



**PRE-DEPARTURE PACKAGE
– COSTA RICA –
2009**

For those who live it!



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Welcome to Máximo Nivel

Welcome to Máximo Nivel. By joining one of our international programs you're starting a small journey to improve your Spanish, better the global community through volunteering, or become a professional teacher through our TEFL/TESOL certification program.

We're very happy that you've chosen Máximo Nivel, and we want your experience to be unforgettable. It's our commitment to quality and service that has made us the organization that we are today. Our staff is available around the clock, so if you have questions or problems, please contact our in-country coordinators and field managers by telephone or email.

This pre-departure package provides you the main information you need to prepare yourself for your upcoming experience abroad. We look forward to seeing you soon.



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Before You Leave

Before you go to Costa Rica you should do the following:

- Leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.
- Make sure your passport is up-to-date.
- Carry your photo identification and the name of a person to contact with you at all times in the event of serious illness or other emergency.
- Keep photocopies of your airline or other tickets and your list of traveler's checks with you in a separate location from the originals and leave copies with someone at home.
- Leave things like unnecessary credit cards and expensive jewelry at home.
- Use a money belt or concealed pouch for your passport, cash and other valuables.

About Costa Rica

Costa Rica is located in Central America and borders Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. A chain of volcanoes and mountains—part of the Andean-Sierra Madre chain—runs the length of the country and separates the Caribbean Sea on the east coast from the Pacific Ocean on the west coast.

Of all of the places on earth, Costa Rica is by far one of the most exotic. The country offers unparalleled natural beauty, active volcanoes, rainforests, and a wide range of national parks and eco-tourism. In addition, Costa Rica has over 1,000 miles of gorgeous white-and-black sand beaches, copious amounts of sunshine, world-class sport fishing, snorkeling and surfing!

For current forecasts in Costa Rica, see <http://www.costarica.com/Home/Weather>



REGION	ALTITUDE	TEMPERATURE		GENERAL DESCRIPTION
		MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	
San Jose	1,170 m/3,839 ft above sea level	24°C / 75°F	27°C / 80°F	In May-November (Rainy Season) warm with intermittent rain and sunshine with Spring-like conditions. In December-April (Dry Season) warm with very little to no rain and Spring-like conditions.
Pacific	sea level	29°C / 84°F	32°C / 90°F	The May-November (Rainy Season) and December-April (Dry Season) seasons are pronounced. Generally hot, and lots of sun year-round.
Caribbean	sea level	29°C / 84°F	32°C / 90°F	The May-November (Rainy Season) and December-April (Dry Season) seasons are less pronounced and the Caribbean coast receives a great deal of rain year-round. Hot, humid and sunny year-round.
Highlands	2200-3800 m / 7,218-12,467 ft above sea level	10°C / 50°F	27°C / 81°F	In May-November (Rainy Season) warm with intermittent rain and sunshine with cool to warm temperatures. In December-April (Dry Season) warm with very little to no rain and Spring-like conditions.

Pickup Information

Please e-mail your flight details in advance. When you get to the Juan Santamaría International Airport in San Jose, walk out of the airport and turn right to meet our driver—Alfonso—who will be waiting for you. Sometimes Alfonso’s son or wife will be there to greet you and they will bring you to Alfonso’s car. When they meet you, they will have a sign with your name on it. Please email your flight details to international@maximonivel.com

If you do not see the taxi driver at the San Jose Airport, please contact our representatives at the numbers below.

Máximo Nivel

**Del Antiguo Higueron
100 metros Sur y 50 metros Este
San Pedro, San Jose
Costa Rica**

Tel: 2253 9220 (local call)
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Food & Accommodation

Máximo Nivel directly manages all accommodations for program participants. Accommodations may include family-stay, hostel, private apartment, or hotel. Regardless of which type of accommodation you have, hot water is available 24 hours a day.

Local Costa Rican food is provided three times a day for participants at family-stays. Costa Rican food is a fusion cuisine. It combines elements of culinary traditions from Africa, Italy, France, China, and Spain, flavored by traditional grains (rice, corn, and beans), roots (sweet potatoes), spices (coriander, garlic, annatto, saffron, parsley, oregano, thyme, nutmeg, salt, and pepper), oils (olive oil, vegetable oil, and lard), sauces (Soy, and Worcestershire), fresh fruit, and vegetables. The food is mild to slightly seasoned.

