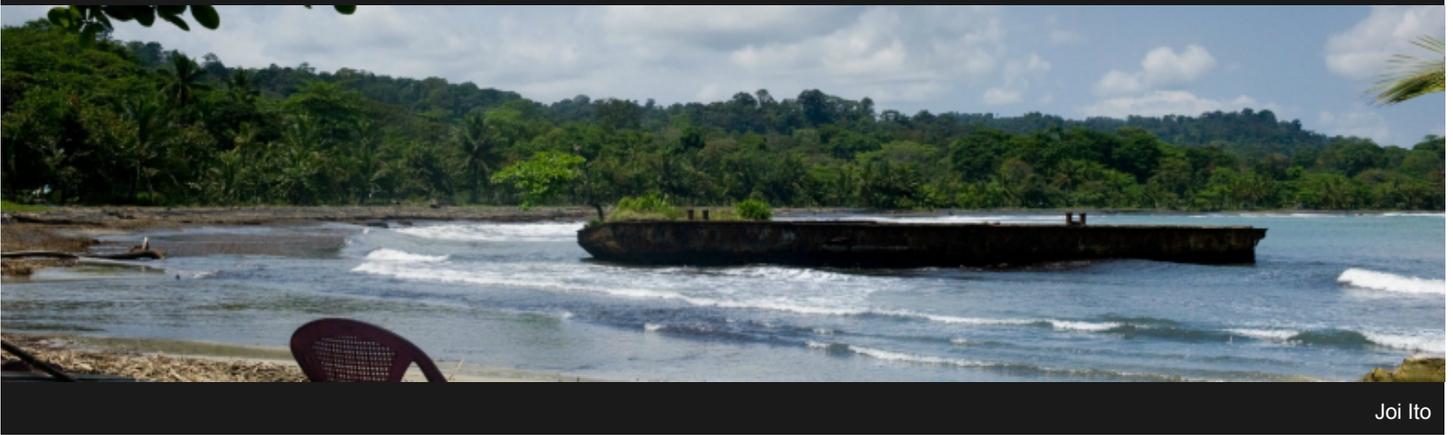




**nileGUIDE**

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Joi Ito

# Italian Restaurant Guide

## **Puerto Viejo, Guanacaste, San Jose, 4 Days**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** Italian cuisine is many people's favorite choice for dinner, ours included. Even in Costa Rica, wonderfully authentic plates cooked by real Italians can be found in the city and the country. Make your way from San Jose to Puerto Viejo by stopping for a bite at these fine places....

# Itinerary Overview

## Day 1 - San Jose

**DAY NOTE:** Finding a good place to eat Italian in San Jose may seem a daunting task, but La Piazzetta will satisfy you and get you ready for more exploring.



**La Piazzetta**

## Day 2 - Guanacaste



**Bacchus**

## Day 3 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** See and be seen in the center of Puerto Viejo, where the Italians at Cafe Viejo know their way around a great Penne Arrabiata and fettucine alfredo (but don't order margaritas here:))



**Café Viejo**

## Day 4 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Our favorite Italian restaurant in the region, La Pecora Nera is just off the beaten track and more than just delicious.



**La Pecora Nera**

# Day 1 - San Jose

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QUICK NOTE

**DAY NOTE:** Finding a good place to eat Italian in San Jose may seem a daunting task, but La Piazzetta will satisfy you and get you ready for more exploring.

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**contact:**  
tel: 2221-8451

## **La Piazzetta**

**location:**  
Paseo Colón near  
Calle 40  
San Jose

**DESCRIPTION:** With a long menu and formal service, this restaurant reminds me of the Italian restaurants of old in New York's Little Italy. The menu includes quite a few risotto dishes, as well as several lobster offerings and some Sicilian fare. The veal scaloppini in a truffle sauce is excellent. Salads are colorful and artistically arranged. For dessert, sample a classic chocolate mousse or tiramisu. The wine list is quite extensive, with good and reasonably priced offerings from Italy, and most other prominent wine producing regions around the world. © Frommer's

