

### **Sustainability Guidelines: Costa Rica**

You are about to embark on a journey to the wonderfully exotic country of Costa Rica, known for its dense, unique rainforests and tropical biodiversity. The country's varying topography will allow you to visit the mountains and the sea: both team with life and color. The rainforests provide home to over a million different species of plants and animals. Scientists still believe that there are millions of new species yet to be discovered in the depths of these rainforests.

### **Environmental Issues:**

Costa Rica's natural beauty is, however, threatened by environmental problems. The main environmental struggles that Costa Rica faces are as follows:

- Deforestation of rainforests: 99% of the country was originally covered by these forests. In the 1990's only 24.4% of rainforest land remained. Today, due to reforestation efforts, almost 50% has been restored. Clearing for agriculture, mostly coffee and bananas, cattle pastures, and urban expansion are the main causes of deforestation.
- Soil erosion is a result of deforestation. Without the trees and flora of the rainforests to hold soil in place, flooding occurs more frequently and the soil no longer contains essential nutrients that come from the relationship between soil and tree roots. Soil erosion also contributes to silt and sediments in the rivers.
- Decline in biodiversity is also caused by the decreasing percentage of rainforest footprint. Without the rainforests, thousands of species are becoming endangered.

### **Environmental Initiatives:**

As a developing country, Costa Rica has an ambitious conservation program, perhaps one of the most developed in the realm of countries with rainforests. Costa Rica has initiated numerous incentive programs to promote sustainable development.

One such project is organized by *Foresta Project of the Foundation of the Development of the Central Volcanic Mountain Range* (FUNDECOR). This project is committed to forest land management. As many of the National Parks are privately owned, the landowners can do whatever they want with the land. But this project works with these landowners to:

- Manage the remaining natural forests for sustainable production and use of timber and other products
- Re-plant native tree species
- Increase productive capacity of degraded pastures and forestlands.

The project is also committed to environmental education, mainly aimed at keeping students aware of re-forestation solution. Students are given the opportunity to lead educational tours of national parks as well as visit the National Parks of Poas and Irazu Volcanoes.

In terms of combating climate change, the government of Costa Rica has announced an ambitious plan for the country to reduce net emissions to zero by 2021 with 90% of its energy provision scheduled to be renewable. To offset emissions in transport and other sectors, radical schemes of reforestation have been put in place. In 2008 alone, seven million trees were scheduled for planting, said to be the highest per capita rate in the world.

*The Las Baulas Conservation Project* is designed to protect the population of Leatherback Turtles that nest on the Pacific coastline of Las Baulas National Park. This coastline is one of the world's last remaining nesting sites and necessary for the continuation of the species. The main aims of the project are to:

- Identify size and status of the nesting population
- Protect nesting female turtles from poachers and predators
- Provide scientific information to develop effective management and conservation strategies
- Improve understanding of the Leatherback species.

The project is achieved by patrolling turtle nests, assisting park guards in controlling tourists on the beach, and meeting with local authorities and leaders of the National Parks to develop conservation issues.

In 1991, Costa Rica developed the *Better Banana Project* (BBP) as an attempt to stop deforestation by banana companies, and it has expanded into the world's largest ecolabeling program for banana farms. The *BBP* ensures that farms meet strict environmental and social standards and are then certified. Certified farms have reforestation programs, workers get fair wages, there is proper safety equipment, and housing is provided as well as schooling for children. Pesticide use has declined dramatically and the most dangerous pesticides have been outlawed altogether. As farming technologies become more sustainable, standards have become more stringent. Traditional methods of growing bananas included heavy use of pesticides and plastic bags, but with the *BBP* these practices have vanished and there is a large commitment to waste and pesticide reduction.

As a visitor to this beautiful country, you can help to preserve its natural beauty and not further its environmental problems. In order to preserve the wildlife, be mindful of your litter when in National Parks or anywhere on your trip; make sure to dispose of it in the proper receptacles. You are very fortunate to be staying in many eco-lodges that promote sustainability and environmental consciousness in Costa Rica.



### Guide to Eco-Lodges in Costa Rica:

**Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Reserve and Spa:** This beautiful green hotel is located on the Los Angeles Private Biological Reserve and the Cloud Forest Reserve. It is a certified Green Hotel, committed to country-style hospitality with respect for the natural surroundings. This hotel boasts many accolades, including the first hotel in Costa Rica in almost eight years to achieve the highest rating of five green leaves by the Certification Board of Sustainable Tourism. The hotel staff is comprised of over 90% local residents of San Ramon, totaling 69 employees. Villa Blanca also has a recycling program, produces its own compost, and uses organic pesticides. The surrounding landscape is a reserve for the cultivation of native orchids, bromeliad, and other native plants. Villa Blanca operates its own organic vegetable garden and green house focusing on restoring native species of vegetation. The hotel has taken further measures to become sustainable by installing low-wattage fluorescent lighting and encourages guests to cut back on their energy consumption while staying at Villa Blanca. The furniture in the hotel was made in Costa Rica, utilizing farm grown lumber and local labor.

**Hotel Capitan Suizo:** This hotel is run by a Swiss family who relocated to Costa Rica in search of adventure and exploration of the natural beauty of the country. The hotel's philosophy lays importance on supporting the local communities and the local nature and wildlife. More than 95 percent of the sixty employees are Costa Rican and most of them are from the region of Guanacaste. No pesticides are used on the premise of the hotel and the landscape on the hotel grounds has been protected and preserved, allowing guests to enjoy an array of species including howler monkeys, garrobos, iguanas, and armadillos. The management and the whole Capitan Suizo team are constantly working on improving and evolving in order to offer the most unforgettable holiday experience they can to their guests.