nación, is a popular paper for business and economic news. *The Tico Times* and *The Costa Rica Star* are the country's primary English-language newspapers.

TV and Radio: ***Sistema Nacional de Radio y Television Costa Rica*** (Costa Rica National Radio and Television System, or SINAT) is the country's public media source. SINAT operates the state-owned television station, *Canal 13*, and radio station *Radio Nacional*. *Teletica* (*Canal 7*) and *Repretal* (*Canal 4, 6,* and *11*) run popular TV stations. Most-listened-to radio stations include *Radio Reloj, Radio Columbia, Radio Monumental,* and *Radio Nacional*.

Telecommunications

As of 2022, Costa Rica has about 152 mobile subscriptions and 10 landlines per 100 inhabitants. There is a limited presence of 5G, but the government has extensive plans to develop this network. Bidding for Costa Rica's 5G infrastructure contracts will begin in 2025.

Internet: Some 85% of Costa Rica's population (around 5 million people) were regular Internet users in 2023. In the same year, Costa Rica had nearly 23 broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, though many Costa Ricans access the Internet via mobile devices.

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