**hours:**  
Mon-Sat 11:30-3pm and  
6:30-11pm

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# Day 2 - Guanacaste

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**contact:**

tel: 2282-5441

**location:**

Santa Ana

**hours:**

Tues-Sat noon-3pm and  
6-11pm; Sun noon-9pm

## Bacchus

**DESCRIPTION:** Easily my favorite Italian restaurant in San José, this place is housed in a historic home that is over a century old. You'd never know it following the massive restoration and remodel. Nevertheless, this place somehow seamlessly blends the old with the new in an elegant atmosphere. The best tables are on the covered back patio, where you can watch the open kitchen and wood-burning pizza oven in action. The menu features a range of antipasti, pastas, pizzas, and main dishes. Everything is perfectly prepared and beautifully presented. The desserts are also excellent, and the wine list is extensive and fairly priced. © Frommer's

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# Day 3 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** See and be seen in the center of Puerto Viejo, where the Italians at Cafe Viejo know their way around a great Penne Arrabiata and fettucine alfredo (but don't order margaritas here;))

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0817

**location:**

Puerto Viejo

**hours:**

Wed-Mon noon-1am

## Café Viejo

**DESCRIPTION:** This place is set right on the busiest corner of "downtown" Puerto Viejo. White gauze curtains help to slightly shield this open-air spot from the hustle and bustle just outside. Still, it's often loud and crowded inside as well, and that's part of the charm of this popular place. You can get a wide range of pastas and thin-crust wood-oven pizzas here, as well as more substantial fish, chicken, and meat entrees. The grilled whole fresh fish is an especially good option. On weekends, a late-night lounge often develops here, with electronic music and dancing.  
© Frommer's

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# Day 4 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Our favorite Italian restaurant in the region, La Pecora Nera is just off the beaten track and more than just delicious.

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**contact:**  
tel: 2750-0490

**location:**  
Cocles

**hours:**  
Tues-Sun 5:30-11pm

## La Pecora Nera

**DESCRIPTION:** This open-air joint on the jungle's edge has a deserved reputation as the finest Italian restaurant in the region, if not the country. Owner Ilario Giannoni is a whirlwind of enthusiasm and activity, switching hats all night long from maitre d' to chef to waiter to busboy in an entertaining blur. Sure, he's got some help, including his grandmother, who makes gnocchi, but it seems like he's doing it single-handedly. The menu has a broad selection of pizzas and pastas, but your best bet is to just ask Ilario what's fresh and special for that day, and to trust his instincts and inventions. I've had fabulous fresh pasta dishes and top-notch appetizers every time I've visited. The gnocchi here is light and mouthwatering. The main dishes come with a variety of side dishes.  
© Frommer's

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# My List

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**contact:**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Oshii's-Caribbean-Lounge-Cafe/163168242591>

**location:**

Puerto Viejo

**hours:**

breakfast til late night

## 1 Oshii's Caribbean Lounge Cafe

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

The beer may not be cold enough for connoisseurs, so go with an exotic cocktail instead.

**DESCRIPTION:** The newest addition to the tiny group of later night venues in Puerto Viejo, Oshii's Caribbean Lounge is a stylish and modern spot with tropical decor and a good location- just off of the intersection at the center of town next door to Baba Yaga. Open for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and cocktails, priced on the low-end, from \$2-\$10. DJs spin house and hip hop-sometimes on vinyl, and it's a fine place to grab a drink after dark.

© NileGuide



editor

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**contact:**

<http://www.latinorockcafe.com/>

**location:**

Costado Sur de bomba La Primavera  
San Jose

**hours:**

We to Mo from 07:00 PM to 02:00 AM

## 2 Café Rock Latino

**DESCRIPTION:** What used to be a disco like any other, gave way to this establishment for audiences that are more selective. Jazz, Trova, Pop and even Rave are programmed to satisfy such musical tastes. Darts, backgammon and chess are part of the experience, and if you want tropical music, Salsa 54 is one level down. On Wednesdays live Jazz performs on stage for lovers of this genre. If you have some old LPs, or would like to buy a few, the Acetates Club, which meets here on Thursday night, might be just for you. © wcities.com

