

ROAD TRIP · COSTA RICA

The Caribbean coast

12 days · Turrialba — San José

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The Caribbean coast

Rafting at Turrialba, canals and turtles at Tortuguero, then reggae and palm beaches at Cahuita and Puerto Viejo.

Length	12 days, 11 nights
Distance	670 km, 6 driving days
Behind the wheel	14 h 20 min
Travellers	2, 1 room, 1 car
Hotels	Comfort: a good hotel (3 stars)
Flights	Amsterdam – San José (SJO), San José (SJO) – Amsterdam

CONTENTS

Turrialba	Days 1–2	**6**
Tortuguero	Days 3–5	**8**
Cahuita	Days 6–7	**10**
Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	Days 8–10	**12**
San José	Day 11	**14**

Day by day

DAY	DATE	NIGHT	KM	DRIVE	°C
1		Turrialba	80	1 h 40 min	
2		Turrialba			
3		Tortuguero	140	3 h 40 min	
4		Tortuguero			
5		Tortuguero			
6		Cahuita	200	3 h 50 min	
7		Cahuita			
8		Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	20	20 min	
9		Puerto Viejo de Talamanca			
10		Puerto Viejo de Talamanca			
11		San José	220	4 h 30 min	
12		Flight home from SJO	20	20 min	

670 km · 14 h 20 min behind the wheel · on average 110 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 Turrialba · About 80 km, 1 h 40 min
Day 3	Turrialba, drive to Tortuguero · About 140 km, 3 h 40 min
Day 6	Tortuguero, drive to Cahuita · About 200 km, 3 h 50 min
Day 8	Cahuita, drive to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca · About 20 km, 20 min
Day 11	Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, drive to San José · About 220 km, 4 h 30 min
Day 12	San José to San José airport (SJO), fly home to Amsterdam · About 20 km, 20 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

Turrialba Cartago

Rafting on the Pacuare

Land at San José (SJO), drive to Turrialba: about 80 km, 1 h 40 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- The Pacuare gorge
- Guayabo, the ancient city
- Coffee farms around Turrialba

With an extra night

With an extra night: Guayabo, or a two-day raft with a night at a river lodge.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Pacuare river rafting — roughly €100 a person
- [ ] Guayabo with a guide — roughly €30 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Cabaña La Montaña: Vistas increíbles y Mirador · 3★
  Quinta el Cinco, Verbena Sur
- [ ] Bella Vista Guest house · 3★
  Sitio Mata- San Rafael
- [ ] Cabaña El Ciprés: Vistas increíbles y Mirador · 3★
  Quinta el Cinco, Verbena Sur
- [ ] Guayabo Lodge · 3★
  Turrialba
- [ ] Cabaña El Manzano: Vistas increíbles y Mirador · 3★
  Verbena Sur

NOTES



DAYS 3–5

Tortuguero Limón

By canoe through the canals of Tortuguero

Turrialba, drive to Tortuguero: about 140 km, 3 h 40 min

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- The Tortuguero canals
- The village and the nesting beach
- Cerro Tortuguero

With an extra night

With an extra night: climb Cerro Tortuguero, or a second canoe trip at sunrise.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Canal canoe tour — roughly €30 a person
- [ ] Turtle night tour (Jul–Oct) — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Boat transfer from La Pavona — roughly €30 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Cabinas Tortuguero Sports Fishing · 3★
  Calle Barra del Tortuguero 2 bungalows Barra del Tortuguero, pueblo San Francisco en el Cerro, 2 bungalows
- [ ] Chilamate Room · 3★
  parque nacional tortuguero
- [ ] Casa Chilamates 2.0 · 3★
  150 mts sur del liceo de barra de tortuguero
- [ ] Cabinas Tortuguero Natural · 3★
  Contigo a la iglesia adventista
- [ ] Apartamentos Caimán 3 · 3★
  Parque nacional tortuguero

NOTES



DAYS 6–7

Cahuita Limón

The coastal trail through Cahuita park

Tortuguero, drive to Cahuita: about 200 km, 3 h 50 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Cahuita National Park
- Snorkelling over the coral reef
- Playa Negra and its black sand

With an extra night

With an extra night: the Sloth Sanctuary, or an afternoon of nothing on Playa Negra.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Guided snorkelling in Cahuita — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Cahuita with a nature guide — roughly €30 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Beachfront Bungalows Hotel · 3★
- [ ] Colina Secreta - Glamping and Villas · 3★
  Calle Margarita Km 1,6
- [ ] La Prometida Hotel · 3★
  220 Metros del Hotel La Perla Negra
- [ ] Korrigan Lodge · 3★
  Korrigan Lodge, Punta Uva, Puerto Viejo
- [ ] Ú Sulè · 3★
  C/ Río Suárez

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DAYS 8–10

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca Limón

Caribbean beaches and reggae

Cahuita, drive to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca: about 20 km, 20 min

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- Punta Uva
- By bike to Manzanillo
- Jaguar Rescue Center

With an extra night

With an extra night: snorkelling at Manzanillo, or a chocolate tour with the Bribri.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Jaguar Rescue Center tour — roughly €30 a person
- [ ] Bribri chocolate tour — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Manzanillo snorkelling — roughly €50 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Colibri Ecolodge · 3★

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DAY 11

San José San José

The Teatro Nacional and the Mercado Central

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, drive to San José: about 220 km, 4 h 30 min

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

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What it costs

DAY	PLACE	HOTEL	TOURS	CAR	TOTAL
1	Turrialba	€100	–	€70	**€170**
2	Turrialba	€100	–	€70	**€170**
3	Tortuguero	€260	–	€70	**€330**
4	Tortuguero	€260	–	€70	**€330**
5	Tortuguero	€260	–	€70	**€330**
6	Cahuita	€100	–	€70	**€170**
7	Cahuita	€100	–	€70	**€170**
8	Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	€110	–	€70	**€180**
9	Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	€110	–	€70	**€180**
10	Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	€110	–	€70	**€180**
11	San José	€100	–	€70	**€170**
12	Flight home from SJO	–	–	€70	**€70**

Flights	€1,800
Hotels	€1,610
Excursions	€0
Car hire	€780
Total	**€4,190**
	€2,100 a person

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

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About this booklet

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

PHOTOS

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Turrialba	Costa Rica (14214278247).jpg · NASA Goddard Space Flight Center from Greenbelt, MD, USA, Public domain
Tortuguero	Anhinga (Anhinga anhinga), Costa Rica.jpg · Hobbyfotowiki, CC0
Cahuita	landscapes/cahuita-national-park_03_l.jpg · Press photo
Puerto Viejo de Talamanca	Wrecked boat beyond a rocky reef flat at Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Costa Rica.jpg · Z3lvs, CC0
San José	Downtown San José City (Costa Rica).jpg · Unknown authorUnknown author, CC0

MAP AND TYPE

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THE ROUTE

Turrialba (2) · Tortuguero (3) · Cahuita (2) · Puerto Viejo de Talamanca (3) · San José (1)

Rafting at Turrialba, canals and turtles at Tortuguero, then reggae and palm beaches at Cahuita and Puerto Viejo.

12 days · 11 nights · 670 km

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