ROAD TRIP · COSTA RICA

Your 14-day road trip from San José

7 towns, flying home from San José.

Length	14 days, 13 nights
Distance	450 km, 8 driving days
Behind the wheel	10 h 40 min
Travellers	2, 1 room, 1 car
Hotels	Comfort: a good hotel (3 stars)
Flights	Amsterdam – San José (SJO), San José (SJO) – Amsterdam

CONTENTS

Alajuela	Days 1–2	**6**
Jacó	Days 3–4	**8**
Manuel Antonio	Days 5–6	**10**
Uvita	Days 7–8	**12**
Dominical	Days 9–10	**14**
Orosí	Days 11–12	**16**
San José	Day 13	**18**

Day by day

DAY	DATE	NIGHT	KM	DRIVE	°C
1		Alajuela	10	10 min	
2		Alajuela			
3		Jacó	90	1 h 40 min	
4		Jacó			
5		Manuel Antonio	70	1 h 40 min	
6		Manuel Antonio			
7		Uvita	70	1 h 30 min	
8		Uvita			
9		Dominical	20	20 min	
10		Dominical			
11		Orosí	130	4 h 10 min	
12		Orosí			
13		San José	40	1 h	
14		Flight home from SJO	20	20 min	

450 km · 10 h 40 min behind the wheel · on average 60 km a driving day

Kilometres and drive times by road (OSRM, OpenStreetMap), without stops: plan generously.

The route



Map: Natural Earth (public domain) · roads © OpenStreetMap contributors

ON THE ROAD

Day 1	Land at San José (SJO), drive to Alajuela · About 10 km, 10 min
Day 3	Alajuela, drive to Jacó · About 90 km, 1 h 40 min
Day 5	Jacó, drive to Manuel Antonio · About 70 km, 1 h 40 min
Day 7	Manuel Antonio, drive to Uvita · About 70 km, 1 h 30 min
Day 9	Uvita, drive to Dominical · About 20 km, 20 min
Day 11	Dominical, drive to Orosí · About 130 km, 4 h 10 min

Well prepared

Passport and entry

Dutch and Belgian travellers need no visa for a holiday of up to 180 days. Your passport must be valid for the whole trip on arrival, and you show a return ticket at immigration. There is no ESTA or form beforehand; the departure tax is included in your air fare.
nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reisadvies/costa-rica

Driving licence and 4x4

Your Dutch or Belgian driving licence is valid for 90 days. For Monteverde, Santa Teresa, Drake Bay and the Nicoya coast road you want a 4x4: dirt roads, potholes and in the green season rivers to drive through. The compulsory liability insurance (SLI/TPL) is always bought from the rental company, even if your credit card gives cover.

On the road

Count on 40 to 50 km an hour on average: mountain roads, lorries and villages. Don't drive after dark; it is dark by six, all year round. Waze knows every road and warns of closures. Never leave anything visible in the car, not even for a moment.

Money

The currency is the colón, but almost everywhere takes dollars and credit cards. Bring a few small dollar notes for tips and parking. Restaurants add 10% service to the bill; an extra tip for a good nature guide (about $10 a person) is customary.

When to go

The dry season runs from December to April: sunny on the Pacific side and in Guanacaste. May to November is the green season, with sunny mornings and afternoon showers, quieter and cheaper; September and October are the wettest months, except on the Caribbean coast, where they are the driest.

Parks and entry fees

The national parks cost foreigners about $12 to $18 a person a day. For Manuel Antonio, Poás, Irazú and Corcovado you buy your ticket online beforehand from SINAC; Manuel Antonio is closed on Mondays.
serviciosenlinea.sinac.go.cr

Health

No vaccinations are required when you come from Europe. Protect yourself against mosquitoes (dengue), especially on the Caribbean coast. Tap water is drinkable in most places; ask in remote areas.

Packing list

- [ ] Passport (valid for the whole trip)
- [ ] Driving licence and credit card in the driver's name
- [ ] Travel and cancellation insurance
- [ ] Confirmations: flights, car, hotels, park tickets
- [ ] Rain jacket or poncho, even in the dry season
- [ ] Walking shoes that may get wet
- [ ] Insect repellent with DEET
- [ ] Reef-safe sunscreen
- [ ] Binoculars for birds and sloths
- [ ] A jumper for Monteverde and the volcanoes
- [ ] Plug adapter for type A/B (120 volts)

DON'T FORGET



DAYS 1–2

Alajuela Alajuela

Poás crater, an hour from the airport

Land at San José (SJO), drive to Alajuela: about 10 km, 10 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Poás volcano crater
- La Paz waterfall gardens
- Coffee farm in the hills of Alajuela