# Puerto Viejo Snapshot

## Local Info

Puerto Viejo de Limon is named after the old harbor at its center, a tiny seaside village nestled along the road 4 hours east of San Jose on Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast. Enclosed by dense rainforest and lush primary jungle that comes down steeply to meet the sea, Puerto Viejo lies in the Talamanca region, an area defined by dramatic, contrasting landscapes over a wide variety of terrain. 1.5 hours south of Limon, and thirty minutes from the neighboring town of Cahuita, Puerto Viejo's population is a mix of the original inhabitants of the Cabecar, Bri-Bri and Kekoldi tribes, Jamaicans, and Europeans, and making Puerto Viejo an international enclave. There are no high-rise hotels, golf courses, or fast food franchises in Puerto Viejo, these are roads less traveled, unpaved paths leading into virgin jungle...reflecting the community's commitment to conservation and modest development that encourages eco-conscious tourism. The beaches south of town are pristine stretches of and soft white sand, fringed with coconut palms and perfect for strolling and sunbathing. Miles of active coral reef are excellent for snorkeling and diving. With weather that is warm and green all year long, Puerto Viejo is an ideal place for escape-from-it-all retreats and unforgettable vacations.

Bordered by two national parks, Manzanillo-Gandoca National Wildlife Refuge to the south, and Cahuita National Park to the north, Puerto Viejo hums with sounds and sights of nature. It is not unusual to spot sloths lounging at eye-level, hear monkeys howling over birdsong, and encounter exotic reptiles at every turn. There is no shortage of sights to see or activities for the visitor to Puerto Viejo. Exploring the nearby national parks, bike riding from beach to beach, cafe hopping, chocolate tasting, yoga- it can all be done in a day or two, but is better spread over a week, or more. Adventure excursions and are easily arranged and well-managed, and eco-tours with informed naturalist guides may be found with a little looking. The nightlife starts late, after 10:30, and it's a casual scene that rotates between a few places- Puerto Viejo's laid back night-life starts late, after 11pm. Reggae music and reefer waft over the town, reminders of the town's roots in Jamaica and Rastafari culture. The

town's most famous spot for surf is Salsa Brava, and fine waves break at Cocles Beach, too. It's easy to see why many travelers leave with dreams of returning, and why plenty never leave at all. The tranquilo life found in this little neck of the woods simply epitomizes "la pura vida."  
© NileGuide

## Hotel Insights

### Hotels

#### In Puerto Viejo

For a longer stay, close to town, you might want to check out **Cashew Hill Jungle Cottages**(tel. 2750-0256; www.cashewhillodge.co.cr). On a hill just on the outskirts of town, these are simple but immaculate individual one- and two-bedroom bungalows, with kitchenettes.

**Moderate**-- In addition to the hotel listed below, **Escape Caribeño**(tel. 2750-0103; www.escapecaribeno.com), is another good option in this price range, located on the outskirts of town, just south of Salsa Brava.

**Inexpensive**-- True budget hounds will find an abundance of basic hotels andcabinas in downtown Puerto Viejo in addition to those listed. Of these, **Hotel Pura Vida**(tel./fax 2750-0002; www.hotel-puravida.com) and **Kaya's Place**(tel. 2750-0690; www.kayasplace.com) are both good bets; however, the most popular spot for backpackers, surfers, and students is **Rocking J's**(tel. 2750-0657; www.rockingjs.com), a sprawling compound offering simple rooms, camping spaces, and a "hammock hotel."

#### Between Puerto Viejo & Manzanillo

All the hotels listed are located along the road south of Puerto Viejo heading toward Manzanillo. This is one of the most beautiful and isolated stretches of beach in Costa Rica. The single coastal road here has been paved all the way to Manzanillo, greatly improving access to this area. I recommend that you rent a car if you plan to stay at one of these hotels because public transportation is sporadic and taxis aren't always available. If you arrive by bus, however, a rented bicycle or scooter might

be all you need to get around once you are settled.

