

What to do when you travel to: Costa Rica

Note: Please print this out or download it to your phone, or other device that you can access readily, so you can carry it with you as you travel to and from your destination.

Before traveling to Costa Rica:

1. Check the airline reservations you have made, make sure there are no changes to your flight by either calling the airline(s) or going online to verify flight status.
2. Check with the airline(s) about luggage weight limits and charges for extra bags/weight
3. Make sure you have gone over your packing lists and have all the necessary stuff
4. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR PASSPORT AND A PHOTOCOPY OF YOUR PASSPORT

On your travel day to Costa Rica:

1. Arrive at your departure airport at least two hours early to go through check in, security, etc. NOTE: PLEASE MAKE SURE TO CHECK YOUR LUGGAGE ALL THE WAY TO YOUR FINAL DESTINATION (USUALLY SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA. IF YOU DO NOT, YOU WILL HAVE TO CLAIM YOUR LUGGAGE AT YOUR LAYOVER DESTINATIONS AND RE-CHECK YOUR LUGGAGE AND GO THROUGH SECURITY AGAIN). TO MAKE SURE THIS HAS HAPPENED, JUST ASK THE ATTENDANT(S) AT THE TICKET COUNTER: **"IS MY LUGGAGE CHECKED ALL THE WAY TO MY FINAL DESTINATION?"** ADDITIONAL NOTE: You should have as many boarding passes as you have connecting flights, please make sure of this before you leave the airline check-in area. So, if you are flying from El Paso to Dallas, and then from Dallas to Costa Rica, you should have two printed boarding passes. If you don't, please ask the person that helped you to figure out where the others are.
2. Please find a secure place to carry/put your passport. You will need to take it out and put it away a lot during your travel day. We recommend a passport carrier that you can put around your neck, or a travel pouch, or simply the SAME place in your bag or backpack. Decide where you will keep it beforehand and make it your routine. Do not be rushed when taking it out and putting it away, we have had a number of students stress out because they carry it in their hand and then misplace it because they may have dropped it while carrying their bags or doing other things. Take it out of your secure carrying place, do what you need to do with it, then put it away until the next time you need it.
3. It is unlikely that when you check in at your original departure city that the airline will indicate the gate from which your flight to Costa Rica will leave in your connecting city. When you land in your connecting city look at the monitors that are in the airport for San Jose, CR and your flight number (CR is for Costa Rica, DO NOT follow the San Jose, CA information, that is California). Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the gate. We recommend going to the gate first to see where it is, this is especially important if this is your first experience flying internationally. The approximate boarding times for all your flight should be printed on the boarding passes.
4. Once you are on your flight to Costa Rica and have settled in your seat, usually, you will receive two forms that you will need to enter Costa Rica (don't worry if they do not give these to you, or they run out on the plane – you can get these when you get off the plane in Costa Rica and you can fill them out there). One is for immigration (imigraciones), and one is for customs (aduanas). You will need your passport and your flight number for these documents. When the document asks for an address of where you will be staying while in Costa Rica, simply write CPI – followed by the campus, so if I am going to CPI in Monteverde, I would write "CPI-Monteverde." If you are visiting multiple CPI campuses, pick one and write it there. When checking your reason for traveling to Costa Rica, please mark "Tourist (Turista)." When they ask you how many family members are traveling with you, indicate "1" (this is you – don't put "0"). Answer the other questions as if you were from Costa Rica... so when it asks if you have spent more than 3 days outside the country, answer "Yes."
5. Upon arriving in Costa Rica, you will get off the plane, then proceed to immigration. Have your passport and immigration form ready once you get in line. Once the immigration officer has stamped your passport, secure your passport in your set place. After you have finished in the immigration area, you will turn to the left and go to the baggage claim area (reclamo de equipaje). Find your luggage.
6. You will need some local money to get started in Costa Rica, look around in the baggage claim area, and there will be some flashing lights for a money exchange (cambio) area. You can use your credit/debit card at an ATM there, or you can use your debit/credit card or cash with one of the tellers. If you use one of the tellers, you will need your passport (we recommend using one of the tellers, since we have seen, on occasion, that the ATMs have had long lines and/or have been out of order). You can try your Spanish with the tellers, but they also speak English, so don't be nervous. For the first weekend in Costa Rica, we recommend changing about \$100. Of course you can change whatever amount you like, the cambio tellers will always try and get you to change more. FYI – if you are studying in Monteverde and Flamingo, most places take either colones or US dollars. If you are going to Heredia, most places do NOT accept US dollars, they only accept colones. Take a minute to familiarize yourself with the money you've just been given. The tellers usually give you something to help with that. The 1000 colones bill (red/rojo) is worth approx.. 2 US dollars; the 2 mil colones bill (blue/azul) is worth approx.. 4 US dollars; the 5 mil colones bill (yellow/amarillo) is worth approx. 10 US

dollars; the 10 mil colones bill (green/verde) is worth approx. 20 US dollars. **Put your money and passport in a secure place**, you will not need them anymore. You will still need your customs form though.

