



Costa Rica's Culture

The following information has been compiled to give you a greater understanding of Costa Rica's culture before your arrival. This information is sourced from Wikipedia, Globe Aware staff, and the great staff at infocostarica.com

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People

When one talks about culture, one is venturing into ample terrain. This piece can't possibly cover the whole ground of Costa Rican culture, but it does discuss the following points: race, class, customs, identity and religion. Costa Ricans, as any other people, are complex and full of surprises.

The country boasts a population close to 3.5 million people, which by standards of the region, is not large at all. El Salvador, for example, is half the size of Costa Rica, but it has double its inhabitants. Also, the growth rate of the population of Costa Rica is only 2.3% per year, and it's actually decreasing.

Racially speaking, the country is one of the most homogenous of the region. Costa Ricans don't like to consider themselves as racists, but they also enjoy talking about their unique "whiteness", when compared to other Latin American countries. The 1989 census classified 98% of the people as white or mestizo, and 2% as black or indigenous. A foreigner traveling through Central America will notice the difference between Costa Ricans and their neighbors. Even though racial problems don't exist to the extent that they do in the U.S. or in some European countries, some "Ticos" look down upon darker-skinned people. Blacks weren't even allowed to go beyond the Atlantic province of Limón, until a 1949 reform. However, racial confrontations are extremely rare and prejudice, even though it exists, is displayed in indirect and careful ways.

Costa Rica is also homogenous when it comes to social classes. Most of the population can be placed in a middle-class, and even though extreme poverty exists, it's not as large a problem as it is in other Latin countries. By the standards of a developed country, Costa Rican incomes are very low, but when compared to other neighbors, salaries and earnings prove to be much better. Besides the poor and middle classes, there is an upper class, which is very elitist. As in other countries, this class is composed by both traditionally rich families as well as by "nouveau riche" families. Even with the existence of extremely rich or poor individuals, Costa Rican society is composed mostly by a middle-class, which causes the impression of class and social homogeneity.

Most of the "Ticos" are very conservative individuals who don't usually welcome "strange" or different ideas. The country's economy and industry have grown incredibly in the past years, but the culture still retains conservative tendencies. A lot of foreigners view the Ticos as lacking initiative and as being passive. They also complain of the lack of punctuality and of quick decision-making. However, the positive aspects of the Tico identity are the friendliness and hospitality that most people transmit. Costa Ricans are also extremely social, and they enjoy gatherings and celebrations of all sorts.

One aspect of Costa Rican culture must be treated separately from others- "machismo". The machista way of thinking is shared to some extent by most men and women, although it's not as extreme as in other Latin countries. While machismo has its negative aspects, it also has its advantages, and is often used by most local women to their advantage.

Finally, when talking about culture, one must not forget the topic of religion. Even though 90% of the country is Catholic, they practice a "lukewarm" Catholicism. Ever since colonial times, the Catholic Institution hasn't exerted a powerful influence either politically or culturally. Most Costa Rican Catholics view their religion more as a tradition than as a practice or even a faith.

Many foreigners have fallen in love with the country and the culture of Costa Rica. The main characteristic of the culture seems to be moderation, as opposed to other countries that offer a culture full of extremes and excesses. The race and the classes are pretty homogenous, while the ideal of the Tico identity encourages compromise and peace, instead of revolution and violence. Even the machismo attitude is tame when compared to other places in the region. Although religious, Ticos frown upon fanaticism or excessive power of the Church. Perhaps this respect for the middle ground is the reason why many foreigners have chosen the country as a travel destination or as a permanent residence.

Food

From the good folks at infocostarica.com:

Costa Rican cuisine is simple but heavy on oil and some species. Comida tipica or native dishes, rely heavily on rice and beans, the basis of many Costa Rican meals. Home-style cooking predominates. But meals are generally wholesome and reasonably priced. Gallo Pinto, the national dish of fried rice and black beans is particularly served as a breakfast. Notable is the famed Rice n' Beans of the Caribbean, a Gallo Pinto made in coconut milk, worth trying. Many meals are derivatives, including arroz con pollo or arroz con atun. At lunch Gallo Pinto becomes Casado : rice and beans supplemented with cabbage and tomato salad, fried plattains, and meat. Vegetables do not form a large part of the diet. Costa Rica home cuisine has an inordinately ammount of fried foods so keep that in mind when you receive and invitation for dinner.

Food staples include beef, chicken, fish and despite of the 1.000+ kilometers of coastline, seafood like shrimp or lobster, is expensive because Costa Rica exports most of its seafood. Travelers with low budget should stick with the casado on lunch time menus, or 'plato del dia' which is a close cousin of the casado with a common denominator of low price and varied ingredients.