**Very Expensive**-- The former tent camp **Almonds & Corals Hotel**(tel. 2272-2024 reservations in San José, or 2759-9057 at the hotel; www.almondsandcorals.com) now offers rustically luxurious bungalows and suites in a lush forest setting near Manzanillo.

**Moderate**-- Although I find all of the options listed in this section far more charming, surfers might look into **Totem**(tel. 2750-0758; www.totemsite.com), which offers very comfortable rooms, set just off the road, right in front of the beach break in Playa Cocles.

**Inexpensive**-- Down in Manzanillo, the simple **Cabinas Something Different**(tel. 2759-9014) is a good option, while **Congo Bongo**(tel. 2759-9016; www.congo-bongo.com) offers fully equipped houses in a lush forest setting.

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## Restaurants Insights

### Restaurants

#### In Puerto Viejo

To really sample the local cuisine, you need to look up a few local women. Ask around for **Miss Dolly**, **Miss Sam**, **Miss Isma**, and **Miss Irma**, who all serve up sit-down meals in their modest littersodas. In addition to locally seasoned fish and chicken served with rice and beans, these joints are usually a great place to find somepan bon(a local sweet, dark bread), ginger cakes,paty(meat-filled turnovers), androndon. Just ask around for these women, and someone will direct you to them. In a similar vein, but with a fancier, large restaurant space, is **Miss Elena Brown**, who has set up shop on the outskirts of downtown, on the road heading south.

If you're looking for a light bite for breakfast, lunch, or a snack, check out **Pan Pay**(tel. 2750-0081), a French-run bakery and sandwich shop located next to Johnny's Place. Also, **Jammin' Juice and Jerk Center**(tel. 8826-4332), in the same

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

building, specializes in jerk chicken, salads, and fresh juices. For casual fare, try **E-Z Times**(tel. 2750-0663), which is right in front of the water near the heart of town, and for Thai and Middle Eastern fare, head to **Chile Rojo**(tel. 2750-0025).

Puerto Viejo has a glut of excellent Italian restaurants; in addition to the places listed below, **Amimodo**(tel. 2750-0257) and **Trattoria da Cesare**(tel. 2750-0161) are both fine restaurants.

For breakfasts, desserts and hearty, healthy lunches, there's **Bread& Chocolate**(tel. 2750-0723). And if you're just looking for something to cool you off, try the new **Mighty River's Ice Cream& Coffee Shop**(tel. 2750-2016), which has delicious homemade ice cream.

### That Rundown Feeling--

Rundown(orrondon) soup is a spicy coconut milk-based soup or stew made with anything the cook can run down-- it usually includes a mix of local tubers(potato, sweet potato, or yuca), other vegetables(carrots or corn), and often some fish and/or seafood. Be sure to try this authentic taste of the Caribbean.

### Between Puerto Viejo& Manzanillo

As the beaches stretching south of Puerto Viejo keep getting more popular, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of places to grab a meal. In addition to the restaurants listed above and below, **Johanna Restaurante**(tel. 8887-6203) in Playa Cocles, and **Cabinas Selvyn**(no phone) at Punta Uva, are both excellent options for local cuisine and fresh seafood.

Finally, if you make it as far south as Manzanillo, **Restaurant Maxi**(tel. 2759-9086) is your best bet. This open-air spot is always packed, especially for lunch. A fresh-fish plate will cost you between\$5 and\$8(£2.50-£4); lobster, in season, will cost around\$14(£7). Whatever you order comes with rice and beans,patacones(fried plantain chips), and a small side of cabbage salad.

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## Nightlife Insights

### Nightlife

There are two main disco/bars in town. **Johnny's Place** is near the Rural Guard station, about 100m(328 ft.) or so north of the ATEC office. You'll find **Stanford's** overlooking the water out near Salsa Brava just as the main road heads south of town. Both have small dance floors with ground-shaking reggae, dub, and rap rhythms blaring. The action usually spills out from the dance floor at both joints on most nights. I like the atmosphere better at Johnny's, although both have tables, chairs, and candles set out on the sand, near the water's edge.