7. □ After changing money, you will go through customs (aduana). First, you will hand your customs form to a person as you enter the customs area, then, you will place ALL of your luggage, backpacks, bags on a conveyor belt that passes through an x-ray machine. Collect your things on the other side. You will then proceed out the doors to the outside of the airport. If you have arranged for transportation from CPI – they will have a person in an obvious place with the letters CPI and NMSU (if you are with the group) or CPI and your name on the paper. Just walk towards them and tell them your name.

Leaving Costa Rica:

1. □ Check with CPI about your arrangements to be taken to the airport, or make sure you have researched how you are going to get to the airport well in advance. You need to arrive about 3 hours before your scheduled flight departure time. Please follow these next steps in order so you will save yourself some time and stress.
2. □ Find the area to pay your exit tax (impuesto). In the San José airport, you will enter inside the airport, turn to your right, and go to the far end of the airport. In the Liberia airport, you will enter inside the airport, go to the center section right in front of the ticket counters, and look for the place to pay. You can use either colones or dollars (or a combination of both) to pay the tax. Or, you can use your credit card as well. This is a good place to get rid of any unwanted colones as you leave Costa Rica. NOTE: it is important to pay this tax before you get in line to check into your flight, because the airlines are required to verify that you have paid your exit tax. If you haven't done so, you will be asked to go pay your tax and then get back in line to check in for your flight. ADDITIONAL NOTE: There are some that will try and tell you to pay this tax at a bank sometime during your stay in Costa Rica. This is possible, but then you must keep proof of that payment throughout the remainder of your trip. We recommend just taking care of it as you arrive at the airport on your departure day.
3. □ Get in line to check in to your flight. You will be given a form to fill out for exiting Costa Rica – this is usually done right at the beginning of the line. You will turn this into the ticket attendants. You will need your passport and flight information for this form. When checking into your flight, please repeat the same process as when you came to Costa Rica. Make sure that your luggage is checked all the way to your FINAL Destination. Put your passport away until you need it again. NOTE: You should have as many boarding passes as you have connecting flights, please make sure of this before you leave the airline check-in area. So, if you are flying from Costa Rica to Dallas, and then from Dallas to El Paso, you should have two printed boarding passes. If you don't, please ask the person that helped you to figure out where the others are.
4. □ Once you have checked in, you will need to go through security and then proceed to your gate. You will need your passport as you present your boarding pass. Please be aware, also, that when you are boarding your plane, the airline people will have tables out at the gate and after they have scanned your boarding pass, they will ask to look through your carry-on bags. Once you are settled in your seat, please put your passport in your secure place.

Re-entering the US:

1. □ While you are on the flight back from Costa Rica, you will receive a customs form (this is similar to when you arrived in Costa Rica). If you don't receive one on the plane, you can get one when you land. On this customs form, please fill it out as you did the form when you entered Costa Rica. If you went with the NMSU group and participated in the volunteer project on the LifeMonteverde Farm, please answer question 11. Part "d" about spending time on a farm honestly. If they question you about it, just explain what you did on the farm. If you are bringing coffee back, you do not typically have to declare that as food. All of the other questions are pretty self-explanatory. Please read the form carefully, on the area that it asks about the \$\$ amount for things you are bringing back to the US, please note that you only need to itemize the things you bought if your total purchases go over \$800. You can just list your purchases as "souvenirs." You will need your passport and flight information for this form. This form is not turned in until you get to customs, so please hold on to it until then. Note: In some airports, like Dallas, they offer the option to do customs form electronically at a self-serve kiosk. You can opt for that option if you wish. If you do that, you will receive a printed confirmation that you filled out the customs form that you can hand the customs agent when you reach the customs section of the airport.
2. □ Once you have landed in your port of entry city in the US, you will first go through immigration, they will scan your passport and may ask you questions about your time abroad. Once you have gone through immigration, you will then go to the baggage claim area and claim your bag. Once you have your bags, you will proceed through customs and hand the agent your customs form (or confirmation of having filled out the electronic form).
3. □ You will now proceed to an area where you will re-check your bags to your continuing flight(s). Look for your airline's counter in this area, and all you have to do is simply turn it into the agent there or place it on the conveyor belt that they indicate. You will now need to go through security one more time before getting on your continuing flight(s). Just follow the signs that indicate where you should go.
4. □ Once you have gone through security (you can use your passport as your ID), look for the monitors to find your connecting flight. Secure your passport, you won't need it anymore.