With an extra night

With an extra night: La Paz waterfall gardens, or a day in San José with the Gold Museum and the Mercado Central.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Central Valley coffee tour — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Poás volcano guided tour — roughly €80 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Casa Cafetal Aeropuerto Two Bedrooms · 3★
  Paso Flores Calle 11
- [ ] Hotel Bamboo Aeropuerto · 3★
  Ave 1, Calles 9-11
- [ ] Las Carmelas, Airport Juan Santamaría, Alajuela, San José · 3★
  C. La Haya
- [ ] Hildas Bed and Breakfast · 3★
  Av 2 Alfaro Ruíz
- [ ] Hostal Casa Azul · 3★
  100 este de Correos de Costa Rica

NOTES

Crocodiles below the Tárcoles bridge

DAYS 3–4

Jacó Puntarenas

Crocodiles below the Tárcoles bridge

Alajuela, drive to Jacó: about 90 km, 1 h 40 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Crocodiles at the Tárcoles bridge
- Scarlet macaws in Carara
- The surf beaches of Jacó and Playa Hermosa

With an extra night

With an extra night: early to Carara for the macaws, or a surf lesson at Playa Hermosa.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Tárcoles river crocodile tour — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Jacó surf lesson — roughly €60 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Tuanis Aparthotel · 3★
  Calle Sol de Oro, 60111 Jacó, Costa Rica
- [ ] Villa Creole · 3★
  Calle Europa 20
- [ ] Bamboo Boutique Hotel · 3★
  Avenida Amapola
- [ ] Monte Carlo Luxury Condominiums · 3★ — roughly €500
  Jaco Beach Downtown
- [ ] The Backyard Hotel · 3★
  Playa Hermosa

NOTES



DAYS 5–6

Manuel Antonio Puntarenas

Sloths and monkeys above white bays

Jacó, drive to Manuel Antonio: about 70 km, 1 h 40 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Manuel Antonio National Park
- Espadilla beach
- Sunset over the Pacific

With an extra night

With an extra night: a catamaran along the coast, or kayaking in the Damas mangroves.

EXCURSIONS

- ☐ Manuel Antonio with a nature guide — roughly €60 a person
- ☐ Catamaran cruise with snorkelling — roughly €90 a person
- ☐ Mangrove kayak tour — roughly €70 a person

HOTEL

- ☐ Apto Cielo Azul · 3★
  Playa Manuel Antonio, 100 metro oeste entrada Parque Nacional
- ☐ Hotel Playa Espadilla · 3★
  Manuel Antonio 200 metros oeste del Parque Nacional
- ☐ Mango Moon Villa · 3★
  200 Oeste del Hotel La Mariposa
- ☐ Hotel Planeta Sano · 3★
  Hotel California Road
- ☐ Natural Pacific Suites, private family rooms · 3★
  https://goo.gl/maps/15WX22dzy1m2DbFbA

NOTES



DAYS 7–8

Uvita Puntarenas

Whales off the Whale's Tail

Manuel Antonio, drive to Uvita: about 70 km, 1 h 30 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- The Whale's Tail in Marino Ballena
- Uvita waterfall
- Caño Island by boat

With an extra night

With an extra night: diving or snorkelling at Caño Island, or the Nauyaca waterfalls.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Whale and dolphin watching — roughly €80 a person
- [ ] Caño Island snorkelling — roughly €110 a person
- [ ] Two-tank dive at Caño Island — roughly €160 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Bambura Bahia Villas · 3★
  Bambura Bahia Uvita
- [ ] Ruca Lodge - Luxury Container Tiny Home Surrounded by Nature · 3★
  Calle San Josecito
- [ ] Apartamentos Equipados DMR #3 · 3★
  200 metro suroeste dela Pizzeria la fogata C. El Mariposario 1
- [ ] MADRE TERRA · 3★
  400 m este del Banco del Costa Rica y 150 m sur de cabinas Los Laureles
- [ ] Cedrela Beach Villas · 3★
  Camino a Playa Chamán

NOTES

Powerful waves on the Costa Ballena

DAYS 9–10

Dominical Puntarenas

Powerful waves on the Costa Ballena

Uvita, drive to Dominical: about 20 km, 20 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Dominical beach
- Nauyaca waterfalls
- Dominicalito for beginners

