

# Acknowledgements

The challenge in writing this book has been keeping abreast of the unprecedented changes in Costa Rican life and culture since we first came here in 1987. My thanks and gratitude go first of all to my husband and co-adventurer Martin for his patient support and critical eye. Many thanks to my daughter Megan Borner Jourdain for introducing me to her colleague Janice Dyer who pulled the book together with

her fine editing skills. Where would I have been without Paul Jourdain's daunting computer skills?

Thanks also to the people I interviewed for contributing their insights and experiences in Costa Rica. In some cases

names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Every effort has been made to ensure this book is as up-to-date as possible. With the frequent changes in laws, telephone numbers, prices and travel information, it is quite likely some information is liable to change.

*Tessa Borner*



Tessa and Martin

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	6
Foreword	13
Chapter 1: Why Costa Rica?	
Our First Visit	16
Tourism	17
About us	19
“Posada Mimosa”	20
Why Costa Rica?	21
Who Chooses to Live in Costa Rica?	24
Chapter 2: Costa Rica at a Glance	
Location	27
Size	27
Electrical Current	27
Major Cities	27
Time Zone	28
Climate	28
Population	28
Literacy	28
Government	29
National Holidays	29
Economy	29
Expatriates	31

# Chapter 1

## Why Costa Rica?

### Our First Visit

My husband Martin and I first visited Costa Rica in 1987. We were looking for a new and interesting holiday destination, free of inhospitable natives, cold commercialism and mundane tour packages. It was Christmas time, and yes, we did make that first visit with *Fiesta Holidays!* We spent a delightful two weeks and vowed to return some day. Little did we know that 13 years later we would be living and running a business here, and that our youngest son would be doing the same!

From 1990 to 1993, we travelled to Europe and other warm climates in search of the ideal place to live and eventually retire. We ruled out Europe because of escalating political and social problems, and the southern United States because of rising crime and high medical and insurance costs. We have never been fans of the Caribbean, feeling that island living can become claustrophobic after awhile. We considered Mexico, but were concerned about poor sanitation.

Costa Rica came closest to meeting our criteria for what we thought would be a relatively trouble-free life:

- accessible and available health care;
- moderate climate;
- reasonable tax rate;
- available and affordable household help;
- total lifestyle change.

From the Posada Mimosa guest book:

*A lovely setting, gorgeous pool and such a warm and wonderful reception by Tessa and Martin! Thank you!*

*Dick & Mary,  
Washington, D.C.*

### Tourism

Since 1993, tourism in Costa Rica has changed dramatically. Tourism overtook coffee as Costa Rica's biggest foreign revenue earner in 1993 by growing at a phenomenal rate of just under 20 percent per year between 1990 and 1993. By the 1994-1995 season, the growth rate had slowed down substantially. In 1996, tourism declined, and the number of tourists flying into Juan Santa Maria airport fell by 4.2 percent.

According to statistics compiled by the Costa Rican Tourism Office (ICT), the number of international tourist arrivals at Juan Santa Maria Airport increased by 12.2% from May 1997-May 1998. The number of North American visitors increased by 24.9% while visitors from Europe showed a small increase of 1%, with a decrease in the number of visitors from Germany, England and Italy. From January to May 1998, the number of visitors from the United States increased by 24.4%. Similarly, Canadian visitors increased by 18.4%, although a spokesperson at the Canadian Embassy questioned the accuracy of these statistics because they include all arrivals, not just tourists (e.g., business people, foreign residents, etc.). The total number of tourists in 1999 was 1,021,138, up from 781,127 in 1996.

The ICT statistics for the first three months of 2000 showed strong growth in the number of tourists from the Northern countries of Europe. The number of tourists arriving in the first trimester of 2000 compared to the same period in 1999 rose by 19.6% from Germany, 13% from Austria, 31.6% from Holland and 17.2% from Switzerland. Last year, 46% of tourists to Costa Rica were from Canada, the United States and Mexico, while only 14% were from Europe.

*John and Mary moved to Costa Rica with their 3 children in 1994, and have found the transition difficult:*

*We had lunch with some people from Canada last week and the gentleman made a comment which I think was very good. Most of the people he has met in the four years he has been living in Costa Rica have reinvented themselves into somebody else! People who come down here to start businesses they know absolutely nothing about – they are reinventing themselves! We have met a lot of flakes here. When you look at all the foreigners living here, there are not a lot of people with any kind of substance to them. They're drifters, they couldn't make it there and they think they can make it here. In fact when our kids went to school after we first arrived here, the other kids said to them "so what are your parents running away from?"*



## Chapter 2 Costa Rica at a Glance

The following information was compiled from the Internet, interviews and our personal experiences.

From the Posada Mimosa guest book:  
*Merci pour votre chaleureux accueil et vos conseils de voyage; vous etes l'heureux proprietaire d'un hotel magnifique! A bientot, peut-etre, Philippe et Marie, Nice, France*

### Location

Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama.

### Size

Total area: 51,100 sq km (slightly smaller than West Virginia).

Coastline: 1,290 km.

Length North to South: 440 km.

Driving time coast-to-coast: About five hours (more like seven in reality due to the road conditions!)

Highest point: Mt. Chirripo – 3,810 meters.

### Electrical Current

110 V

### Major Cities

San Jose, Alajuela, Cartago, Puntarenas, Limon, Heredia, Liberia.



# P Chapter 3 Travelling to Costa Rica

## Passports

Make sure you have a valid passport and make a photocopy of it. Citizens of the United States, Canada and most western European and Latin American countries do not need visas to enter Costa Rica and can stay for 90 days. If you overstay the 90 days, you will have to pay a fine and the amount you pay will depend on the number of days you stay over the limit. For longer stays, you have to apply for an exit visa that will allow you to stay for 30 days more, or you can leave the country for 72 hours and return again for three more months.

If you are unlucky enough to lose your passport (as I did) and you did not make a copy of your latest exit and re-entry into Costa Rica (as I didn't), there is a strong chance you will not be able to leave the country. In my case, the British Embassy said it could issue a passport in two days, but I would have to go to immigration to get confirmation of when I re-entered Costa Rica. All passengers entering by plane are computerized the day after they arrive, but those arriving across the border by car or bus are not, and lists of travellers are sent to central offices only once a week. (P.S. I found my passport so I did not have to do any of the above!)

## Currency

The currency of Costa Rica is the "colon" in notes of 10,000, 5,000, 2,000, 1,000, 500, 100 and 50 and it

From the Posada  
Mimosa guest book:

*Many thanks for your  
warm hospitality, your  
inspired setting and  
the wonderful birds.*

*A memorable but brief  
visit by which to  
remember Costa Rica  
– Pura Vida!*

*Douglas & Rosemary,  
Hove, England*