The most common dishes that reflect the rural culture and are served in typical food restaurants are *Gallo Pinto* and *Casados*. *Gallo Pinto* consists of rice and beans seasoned with coriander, onions and Worcestershire sauce usually served for breakfast with scrambled or fried eggs and a cup of *Agua Dulce* (pure sugar cane diluted in hot water) or coffee. *Casados* consist of white rice, black or red beans served with pork, steak, or chicken, a small portion of cabbage/lettuce & tomato salad, and fried plantains. Traditional food goes far beyond *Gallo Pinto* and *Casados*. You can delight yourself with more main dishes, drinks, and desserts. Popular main dishes are *Arroz* (rice,) *Higado en salsa* (beef liver) *Escaveche*, *Pozole*, *Ceviche*, *Arroz con Pollo*, *Papas con Chorizo*, *Olla de Carne*, *Barbudos*, and *Mondongo*.

Electricity in Costa Rica

Every accommodation is equipped with 24-hour electricity. Electricity throughout Costa Rica is 120V, 60Hz—the same frequency used in the United States. The following plugs will work in most Costa Rican homes and hostels:



Plug A: Flat blade attachment plug.



Plug B: Flat blade attachment with a circular grounding pin.

Passport/Visa

European and North American citizens holding valid passports are permitted to stay in Costa Rica for 90 days without a visa. However, travelers from the following South American, African, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European countries must pre-arrange their tourist visas:

All African nations (with the exception of South Africa), Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Angola, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Benin, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Negara Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Bhutan, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cameroon, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Comoros, Chad, Ecuador, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liberia, Lebanon, Macao, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Qatar, Saharhui Arab Republic, Central African Republic, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of the Congo, Laos, Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leon, Sudan, Swaziland, Thailand, Tanzania, Tajikistan, East Timor, Togo, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Djibouti, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

As in most countries, in order to visit Costa Rica, travelers must show their passports upon entry. The passport must be valid for 6 months following any entry date into Costa Rica.

Visa Extensions

Our in-country coordinator will help you with a visa extension if it is needed. Your visa can be extended by leaving the country for 72 hours (the in-country coordinator can arrange your travel to Panama or Nicaragua if you would like to take this option), or by paying approximately US\$100.00 to the Costa Rican Immigration Office, who will issue you a 1-month extension.

Documentation

You should always carry a photocopy of your passport with you at all times. It is not recommended to carry your actual passport, as loss or theft of your passport can be a costly and time-consuming problem. It is also a good idea to keep photocopies of other important documents (airline tickets, prescriptions, etc.) in a safe location. Because entry requirements change frequently, it is always a good idea to call your Costa Rican Embassy or consulate before leaving to see if there are any new regulations.

Money, Finances, and Exchange

The *Colon* is the official currency of Costa Rica; there are 100 *centimos* in each Colon. It is wise to verify the most current exchange rate before your departure: www.x-rates.com. Travelers' Checks are not recommended; the best thing to do is to bring your ATM card and major credit cards; also most Visa and MasterCard branded debit cards will work in Costa Rica. Major tourist areas and hotels all accept major credit cards and U.S. dollars, but if you intend to avoid expensive and touristy places, you will likely need cash. ATM's are easily accessible in major cities and tourist areas, and generally provide both colones and dollars. Cash can be exchanged easily at the airport and at any bank.

Taxes

The official sales tax is 13% on the amount paid for goods and for some services. The services of Lawyers, Doctors, Dentists and other independent professionals are exempt from sales tax; anything else you buy, from a candy bar to a computer or furniture is taxed.

Tipping

All hotels will add a 10% service charge plus 3.39% tourism tax to the bill by law. Restaurants also add a 10% service charge to the bill. That said, additional tipping is recommended for hotel staff, porters and waiters. Tipping is a personal matter, and you are encouraged to tip the amount you feel is appropriate (5% - 10% additional). Please note, that taxi drivers do not need to be tipped.