Eating in Costa Rica doesn't present the health problems that plague the unwary traveler elsewhere in Central America, but you need to be aware that some of the pesticides used in Costa Rica are forbidden elsewhere. Something I should say is that you may eat where the locals eat, usually that means tasty and trustworthy food. Beware of black beans and chicharrones, which might prove to be too much for some foreign stomachs.

Costa Rica has no national drink, but very popular in the cultural tradition of drinks are Horchata, a cinnamon flavored cornmeal drink, Chan, a slimy drink made of seeds, Linaza, which is popularly used to cure indigestion, and Fresco de Frutas, which is basically a fruit salad floating on a base of kola and water, delicious!! And, of course, guaro, the campesino's nearly-tasteless yet potent alcoholic drink of choice. And coffee of course, Costa Rica's grain of gold. Most of the best coffee is exported, so don't expect the best coffee everywhere you go. Coffee is traditionally served very strong and mixed with hot milk.

Many bars in Costa Rica have the now disappearing habit of serving bocas with each drink , bocas are different types of food in small amounts, usually ceviche or chicken wings or bean soup, to have a better time with your drinks. Some bars provide them free but others may apply a small charge. Turtle eggs which may have been taken in a special legal season are a very popular dish in many bars for its special taste, but are best avoided because of the possibility of having been poached illegally.

Imported drinks may be expensive so you might be better of trying with the local Costa Rican drinks. The beer is a very popular drink and the ones of most sale are Bavaria and Imperial. Even the poorest campesino can afford the native red-eye, guaro, a harsh , clear spirit distilled from fermented sugarcane. In rural areas you might find Vino de Coyol, which is a wine distilled from liquid that is collected on holes on the trunk of a very spiny palm, drink with caution, intoxication goes away, but many say if you go out in the sun with a Coyol hangover, you might find yourself drunk again.

Avoid the local wines, all of which are made from fruits other than grapes, such as blackberries and 'nance'. The most memorable thing of them is the hangover. Imported wines are expensive with exemption of the ones from Chile or Argentina which are of great quality. We personally like the Cousino Macul, imported from Portugal.

Leisure Time

by Infocostarica Staff

Playwriting in colonial Costa Rica was never recorded; therefore, its beginnings are placed in the nineteenth century, when the main themes were: religion, folklore and customs, and historical events. Some folkloric or "Costumbrista" authors and their works are: Carlos Gagini who wrote *Los pretendientes* (1890), *Don Concepcion* (1902) and *El Candidato* (1919), and Rafael Carranza, who wrote *Un duelo a la moda* (1880). During this time, theatrical pieces were characterized by humor and by the presentation of rural as well as urban characters, who were rather stereotypical.

In *Magdalena* (1902), by Ricardo Fernandez Guardia, there is a more pronounced shift from the countryside to urban areas; the shift that occurs during this play is representative of the transition that the genre of theater is undergoing at the time, from a folkloric theme to a cosmopolitan one. Europe is seen in a contradictory light, since it serves as a model worth imitating (even in the arts), but it also represents a negative influence that threatens to "corrupt" the Costa Rican way of life. In 1906, Daniel Urena presents a piece that insists on defending conservative moral values, such as honor. In 1910, Ernesto Marten publishes *Cuento de amor*, which presents the clash of traditional values such as family unit and romantic love with newer values brought on by Capitalism and foreign investment in the country.

The evaluation of morality is continued by Jose Fabio Garner, who writes several plays during the 20's about social and family problems. He sheds light on delicate subjects that hadn't been approached by Costa Rican theater, like adultery, rape and even abortion. On the one hand, he can't trust the moral condition of the nation, but on the other hand, he supports social stereotypes which are a cause of this deterioration. Some of his obtuse views limit the role of women in Costa Rican society and cause her to be a victim of the social degeneration that he's denouncing.

During the late 1920's, Hector A. Castro Fernandez introduces European Vanguardist styles to Costa Rican theater. In "*El punto muerto*" (1938), he portrays an almost science-fiction and surreal work, which criticizes the dehumanization that results from the industrialism of nations. Other productive playwrights of the time were: Jose Marin Canas, Jorge Orozco Castro and M.G. Escalante. However, these authors didn't explore the Vanguardist style, like Castro, and remained aloof to European styles, like the Theater of the Absurd or Surrealist Theater.

After 1920 and early 1930's, theater production decreased severely. However, in 1950, several companies were formed, thus renewing artistic creation as well as the public's interest in theater. In 1950 the Teatro Universitario or the University's company was established, thus promoting the formation of young actors that would later become essential in this endeavor. In 1951 Alfredo Sancho founded his Teatro Experimental, which apart from interpreting universal plays, would produce Costa Rican pieces. During this decade several theater houses were also opened, like the Teatro Arlequin and Teatro Las Mascaras, a fact that points to the growing interest in theater by the public in general.

