



GREENTRACKS

Recommendations for Tropical Travel with GreenTracks

Costa Rica Herping Tour

The following should be considered *General Information* and may or may not apply to everyone's entire itinerary.

CURRENCY

Money exchange is easily taken care of either in your international departure airport or upon arrival in-country at the San José airport. There are money exchange offices in both places where you can easily exchange US dollars for colones. It is easy to change some money as you wait for your bags. Also, there are ATM machines elsewhere in the airport and around the country and, if the compatible systems include one or more on your card; they are easy to use and they have an English language option.

Depending on your food, beverage and entertainment preferences, it is recommended that you bring along from \$200 to ? Souvenirs and handicrafts are available in the towns.

Many vendors will accept credit cards. It's always a good idea to bring VISA and MASTERCARD cards in case of emergency. Also, call your card companies and let them know where you will be going so they do not see foreign card use as a security threat.

We do not recommend Traveler's Checks. Few places accept them. If you do bring traveler's checks you may find yourself standing in a long bank line waiting to cash them.

If you bring cash, bring \$20 and larger bills. Request clean, crisp, new bills from your bank. Worn, torn, marked bills will be refused in many Latin American countries.

A pouch or money belt is recommended for carrying valuables; these are available at camping or luggage stores. Keep your passport safe at all costs. It is an incredible problem if you lose it. It is also a good idea to make a copy of the front page of your passport and keep it separate from your passport.

MEDICAL

Consult your doctor for all medical concerns. What follows is simply a list of suggestions.

Malaria exists in tropical regions world-round, but is uncommon in most parts of Costa Rica. Check the Center for Disease Control's web page...

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/costa-rica>

... for Costa Rica as you consider obtaining medication to prevent it. There are various types of pills; consult with your doctor.

You should consider getting a Yellow Fever vaccination. While you're at it, Typhoid and Hepatitis A & B. It is also good to be sure your tetanus is up to date.

Travel to the lowland rainforest exposes your body to a significantly new microbial fauna. Some travelers experience diarrhea and stomach upset about 3 days after arrival in this area. This is not a "disease", just your body adjusting to a different group of intestinal bacteria. A highly recommended medication to have on hand is an antibiotic to be taken in case of bad gastrointestinal upset. Physicians usually prescribe Cipro (Ciprofloxacin), Doxycycline or Xifaxan. Some people recommend taking antibiotics prophylactically if you will be traveling in the lowland rainforest for a short period. Others believe it best to wait for the onset of symptoms. Do what your doctor recommends. But we do recommend you have some medication on-hand to deal with the situation if it arises. You don't want to lose a day or two out of your trip due to a bad upset stomach. Anti-symptomatic medications such as Immodium or Lomotil are handy if one must spend time in a vehicle or plane, but rushing to use them at the onset of symptoms often makes things worse; give your body a little time to protect itself.

Be sure to ask your physician about the possible dangers of combining medications, especially if you are already taking prescription drugs.

Aside from this, simply bring along any of the usual medications with which you travel (aspirin, Tylenol, Dramamine, antacids, Pepto, etc.). In every case, please follow your physician's advice about all health aspects. Despite the suggestions above, we have found the tropics to be delightful and have seldom encountered health problems. These suggestions are because it is best to be prepared and because most trips are of short duration so a little prevention may be wise.

INSECT REPELLENT

Bugs are no worse than in the States. Repellents with "DEET" are often effective. 100% DEET is not safe. Concentrations of 25% to 30% are sufficient. Some people are sensitive to DEET and might do best with repellents with even lower concentration. Be aware that certain colognes and perfumes may attract bees or other insects. Many airlines now prevent aerosol cans in luggage so look for wipes or some other form of repellent. The best way to apply insect repellent is by hand, prior to dressing.

CLOTHING

Casual; we prefer breathable, absorbent, light-weight fabrics.

Synthetics designed for hot weather by companies such as Travel Smith, Ex-Officio, Columbia, and REI, which wick moisture away from your skin and dry fast are excellent though expensive. They are very comfortable.