One of the more popular places in town is **Hot Rocks**, a large dirt lot with some canvas catering tents over its bar and some of its table area. This place, which is located right where the main road hits the water, has a huge screen upon which several late-run movies are projected each night. Another option is the **Sunset Bar**, which is near the water, beside the bus station, and sometimes features live music. For a more sophisticated ambience try the downtown **Baba Yaga**, or the ocean-side **E-Z Times**. An open-air bar on the second floor of **Soda Tamara** is a casual and quiet place to gather after dark. Finally, for a more local scene, check out **Bar Maritza's**, which really seems to go off on Sunday nights.

You can also take advantage of the pool table, board games, and DirecTV(usually showing sporting events) at **El Dorado**, in front of the ATEC office, as an alternative to the loud music and dance scenes of the other joints mentioned above.

Heading just south out of town, the **Cut Back** is a popular spot with backpackers and bohemians, with a solid after-hours scene. Farther south of town, at the start of Playa Cocless, **El Tesoro** shows large-screen movies every night.

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## Things to Do Insights

### Attractions

### Not Your Everyday Gardens

One of the nicest ways to spend a day in Puerto Viejo is to visit the **Finca La Isla Botanical Gardens**(tel. 2750-0046 or 8886-8530;crgarden@mac.com), a couple hundred meters inland from the Black Sand Beach on a side road just north of El Pizote lodge. Peter Kring and his late wife Lindy have poured time and love into the creation of this meandering collection of native and imported tropical flora. You'll see medicinal, commercial, and just plain wild flowering plants, fruits, herbs, trees, and bushes. Visitors get to gorge on whatever is ripe at the moment. There's also a rigorous rainforest loop trail leaving from the grounds. The gardens are generally open Friday through Monday from 10am to 4pm, but visits at other times can sometimes be arranged in advance. Entrance to the garden or loop trail is \$5(£2.50) per person, or\$10(£5) with the guided tour.

**Cacao Trails**(tel. 2756-8186; www.cacaotrails.com) is a one-stop attraction featuring botanical gardens, a small serpentarium, an open-air museum demonstrating the tools and techniques of cacao cultivation and processing, and a series of trails. There's also a large open-air restaurant, and a swimming pool for cooling off. You can also take canoe rides on the bordering Carbon River, and even watch sea turtles lay their eggs during the nesting season. Admission to the attraction is\$25(£13), including a guided tour. A full-day tour, including lunch and a canoe trip, as well as the guided tour, costs\$47(£24). During turtle nesting season, they do night tours to watch sea turtles lay their eggs.

Near Punta Uva, you'll find the **Punta Uva Butterfly Garden**(tel. 2750-0086).

This small yet well-run facility is the only butterfly-breeding and production facility along the coast, and it's open daily from 8am to 4pm. Admission is\$5(£2.50) for adults; children enter free.

Finally, down around Playa Chiquita, at the Tree House Lodge, there's the **Green Iguana Conservation Tour**(tel. 2750-0706; www.greeniguana.com). This educational tour focuses on the life cycle, habits, and

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

current situation of this endangered reptile. The tour features a walk around a massive natural enclosure, as well as a video presentation. The cost is \$15 (£7.50).

### South Caribbean Music Festival

Each year, the folks at Playa Chiquita Lodge organize a month-long festival of concerts and workshops featuring local and national musical groups and solo artists. The dates vary, but the festival tends to fall somewhere during the months of March and April and always ends the week before Easter. Concerts are usually held on Friday and weekends at Playa Chiquita Lodge and other venues around the area.

### Shopping

Puerto Viejo attracts a lot of local and international bohemians, who seem to survive solely on the sale of handmade jewelry, painted ceramic trinkets (mainly pipes and cigarette-lighter holders), and imported Indonesian textiles. You'll find them at makeshift stands set up by the town's *sparquécito* (little park), a few wooden benches in front of the sea between Soda Tamara and Stanford's.