The sixties were also very productive years for the theater. The Catania brothers arrived to the country, bringing about an explosion of actors, directors and theater specialists. In 1969, the Department of Drama of the University of Costa Rica began functioning, and by this time it could be said that theater as an art form and a concrete activity had finally solidified. Some important playwrights that were "born" during this important time, were: Alberto Canas, Samuel Rovinski and Daniel Gallegos. These authors and directors at times discussed themes that were serious and somewhat burdensome for the public's conscience, like adultery, abortion, existentialism and the manipulation and the exercise of power over others. Nevertheless, the public was ready for this heavy load.

Currently, part of the productions belong to the classical theater production, including pieces by Shakespeare and classical Spanish authors. However, commercial theater is more popular, and it includes modern plays written by Costa Ricans and other Latin Americans. Some of the most popular plays could be considered intellectually "light", but they are extremely enjoyable and funny. Even if they aren't as serious as other performances, they are valuable in that they present fragments of contemporary Costa Rican reality. They are an important cultural text that also happens to entertain its audience.

Transportation

by Infocostarica Staff

When I was living in the United States, during my college years, a fellow student asked me if there were buses in Costa Rica. I felt a mixture of anger and downright disbelief, when I thought of how much better the bus service was in Costa Rica than in the United States. Better of course, doesn't mean that the buses are in better condition than in the U.S., but it does mean that public bus transportation in Costa Rica is much more abundant, frequent and cheaper. However, the bus isn't the only means of transportation that tourists can use while they visit Costa Rica.

There are rent-a-cars in Costa Rica, in the airport, in the capital city of San Jose and other cities and in some rural areas. Lots of these cars are four-wheel drives, but they're not used only for rural roads, since potholes abound in main streets in major cities. Lately, the roads have been well-marked and one can get maps and directions from the ICT (Tourism Bureau) in downtown San Jose, under the Plaza de la Cultura. Some legal facts that a driver and car renter should be aware of, are: driving age is eighteen and over but if you're a foreigner, you must be 21 years old and always carry a passport; a tourist's driver's license is valid only for three months after arrival, after which he/she has to apply for a Costa Rican license. People who have never driven in Costa Rica before, must be psychologically prepared to do so. Some drivers here are reckless and rude, especially in a major city. Although the speed limit is usually 50 mph, Costa Rica holds the world's highest auto fatality rate (18 deaths per 100,000 kms., as opposed to 2.7 deaths in the U.S.) Driving outside of San Jose is not nearly as stressful, but one must beware of potholes and of sharp curves, especially in mountainous regions.

Taxis, like buses, offer excellent service and they are much cheaper than in other countries. All taxis in the cities have a meter, which you must make sure is turned on when you enter the cab. Taxis charge more if they leave the city, so you must make sure to ask about an approximate amount before being taken there. Buses are a good option if you want to travel cheaply, and as I've mentioned before, they are abundant. They can get pretty crowded sometimes, and people have to ride standing up and holding on to a rail, but this doesn't really matter for short rides. The ICT (Tourism Bureau) will gladly give out the information on bus schedules, fares and bus stops and major terminals. It's important to keep in mind that buses are more crowded from Friday to Monday, since a lot of people commute during the weekend. Also, luggage space is limited in most buses, and unless they are a tourist bus, they don't have bathrooms, so don't drink a lot of liquid!

If land travelling gets a little boring, you might want to try out the aerial means. There are some local airlines that offer flights to several locations, and they aren't that expensive. Two local airlines are: SANSA (tel.233-53-80) and Travelair (tel.232-78-83), which is more costly but it's more reliable when it comes to reservations. Aero Costa Sol (tel.441-14-44) also offers trips inside Costa Rica, and sometimes to neighboring countries like Panama and Nicaragua. If you're looking for a helicopter ride, you might want to call Helicopteros de Costa Rica (231-65-64, 232-12-51). Remember that the country code for Costa Rica is 506, and that there's no area code, so that you just dial the country code and the rest of the number. Going back to the planes and helicopters, most of them leave San Jose from either the international airport, Juan Santamaria, or the local one in Pavas called the Tobias Bolanos.

Trains are a great option for more romantic or adventuresome tourists, but unfortunately, their service is extremely limited in Costa Rica. Since their future is uncertain, it's better to check with two agencies that offers short tours on this means of transportation: Swiss Travel Agency (tel.231-40-55) and TAM travel (tel.222-26-42). They usually run in the Atlantic region of Costa Rica.