Take plenty of underwear and socks. You will need long-sleeve shirts, (the sleeves can be rolled up in heat or down if bugs are a problem), short-sleeve shirts and T-shirts. Bring both long pants and shorts. A crushable, water-resistant hat to protect you from the sun is essential.

Shoes need not be heavy. A light-weight hiking boot or walking shoe is perfect. Bring a second pair of comfortable shoes and keep them clean for wearing in town and your travel home. Also bring some thongs or sandals and a bathing suit.

The two items most likely to be lost are your hat and sunglasses. You might bring an extra of each. A poncho or light rain jacket is useful. We prefer to travel light in every case.

EQUIPMENT

Bring a day pack or hip pack to carry your gear on hikes. Place a plastic bag inside so you can safeguard electronics in the event of rain.

Bring a good flashlight and alkaline batteries. You might wish to consider the new Luxeon LED lights, some of which throw powerful beams while only using AAA batteries. If your light uses lithium or other non-traditional batteries, bring spares or a charger. COAST brand lights include some excellent models and they are available at Home Depot and Lowes stores. We prefer a small model that features CREE technology, produces around 200 lumens of light, and runs on 3 AAA batteries. A set of batteries in these lights will usually last at least two full evenings. Whatever your choice, **YOU NEED A LIGHT THAT IS STRONG AND THAT LASTS** if you wish to participate in night hikes. **DO NOT BRING A HEADLAMP AS IT BLINDS OTHERS ON THE TRAIL.**

Binoculars are recommended for bird or monkey watching.

Bring a camera. A good flash, macro lens, and short telephoto lenses are also good. Bring spare batteries and spare memory cards. At most lodges you can charge your camera batteries. Electric current in Costa Rica is 110 volts. Most electronics will recharge at this voltage, and plug adapters are not necessary, although it is always advisable to carry a 3-prong to 2-prong adapter. Electricity may not be available at some destinations.

MISCELLANEOUS

Small pocket knife; good book; field guides to fauna and flora; a nalgene water bottle (camping supply stores) is handy, as is a small first-aid kit. If you wear eyeglasses bring an extra pair.

If you wish to bring a snakestick, it is best to use a collapsible model. Checking something larger is complicated. In any event, a stick is not required.

The tropical sun is intense and you should be concerned about skin protection, so bring the appropriate sunscreen (minimum SPF 50) and apply it often. Those taking Doxycycline or any other Tetracycline derivatives should be aware of possible increased sensitivity to sun.

Take a few plastic bags; they make good organizers, and can be used to protect cameras and

binoculars inside your day pack if you get caught in a downpour.

LUGGAGE

Don't use a backpack, especially external frame. You won't have to hike with your gear. Any sort of luggage will do, but we prefer the soft type such as a duffel bag or shoulder bag. It's always best to label each bag inside as well as by outside tags, and to lock them. We recommend the small combination locks approved by the TSA. They have a master key to open these locks in the event they need to search your bag and will not have to break the lock to do so. (But sometimes do so anyway!) Bring a spare lock or two in case someone removes the one on your bag. Plastic wire ties are also good for securing your luggage shut in the event that customs or security should break your lock. Use your cell phone or camera to photograph your luggage prior to checking; this facilitates claims in the event of loss.

It's best to carry valuable or fragile items on the plane with you... also a spare set of clothes and your toiletries in case the airlines lose a bag.

INSURANCE

We **STRONGLY** recommend that all GreenTracks clients obtain Traveler's Insurance to reimburse you, should you have to cancel for medical or other reasons. This insurance can be obtained from TravelGuard through a link on our website.

DOCUMENTATION

Everyone must have a valid passport. Costa Rica does not require that USA, Canadian, British, French and many other country's citizens obtain a visa before they travel. Costa Rica will issue you a tourist visa upon arrival in-country (keep any copy they give you in your passport). Citizens of some countries may need to obtain a visa from their local Costa Rican consulate before they can travel to Costa Rica. Consult with the GreenTracks office or your travel agent.