In addition to the makeshift outdoor stands is a host of well-stocked gift and crafts shops in town. The **Jewelry Factory** and **Color Caribe**, both on the main road into town, sell a wide range of jewelry, crafts, and gift items, as well as Costa Rican hammocks. **Luluberlu**, located inland across from Cabinas Guaraná, features locally produced craftwork, including shell mobiles and mirrors with mosaic-inlaid frames, as well as imports from Thailand and India. For ceramics, head south to Playa Chiquita and check out the traditional Japanese-style works at **Raku Art**.

**Tip:** My favorite local purchase is locally produced chocolate, which comes wrapped in wax paper the size and shape of a roll of quarters. They come plain or flavored with coconut, peanuts, mint, ginger, or raisins, and can be found for sale at many gift shops and restaurants around town. Finally, if you need a book to read on the beach, head just south of town to **Echo Books**, which has a good supply of new and used books, as well as a small cafe and gift shop. The owner also specializes

in making homemade truffles and other chocolate treats from local cacao.

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## Travel Tips

### Planning a Trip

#### Getting There & Departing

**By Plane**-- The closest airport to Puerto Viejo is in Limón. A taxi from the airport to Cahuita should cost around \$20 (£10). Alternately, you can just walk the long block from the airport terminal to the main road south and flag down any of the frequent buses that pass by.

**By Car**-- To reach Puerto Viejo, continue south from Cahuita for another 16km (10 miles). Watch for a prominent fork in the highway. The right-hand fork continues on to Bribri and Sixaola. The left-hand fork (it actually appears to be a straight shot) takes you into Puerto Viejo on 5km (3 miles) of paved road.

**By Bus**-- **Mepe** express buses (tel. **2257-8129** in San José, or 2750-0023 in Puerto Viejo) to Puerto Viejo leave San José daily at 6 and 10am, noon, and 2 and 4pm from the new Caribbean terminal (Gran Terminal del Caribe) on Calle Central, 1 block north of Avenida 11. The trip's duration is 4 1/2 to 5 hours; the fare is \$7 (£3.50). During peak periods extra buses are sometimes added. Always ask if the bus is going into Puerto Viejo (you do not want to get dropped off at the turnoff for Sixaola) and if it's continuing on to **Manzanillo** (especially helpful if you're staying in a hotel south of town). Regardless, don't be surprised if it doesn't do exactly what you were told.

**Gray Line** (tel. **2220-2126**; [www.graylinecostarica.com](http://www.graylinecostarica.com)) has a daily bus that leaves San José for Puerto Viejo at 9:30am. The fare is \$33 (£17). The return bus leaves Puerto Viejo at 7am. **Interbus** (tel. **2283-5573**; [www.interbusonline.com](http://www.interbusonline.com)) has a daily bus that leaves San José for Puerto Viejo at 7:50am. The fare is \$35 (£18). Interbus buses leave Puerto Viejo daily at both 7am and 2:50pm. Both companies will pick you up at most area hotels in both

San José and Puerto Viejo, and both offer connections to various other destinations around Costa Rica.

Alternatively, you can catch a bus to **Limón** and then transfer to a Puerto Viejo-bound bus in Limón. These latter buses (tel.

**2758-1572**) leave roughly every hour between 5am and 6pm from in front of Radio Casino, which is 1 block north of the municipal market. Buses from Limón to Manzanillo also stop in Puerto Viejo and leave daily at 6 and 10:30am and 3 and 6pm. The trip takes 1 1/2 hours; the fare is \$2 (£1).

If you arrive in Puerto Viejo by bus, be leery of hucksters and touts offering you hotel rooms. In most cases, they just work on a small commission from whatever hotel or cabin is hiring, and, in some cases, they'll steer you away from one of my recommended hotels or falsely claim that it is full.

Express buses leave Puerto Viejo for San José daily at 7:30, 9, and 11am, and 4pm. Buses for Limón leave daily at 6 and 9am, and 1, 4, and 5pm. Buses to **Punta Uva** and **Manzanillo** leave Puerto Viejo daily around 7:30am, noon, and 4:30 and 7:30pm. These buses return from Manzanillo at 5 and 8:15am and 12:45 and 5pm.