So as you can see, there are buses in Costa Rica, and plenty of them for that matter. There are also other means of transportation like taxis, rent-a-cars, planes, helicopters and some trains. Costa Rica might not be as advanced as other countries in many respects, but it does offer many different and for the most part, cheap options for getting around the country.

Education System

by Infocostarica Staff

Everything in San Jose makes clear that Costa Ricans are a highly literate people : the country boasts of 93% literacy in those 10 years or over, the most literate population in Central America. Many of the country's early fathers like the first president, Jose Maria Castro, were former teachers who were concerned about the education in Costa Rica. In 1869, the country became one of the first in the world to make the education both free and obligatory, funded by the state's share of the great coffee wealth. In those days only one in ten Costa Ricans could read and write . By 1920 the 50% of the population was literate and by 1970s 89% were able to read and write.

The last 20 years have seen a significant boosts to educational standards. Since the 70s the country has invested more than 28% of the national budget on primary and secondary education. President Figueres elected in 1994, advocates a computer in each of the nation's 4000 schools, plus obligatory English classes, probably with the technological and tourist industries boom of recent years.

Libraries are the only way for adults in rural areas to continue education beyond six grade. The country, with approximately 100 libraries, has a desperate need for books and for funds to support the hundreds of additional libraries that the country needs.

Elementary and High schools are to be found in every community. Students are not required to pay for assistance, a nominal charge of around \$20 per year applies. Elementary school has 6 year levels, where as high school has 5 year levels. Each is divided in two cycles, and upon completion of each cycle, students are required to pass tests on all subjects studied during those years. The most notorious of these tests are the Bachillerato Tests, which are required to get the high school diploma needed for admission to Universities.

Although the country lacked a university until 1940, Costa Rica now boasts four state-funded universities and a score of small private ones, whose number has increased dramatically in the last decade, due to the difficulty of being admitted to state-funded, more prestigious universities. Opportunities abound for adults to earn the primary or secondary diplomas they failed to gain as children.

The University of Costa Rica (UCR), the largest and oldest university, enrolls some 35,000 students, mostly on scholarships, but even paying full tuition is not hard as it rarely surpasses \$200 a semester. The main campus is in the northeastern San Jose community of San Pedro but the UCR also has regional centers in Alajuela, Turrialba, Puntarenas and Cartago. The National University in Heredia, offers a variety of liberal arts, sciences, and professional studies to 13,000 students . Cartago's Technical Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR) specializes in science and technology, and seeks to train people for agriculture, industry and mining. And the State Correspondence University, founded in 1978, is modeled after the United Kingdom's Open University and has 32 regional centers offering 15 degree courses in health, education, business administration, and the liberal arts.

In addition there are many private institutions like, the Autonomous University of Central America, the University for Peace, sponsored by the United Nations offering a master's degree in communications for Peace.

Languages

From the infocostarica.com Staff

When Ana went up to the gate, she looked for the bell, but there wasn't one, so she screamed out "Upe!", the Costa Rican saying for asking to be let in. Then, when Dona Mayela came out, Ana asked her "Como esta?" (how are you), and the lady answered: "Muy bien, gracias a Dios, y usted?" (Very well, thanks to God, and you?). If you're a foreigner and you don't know how to speak Spanish, it would be a shame for you to miss out on Costa Rican sayings and language in general. Even though a lot of people living in the capital city of San Jose speak some English, (especially those people in the tourist trade), you won't encounter many English-speakers in more rural areas. It's always advisable to learn at least the basics, so that your stay can be more enjoyable and less stressful.

Costa Ricans don't use the same Castilian Spanish that's spoken in Spain. The Spaniards lisp their c's and z's and they use the "vosotros" person, while Costa Ricans use the antiquated form of "vos", and the more formal "usted". They all mean "you" but they vary in their formality and they affect verb conjugations. Costa Rican Spanish is as dynamic a language as any other, and it's full of "Tiquismos" or unique sayings and argot. One of the common Tiquismos is the use of the diminutive- Costa Ricans are called "ticos" because they add this word as a suffix in order to create a diminutive. In other words, instead of saying "blanquito" (small, white), they might say "blanquitico" or "blanquititico", which means the same thing. Ticos also use tons of terms of endearment, which shouldn't be misinterpreted as mean nicknames. For instance, it's common for Ticos to call people "flaco" (thin one) or "gordo" (fat one) without intending any offense at all. People of other races are usually called by their race, as in "chino" (chinese) or "negro" (black one). I hate to think of what would happen in another country such as the U.S., which is full of more pronounced racial tensions if people were to call out these names to minorities.