Safety

Costa Rica is the safest country in Central and South America. However, as in any foreign country, you should use common sense and your best judgment to avoid becoming the target of petty crime. San Jose is a lively city with a vibrant nightlife. Be on your toes when in crowded places. Avoid walking alone at night. If you find yourself alone and your instincts tell you something is wrong, move to a crowded place. The most common form of crime against visitors to Costa Rica is pick-pocketing and petty theft of personal belongings. Make sure you only do business with well-established agencies and businesses, or ones that are recommended by Máximo Nivel. Please keep the following things in mind:

- If you happen to fall asleep on public transport, be aware that this is an opportunity for someone to rob you of your belongings. Never leave your luggage unattended.
- Don't change money on the street. The rates are generally high—as are the risks. Many money changers on the street will cheat you or even steal your money outright.
- Do not use taxis that don't have functioning meters—this is the law in Costa Rica.
- Do not flash money in public and avoid wearing expensive-looking jewelry or cameras.
- Keep your passport locked in your room and carry a photocopy with you for identification.

Health

Tap water in Costa Rica is potable – most people drink it straight from the tap.

Sunburn ruins more trips than any other danger you're likely to face in Costa Rica. Because of the country's proximity to the equator UV radiation and effects from the sun can be very intense. You can burn very quickly, even to the point of requiring hospitalization. Always remember to wear sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat.

Aside from taking preventative medication, you should avoid insect bites as much as possible. Use repellent and sleep under a mosquito net when traveling through the forested regions of Costa Rica. Avoiding mosquito bites in Costa Rica is not to prevent Malaria as many people believe, but more to prevent dengue fever, another mosquito-borne illness. Malaria is *not* a problem in Costa Rica and no special precautions need to be taken.

Use insect repellents that contain a high DEET content (diethylmethyloamide). Read and follow all directions and precautions on the product label. Do not inhale, swallow, or get repellent into your eyes (DEET is toxic if swallowed). If using a spray product, apply the repellent to your face by spraying your hands and then rubbing the product carefully over your face, avoiding the eyes and mouth as best as possible.

Máximo Nivel keeps a number of medications and first-aid supplies on hand at its office. We are more than happy to help treat minor cuts, scratches, headaches and minor stomach issues. For more serious illnesses, we'll take you to the private clinic or hospital close to our office. One of our staff members will accompany you to the clinic at any time, day or night.

Vaccinations

We recommend you ask your medical doctor for advice about vaccinations. Immunizations for Hepatitis A and Tetanus are very important for traveling to Costa Rica. If you have any sort of allergy please let us know at the beginning of the program so that we can place you in an appropriate setting for your condition.

What to Bring

The key to packing for a trip to Costa Rica is to pack for a variety of conditions. The best way to deal with the potential extremes that Costa Rica has to offer—the intense sun during the day, the cool mountain nights, and the heat and humidity of the rainforests and coasts—is to dress using several layers. Suggested packing list for Costa Rica:

Clothing

T-shirts
2 warm shirts
2 pairs of pants
3 pairs of shorts
Fleece jacket
Rain gear
Sneakers
Hiking boots
Sandals
Sunglasses
Hat

Equipment

Day pack
Camera
Water bottle
Laptop (TEFL/TESOL)

Toiletries

Bathroom kit
Sunscreen
Repellent

Please note that San Jose is a conservative city, and many volunteer projects do not allow the use of tennis shoes, jeans or T-shirts. Tank tops, shorts, and short skirts in the city center are strongly discouraged for social reasons, and are forbidden at many projects for religious reasons. That said, these clothes are very suitable for the beach or on tours.

All TEFL/TESOL program participants MUST bring clothes for teaching classes. Whereas dress code is casual during the TEFL/TESOL course, during the last week while you are teaching English classes professional dress is required—this means well pressed slacks, nice collar shirt or blouse, belt, and dress shoes. Participants that do not bring appropriate teaching attire will be required to purchase it prior to teaching.

Please Contact Us

The staff at Máximo Nivel wants you to have the most enjoyable experience possible in Costa Rica. If you have any questions or concerns not addressed in this package, don't hesitate to contact us by email or telephone.

San Jose, Costa Rica

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