With an extra night

With an extra night: on horseback to the Nauyaca waterfalls, or the whales of Marino Ballena.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Dominical surf lesson — roughly €60 a person
- [ ] Nauyaca waterfalls on horseback — roughly €80 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Villas Alturas · 3★
  San Martin Norte
- [ ] Hotel Villas Rio Mar · 3★
  800 meters northeast of the Dominical entrance
- [ ] Tribe Boutique Hotel - Adults Only · 3★
  Tribe Boutique Hotel, Dominical Costa Rica 50 meters south of the school, next to ICE
- [ ] Hotel Tropical Sands Dominical · 3★
  Quality Road - 75 Metres Sur y 75 Este Restaurante El Coco Frente Cool Vibes y Soda y Ensuenos (Montanas de Agua)
- [ ] Rio Lindo Hotel · 3★
  Entering Dominical after 50 meters on the right

NOTES



DAYS 11–12

Orosí Cartago

On Irazú volcano, above the clouds

Dominical, drive to Orosí: about 130 km, 4 h 10 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- The craters of Irazú volcano
- Orosí's colonial church
- The ruins of Ujarrás
- The basilica of Cartago

With an extra night

With an extra night: Tapantí park, or Orosí's hot springs.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Irazú volcano and Orosí valley tour — roughly €70 a person
- [ ] Orosí coffee tour — roughly €30 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Coffee Pickers Village By Hacienda Orosi · 3★
  Paraiso
- [ ] Montaña Linda Guest House Orosi · 3★
  400 meteres South of the church Orosi center
- [ ] Hotel Alma de Luna · 3★
  225 Main Road
- [ ] Hotel Reventazon · 3★
  Del BN 25 sur, 25 oeste
- [ ] Hotel Tapanti Media de Orosi · 3★

NOTES



DAY 13

San José San José

The Teatro Nacional and the Mercado Central

Orosí, drive to San José: about 40 km, 1 h

1 night

DON'T MISS

- Teatro Nacional
- Gold Museum
- Mercado Central

With an extra night

With an extra night: the Jade Museum, or a day trip to Irazú volcano.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] San José walking tour — roughly €30 a person
- [ ] Mercado Central food tour — roughly €50 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Viajero San José Hostel · 3★
  Avenida 9, Calles 13 y 15
- [ ] Isla Verde Hotel · 3★
  200 Oeste de la Embajada Americana
- [ ] Hotel Residence Inn Suites Cristina · 3★ — roughly €120
  300 meters north ICE building
- [ ] Hilton Garden Inn Santa Ana, San Jose · 3★ — roughly €90
  City Place, Santa Ana
- [ ] D Sabana Hotel San José · 3★ — roughly €120
  Ave. 6, Calle 28

NOTES

What it costs

DAY	PLACE	HOTEL	TOURS	CAR	TOTAL
1	Alajuela	€110	–	€70	**€180**
2	Alajuela	€110	–	€70	**€180**
3	Jacó	€110	–	€70	**€180**
4	Jacó	€110	–	€70	**€180**
5	Manuel Antonio	€160	–	€70	**€230**
6	Manuel Antonio	€160	–	€70	**€230**
7	Uvita	€130	–	€70	**€200**
8	Uvita	€130	–	€70	**€200**
9	Dominical	€120	–	€70	**€190**
10	Dominical	€120	–	€70	**€190**
11	Orosí	€90	–	€70	**€160**
12	Orosí	€90	–	€70	**€160**
13	San José	€100	–	€70	**€170**
14	Flight home from SJO	–	–	€70	**€70**

Flights	€1,800
Hotels	€1,540
Excursions	€0
Car hire	€910
Total	**€4,250**
	€2,130 a person

An estimate to plan with (prices of 2026-10): hotels, the ticked excursions, car hire and flights. No fuel or meals.

Notes

About this booklet

Made on rondreis.expert. Your trip is still there, to change and print again: costa-rica.roundtrip.expert/planner/

PHOTOS

From Wikimedia Commons, all free of rights (public domain or CC0).

Alajuela	Piaya cayana, Costa Rica.jpg · Hobbyfotowiki, CC0
Manuel Antonio	landscapes/manuel-antonio-national-park_03_l.jpg · Press photo
Uvita	beaches/Playa-Ventanas-Puntarenas-2.jpg · Press photo
Orosí	Dec2023. Nuestra Señora de la Limpia Concepción del Rescate de Ujarrás, near Paraíso, Cartago Province, Costa Rica 03.jpg · Ridiculopathy, CC0
San José	Downtown San José City (Costa Rica).jpg · Unknown authorUnknown author, CC0

MAP AND TYPE

Map: US Census Bureau (public domain), roads © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL). Type: Playfair Display and Inter (SIL Open Font License).