Apart from the unique "Tiquismos", Costa Rican Spanish isn't really that difficult to learn. Ticos speak more slowly and clearly than in other Latin American countries. Ticos are also extremely patient with people who are trying to learn their language, and they will help and encourage them to do so. It's advisable to learn at least the basics of the language, since as was mentioned before, only some people speak English. The only large population of native English speakers is located in Limon, where people of Jamaican descent settled.

Costa Rican Spanish, as most Spanish in Latin America, is extremely polite and sometimes formal. Some key words to learn, in order to keep up with the politeness are: "Gracias" (thank you), "Por favor" (please), "Buenos dias" (good morning). Ticos also mention luck and God a lot in their speech: "Que Dios lo acompañe" (May God go with you), or if you meet them for the first time "Mucho gusto" (It's a pleasure).

Language schools abound in Costa Rica, and they range from a few mediocre ones to a majority of excellent ones. Some are located in universities, such as the program for foreign students in the University of Costa Rica (506)207-56-34, in private institutions, like the Forester Institute (506)225-31-55, Intensa (506)225-60-04, and many, many more. There are even language schools in rural areas, near rainforests or in beach areas, that offer a good combination of exotic living and language learning for the more adventure-type travelers.

All in all, Costa Rica is an excellent option for learning Spanish in an easy and gradual way. There are intensive 2-4 week courses and semester and yearly programs for the more ambitious types. The best way to learn a language is to have a boyfriend or girlfriend that will teach you, but even if this doesn't happen, in Costa Rica, there are numerous language schools where you can learn and friendly people in the streets who won't make fun of you or lose their patience when you're trying to speak their language.

Employment and the Economy

The economy of Costa Rica heavily depends on tourism, agriculture, and electronics exports. Poverty has been reduced over the past 15 years, and a social safety net put into place. Economic growth rebounded from -0.9% in 1996 to 4% in 1997, 6% in 1998, 7% in 1999.

According to the CIA World Factbook, Costa Rica's GDP per capita is US\$11,100; however, this developing country still faces the second highest inflation rate in Latin America, lack of maintenance and new investment in infrastructure, over 610,000 (16%) people below the poverty line and just over 270,000 (6.6%) unemployed. The Costa Rican economy grew nearly 5% in 2006 after experiencing 4 years of slow economic growth.

Inflation rose to 22.5% in 1995, dropped to 11.1% in 1997, 12% in 1998, 11% in 1999 and 9% in 2007. Large government deficits - fueled by interest payments on the massive internal debt - and inefficient administration by government monopolies have undermined efforts to maintain the quality of social services. Curbing inflation, reducing the deficit, and improving public sector efficiency through an anti-corruption drive, remain key challenges to the government. Political resistance to privatization has stalled liberalization efforts.

Costa Rica's economy emerged from recession in 1997 and has shown strong aggregate growth since then. After 6.2% growth in 1998, GDP grew a substantial 8.3% in 1999, led by exports of the country's.

The strength in the nontraditional export and tourism sector is masking a relatively lackluster performance by traditional sectors, including agriculture. Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, was 10.1% in 1999, down from 11.2% the year before. The central government deficit decreased to 3.2% of GDP in 1999,

down from 3.3% from the year before. On a consolidated basis, including Central Bank losses and parastatal enterprise profits, the public sector deficit was 2.3% of GDP.

Controlling the budget deficit remains the single biggest challenge for the country's economic policy makers, as interest costs on the accumulated central government debt consumes the equivalent of 30% of the government's total revenues. This limits the resources available for investments in the country's deteriorated public infrastructure, investments in many cases that would result in higher quality infrastructure if they were better planned. Contents

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Natural resources

Costa Rica's major economic resources are its fertile land and frequent rainfall, its well-educated population, and its location in the Central American isthmus, which provides easy access to North and South American markets and direct ocean access to the European and Asian Continents. Costa Rica has two seasons, both of which have their own agricultural resources. The seasons are the basic, wet and dry, tropical seasons. One-fourth of Costa Rica's land is dedicated to national forests, often adjoining beaches, which has made the country a popular destination for affluent retirees and ecotourists. In terms of the 2008 Environmental Performance Index ranking, Costa Rica is 5th in the world, up from the 15th place in 2006.

Tourism

Ecotourism is key in Costa Rica's tourism industry. Shown Savegre River, Talamanca.
Main article: Tourism in Costa Rica

With a \$1.92-billion-a-year tourism industry, Costa Rica stands as the most visited nation in the Central American region, with 1.9 million foreign visitors in 2007,[3] thus reaching a rate of foreign tourists per capita of 0.46, one of the highest in the Caribbean Basin, and above other popular destinations such as Mexico (0.21), Dominican Republic (0.38), and Brazil (0.03).