### Orientation

The road in from the highway runs parallel to Playa Negra, or Black Sand Beach (this is not the same one I talked about in Cahuita), for a couple hundred meters before entering the village of Puerto Viejo, which has all of about 10 dirt streets. The sea is on your left and forested hills on your right as you come into town. It's another 15km (9 1/3 miles) south to Manzanillo. This road is paved all the way to Manzanillo, although some sections are nonetheless in fairly rough shape.

### Fast Facts

**Public phones** are located around town and at several hotels. Those looking to change money should head to the **Banco de Costa Rica** branch on the main road in town. There's also a **Banco Nacional** branch in **Bribri**, about 10km (6 miles) away. Both of these banks have ATMs. You'll

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

find the **post office** in the tiny strip mall behind Café Viejo. There is a **Guardia Rural police office** (tel. **2750-0230**) on the beach, near Johnny's Place.

There are several little Internet cafes around town. There are also a couple of full-service laundromats-- the one at **Café Rico** (tel. **2750-0325**) will give you a free

cup of coffee, cappuccino, or espresso while you wait.

There are a handful of taxi drivers in town. You'll either find them hanging around the parquecito (little park), or you can try calling **Bull** (tel. **2750-0112** or 8836-8219) or **Delroy** (tel. **2750-0132**). You can rent scooters and bicycles from several

operators in town. I like **Sucurucú** (tel. **2750-0700**), which is just south of the bus stop, and **Dragon Scooter Rentals** (tel. **2750-0728**), which is across from the restaurant Salsa Brava, at the stand for **Aventuras Bravas**.

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# Guanacaste Snapshot

## Local Info

The Costa Rican province of Guanacaste takes in a wide variety of things to do and places to see, from the Playas del Coco to two volcanic national parks to the beaches at Tamarindo, Samara, and Carrillo. As such, there's no shortage here of infrastructure and resorts to cater to adventurous tourists of any taste.

Whether you want to zip line through a cloud forest, do some deep-sea fishing, tour turtle nesting sites, surf, or go whitewater rafting, mountain biking, or horseback riding

on the beach(phew!), Guanacaste's a prime location to slake your thirst for outdoorsy excursion.

Guanacaste covers the majority of Costa Rica's Northern Pacific region, known for its Tropical Dry Forest. Weather patterns here differ from much of the rest of the country in that there is a verifiable dry season(December to May) that fosters drought-resistant flora and unique fauna not found elsewhere. This is the place to spot Howler Monkeys, Black Iguanas, the White-throated Magpie-Jay, and the Turquoise-Browed Motmot.

Wildlife's not your thing? Guanacaste is a mecca for surfers, who make the pilgrimage to its legendary breaks like Playa Negra and Tamarindo, inspired by the movie Endless Summer II. Book a guided surf tour for an easy way to hit the best, but also be aware that there are many smaller breaks in the area unspoiled by mainstream tourism and ready to be discovered.

Guanacaste, with its diverse activities and wildlife, truly offers a little bit of what's best in Costa Rica.

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# San Jose Snapshot

## Local Info

San José is small and cozy. Although its style and architecture are contemporary, some buildings of strong European influence, mainly British and French, can still be found as a heritage of the economic coffee prosperity from the turn of the century. Towards north and west of the city, we can still appreciate some old adobe structures with tile roofs that have been preserved with care, which evoke past remembrances of the large coffee plantations and farms. Although district areas do exist, these are small quadrants for property census and electoral organization mainly. The administrative division of the country was defined by regions or cantons which have their own municipalities, and can be considered as small urban zones and towns, with their own unique personality and characteristics. Thanks to the topography, there is a great diversity of micro-climates that determine in many cases the type of production on the region. Distances are easily covered by car or public transportation.