Ecotourism is extremely popular with the many tourists visiting the extensive national parks and protected areas around the country. Costa Rica was a pioneer in this type of tourism and the country is recognized as one of the few with real ecotourism.[4] Other important market segments are adventure, and sun and beaches. Most of the tourists come from the U.S. and Canada (46%), and the E.U. (16%),[5] the prime market travelers in the world, which translates into a relatively high expenditure per tourist of \$1000 per trip. In terms of 2008 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), Costa Rica reached the 44th place in the world ranking, being the first among Latin American countries, and second if the Caribbean is included.[6] Just considering the subindex measuring human, cultural, and natural resources, Costa Rica ranks in the 24th place at a worldwide level, and 7th when considering just the natural resources criteria. The TTCI report also notes Costa Rica's main weaknesses, ground transport infrastructure (ranked 113th), and safety and security (ranked 128th).

Exports, jobs, and energy

Intel microprocessor facility in Costa Rica is responsible for 20% of exports and 4,9% of the country's GDP.

Costa Rica used to be known principally as a producer of bananas and coffee. Even though coffee, bananas, pineapple, sugar, lumber, wood products and beef are still important exports, in recent times electronics, pharmaceuticals, financial outsourcing, software development, and ecotourism have become the prime industries in Costa Rica's economy. High levels of education among its residents make the country an attractive investing location.

The country has successfully attracted important investments by such companies as Intel Corporation, which employs nearly 3,500 people at its custom built \$300 million microprocessor plant; Procter & Gamble, which is establishing its administrative center for the Western Hemisphere in Costa Rica; and Abbott Laboratories and Baxter Healthcare from the health care products industry likewise. Manufacturing and

industry's contribution to GDP overtook agriculture over the course of the 1990s, led by foreign investment in Costa Rica's free trade zones. Well over half of that investment has come from the U.S. In 2006 Intel's microprocessor facility alone was responsible for 20% of Costa Rican exports and 4.9% of the country's GDP.

Poás Volcano Crater is one of the country's main tourist attractions.

Trade with South East Asia and Russia has boomed during 2004 and 2005, and the country is expected to obtain full Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) membership by 2007 (the country became an observer in 2004).

Tourism is booming, with the number of visitors up from 780,000 in 1996, through 1 million in 1999, to 1.9 million foreign visitors in 2007, allowing the country to earn \$1.9-billion in that year.[11] Tourism now earns more foreign exchange than bananas and coffee combined.[12] In 2005, tourism contributed with 8,1% of the country's GDP and represented 13,3% of direct and indirect employment.[13]

The country has not discovered sources of fossil fuels--apart from minor coal deposits-- but its mountainous terrain and abundant rainfall have permitted the construction of a dozen hydroelectric power plants, making it self-sufficient in all energy needs, except oil for transportation. Costa Rica exports electricity to Central America and has the potential to become a major electricity exporter if plans for new generating plants and a regional distribution grid are realized. Mild climate and trade winds make neither heating nor cooling necessary, particularly in the highland cities and towns where some 90% of the population lives.

Infrastructure

Costa Rica's infrastructure has suffered from a lack of maintenance and new investment. The country has an extensive road system of more than 30,000 kilometers, although much of it is in disrepair. Most parts of the country are accessible by road. The main highland cities in the country's Central Valley are connected by paved all-weather roads with the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and by the Pan American Highway with Nicaragua and Panama, the neighboring countries to the North and the South. Costa Rica's ports are struggling to keep pace with growing trade. They have insufficient capacity, and their equipment is in poor condition. The railroad didn't function for several years, until recent government effort to reactivate it for city transportation.

The government hopes to bring foreign investment, technology, and management into the telecommunications and electrical power sectors, which are monopolies of the state. However, political opposition to opening these sectors to private participation has stalled the government's efforts.

Costa Rica has a reputation as one of the most stable, prosperous, and among the least corrupt in Latin America.[14] However, in fall 2004, three former Costa Rican presidents (Jose Maria Figueres, Miguel Angel Rodríguez, and Rafael Angel Calderon) were investigated on corruption charges related to the issuance of government contracts, and several of the legal proceeding are still open.

The poor state of public finances and the maladministration by state monopolies will continue to limit the state's ability to try to modernize these sectors in the absence of a political consensus to permit private investment. Failure to act soon on telecommunications could prove an obstacle to the government's desire to attract more world-class foreign investment.

Nationalized industry

Some large sectors such as utilities and telecommunications are nationalized and/or are government supported monopolies.

Although there are no formal capital controls, it has been claimed that the prevalence of state-owned banks have had the same effect. They are also blamed for the rampant inflation that currently runs at around 11%.

The quality of these industries, particularly power and communications, have been sharply criticized for the outages that occur nearly daily in some areas.

The large amount of government intervention and support for these industries has been blamed for the lack of funding for and virtual non-existence of police.

Religion

By Infocostarica Staff

More than the 90% of the Costa Ricans are catholic , but almost no one gets riled about his or her religion and faith, as religious freedom is granted by the constitution and upheld by the tolerant nature of the Ticos. Holy Week (the week before Easter) is a national holiday, and its supposed to be a time of prayers and good behavior, but people in almost every place of Costa Rica take it as an excuse for vacations and secular binge. Here the passing of the parish priest inspires no reverential gestures. And almost all Costa Ricans respond to the sound of the church's bells only on special events, like baptism, marriage, and maybe the Easter morning our during mourning masses.

Costa Rica as a country has always been remarkably secular, the relationship between the state and the church has been always very weak. The population special dislike for dictators have made them intolerant of priests, together with the influence of secular liberal administrations that vanished orders and deeply affected the church's influence at the beginning of the 19th century. The church in the feudal Central American nations offered the peasants who where poor and ignorant a great consolation which was salvation and the kingdom of heaven. But in Costa Rica the church had trouble from the earliest colonial times to take control over people minds and moral. While poor peasants can be convinced they'll become bourgeois in heaven, a rising class wants its comforts on earth. Costa Rica's modernity and middle-class achievements have made the traditional Church and all of its meanings superfluous for many people.

Still, every village, no matter how small it is, has a church facing east, on the west side of the central plaza, and its own saint's day, which is usually celebrated with secular fervor. Every home, taxi, office and bus has its token religious icons. The Catholic marriage ceremony is the only church marriage with state recognition, and so, Catholicism is the official state religion as mandated by the Constitution of 1949 .

Protestantism has proven even less spellbinding. The Catholic clergy has fiercely defended its turf against Protestant missionaries, and the Protestant evangelism so prevalent in other parts of Central America has yet to make a dent in Costa Rica. Many kinds of sects also can be found in many places of Costa Rica but they never tend to be any kind of majority, although they are certainly on the rise and quite uproarious compared to the traditional religions.

A sudden increase in the number of religious sects might be marking a spiritual awakening of a large non-religious population who is disappointed by the traditional catholic church's pomposity and lack spiritual content. Unfortunately, these new sects, whose adepts are despectively called a generic "Cristianos" by the rest of the population, are usually founded by greedy or lascivious preachers with something other than salvation in mind. The catholic church has already started it's counter attack in trying to recover the souls of the people by sending nice looking priest to preach on television and radio in a manner quite unheard of from the Catholics before this troublesome times.

Older people tend to be more pious than younger ones, but it is undeniable that even without attending church a vast majority of the population considers itself catholic and have an inherited respect for the church.

It is also important to mention that other major religions have their representatives in Costa Rica, among them one can count Judaism, with a Synagogue in San Jose, Buddhism, Hinduism and the Islam.

Music

Costa Rica counts with an outstanding National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica since the early 1900s. Offers worldwide performances as well as seasonal concerts usually held in the National Theater, a replica of the Opera of Paris. Often performs giving concerts in the White House USA, to the Kings of Spain, have held concerts with Luciano Pavarotti, the Royal family of Japan, etc. Proudly, also performs in the regional areas and underdeveloped countries, teaching classical music. The National Symphony Orchestra has various CD's.

Costa Rica also has a Youth Symphony Orchestra, founded by ex President Jose Figueres Ferrer in the 1970. "Concertina Ana Gabriela Castro-Rosabal" was the first 4 year old girl/ child/Costa Rican to direct the Youth Symphony Orchestra into tuning in its 1970 Debut, and first 4-year-old violin soloist to play Mozart

under the direction of director Gerald Brown. Violinist Ana Gabriela Castro-Rosabal, Master in Violin Performance was the key performer for the Yourth Symphony Orchestra Debut in 1970.

Proudly the Costa Ricans say, "Costa Rica does not have an army, but it has violins". Instead of allocating budget to have an army, Costa Rica has a Symphony, free education K to Ph.D. and free universal health insurance.

Though its music has achieved little international credit, Costa Rican popular music genres include: an indigenous calypso scene which is distinct from the more widely-known Trinidadian calypso sound, as well as a thriving disco audience that supports nightclubs in cities like San José. American and British rock and roll and pop are very popular and common among the youth (especially urban youth), while dance-oriented genres like soca, salsa, merengue, cumbia and Tex-Mex have an appeal among a somewhat older audience.

Mexican music is very popular among older people and some people in the countryside. During the middle years of the 20th century, Costa Rica was exposed to much Mexican cultural influence.

Another new genre explored in Costa Rica is celtic with the group Peregrino Gris.

Folk Music

The Caribbean coast shows a strong African influence in the complex percussion rhythms like sinkit. Like its northerly neighbors in Central America, the marimba is a very popular instrument, and Costa Rican marimba music is very popular. In modern times, groups like Cantares have helped to popularize Costa Rican folk music, and were a leading part of the New Costa Rican Song movement[1].

Costa Rica's pre-Columbian population has contributed a large part of the country's folk heritage, include rare musical scales, certain ceremonial songs and ocarinas. The Guanacaste region, in the Peninsula of Nicoya, is home to the best-known folk traditions. Along the Atlantic coast, the African musical heritage is more pronounced, and Afro-Caribbean music like rumba, calypso and reggae are popular.

In most of Costa Rica, ancient instruments like ocarinas are being replaced by international instruments like accordions and guitars. There are still folk styles, even outside of Guanacaste, such as the Talamanca's Danza de los Huelos and the Boruca's Danza de los Diablitos.

Guanacaste is the major center for Costa Rican folk music, especially pre-Columbian styles like the Danza del Sol and Danza de la Luna of the Chorotega, who also popularized the ancient quiyongo (a single-string bow and gourd resonator) and native oboe, the chirimia [2].

Costa Rica's population never developed a major rhythm or style that became a major part of popular music, nor has Costa Rica produced a great literary or other artistic tradition [3]. There have been exceptions, such as the Costa Rican landscape school of painting in the 1920s. The Andean peña tradition (an international gathering of like-minded persons) is strong in Costa Rica as well, introduced by immigrants from Chile and Argentina.

In the late 1980s some local artists and bands became famous for having their own style and original material, such as José Capmany, Café con Leche and Inconsciente Colectivo; some of them had fans from outside of Costa Rica, like Editus, a Grammy winning contemporary jazz ensemble. At around that time a popular Latin genre developed, chiqui-chiqui (a mixture of merengue, cumbia and other latin rhythms along with afro-pop influences) as it was known, led by bands such as Los Hicsos and La Banda. After losing popularity around the 90's, chiqui chiqui has resurfaced and established itself as one of the most popular and recognizable music among Costa Ricans, thanks in part to the release of CD re-editions of many classic hits.

From the late 90's to present time, there has emerged a newer local rock style led by bands such as Gandhi, Evolución, Tango India, Suite Doble, Alma Bohemia, and Kadeho, all of which have been accepted positively by Costa Rican youths. There are Metal bands, like Insano, Deznuke, December's Cold Winter, Feedback(fdbk) and Cold, to name but a few. Also bands venturing into Reggae and Ska are popular, one example is Mekatelyu and Michael Livingston.

Malpaís, a band emerging from the Guanacaste-area, is one of the central bands of the Costa Rican rock and music scene of today, mixing traditional Costa Rican folk and Latin music with jazz and rock and has met great success in Costa Rica and surrounding countries.

For all the fanfare of rock, electronic or world music, Latin music is somehow the most common music genre in some specific sectors, and visitors will find that most Costa Ricans of certain generations favor Latin music (Cuban, Mexican and Colombian).

Music Institutions

Classical music performing organizations include the Costa Rican National Symphony Orchestra (formed in 1970), which has been conducted by Americans Gerald Brown and Irwin Hoffman, and currently by the Japanese music director, Chosei Komatsu. The country is also home to an opera company, one of the first professional choirs in Central America, and a state-subsidized youth orchestra, which belongs to the National Symphony Orchestra. The Universidad de Costa Rica has a concert band and an orchestra, besides an early-music group and several chamber music groups. The National University, Universidad Nacional, has a resident string quartet and a Symphony Orchestra which had its very successful premiere at the National Theatre in San José on May 10, 2007, conducted by Dieter Lehnhoff. It has also a highly successful piano school led by the Russian virtuoso, Alexandr Sklioutovsky. Other well-known groups are the El Café Chorale and the Sura Chamber Choir[4] and also the pianist Ismael Pacheco, who was the first costarican pianist to have been performed at the prestigious Carnegie Hall on the year 2001. [5].

Both the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR), in San José, and the Universidad Nacional (UNA), in Heredia, have well-structured programmes in Music, where students can pursue bachelor's degrees in instrumental and vocal performing, composition, and conducting. The latter also has a doctoral degree in Central American Arts and Letters, with an emphasis in Music.

Contemporary composers include Mario Alfragüell, Marvin Camacho, Alejandro Cardona, Bernal Flores, Benjamín Gutiérrez, Luis Diego Herra, and Eddie Mora, to name but a few.

Costa Rican folk institutions include the Fantasía Folklorica. Every August, Costa Rica is home to an International Festival of Music.

In recent years the government, led by the Ministerio de Cultura, has aimed to revitalize traditional Costa Rican music.

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