### San José Downtown

Very early, within the drowsiness of the dawn and the growing murmur of the first by-passers, this small city awakens indulged in laziness after a night of great food, drinking, and fun. The exquisite smell of fresh bread and recently brewed coffee from the highlands fills the air that surrounds the coffee and soda shops, meanwhile the rustling of fast-paced steps, car motors and horns increases even more.

Due to its small size, friendly and charming San Jose, or Chepe as known affectionately by thecos is worth to be checked by foot. Not so long ago, the Central Avenue was closed to vehicle traffic and embellished with stone paving and gardens, so the tourists and locals as well could walk by in comfort or just sit down to enjoy the passing-by of the very beautiful Costarrican women!

Just ask anyone on the street: 'How are you?' The answer invariably will be: Pura Vida! (Pure Life!)

This expression explains in two words the charm, positivism, and friendliness of the local people towards a newcomer. Oh! If you do not speak Spanish, there is a very good chance you will get an answer in English!

It is important to note; that San Jose's Municipality has made great efforts to protect the security of its inhabitants and visitors as well, but some areas in downtown may be considered dangerous. However, as in any city, prevention is always a good measure.

### Escazú

The district of the witches! If you ever need a magic potion for luck or love, or want to cast a spell on someone, you will have to look around Escazú. This is more of a legend than a reality. Actually, Escazú has become a major commerce and entertaining area, with beautiful hotels and fabulous restaurants. Its residential zones are ample and highly priced. Located in the foothills of the mountain, you just need to go up a few meters to enjoy a breathtaking view of the whole city.

### Santa Ana

Heading West from Escazú a few kilometers on the same road, you will find the very impressive Santa Ana Valley. Its marvelous weather has helped to turn this zone into a highly developed area in very short time. Many residents from the more dense areas, tired of the noise and turmoil have moved over to Santa Ana in a quest for tranquility and warmth.

The main produce of this region are onions that are planted in the area with great pride. Other vegetables are also produced and there is a flourishing pottery industry as well.

### Montes de Oca

The district of the youth and the culture! The University City Rodrigo Facio, the Universidad de Costa Rica is located in the

main urban zone, San Pedro. This area has become the preferred place for students and intellectuals. There are moderately priced small cafés and bars around the University and student boarding houses. Bed and Breakfast and apartment hotels are nearby to house the tourists. This is a very traditional commerce area of Malls, restaurants, and entertaining as well.

There are other more rural areas, farther from the city environment within San Jose. Puriscal, Tarrazú and Aserri, as well as Acosta, Dota and Pérez Zeledón stand out for the beauty of their scenery, with small markets of local products and artisan stores. The travel agencies have tours to drive you over, and there is always a public transportation service and car rentals for the adventurous one. No doubt, San Jose is in all of its urban and rural expressions, a glamorous and modern great city with beautiful and wonderful towns to discover. ©

## History

Embraced by the splendorous and perennial green-blue mountains that form the Cordillera of Talamanca and the Central Volcanic Cordillera, lies the city of San José. Established around a small hermit in honor of Saint Joseph in May 21, 1737, in what was known as The Plain of the Mount's Mouth, it extends on a southeast-northwest axis. Its growth from a small villa to Costa Rica's capital city was hard and painful.

"Four leagues north from Aserri, in a very pleasant plain, there is an ugly village with the diminutive of Villita, just developing. It is composed of eleven roof-tiled and fifteen straw houses, which form no plaza or street. It lacked water which was then carried by open channels; the church is the most narrow, humble and indecent from all those I saw in that province; its patron Saint Joseph."

With these textual words, starts the oldest registered description of San José, made in 1751 by the bishop Agustín Morel de Santa Cruz. With less than one hundred

## San Jose Snapshot continued

and fifty inhabitants, building a town was a challenge, since there was not even water for basic needs. Presbyter Don Juan de Pomar y Burgos was then assigned to the Villita (Small Village) and commissioned to construct a water system and establish a parish. It is important to note that all the village settlements from that time were highly influenced by a very powerful ecclesiastic and religious government. It is precisely doña Maria de Torres, mother of the priest Manuel Antonio Chapui, a great promoter of the development of San Jose, who donated the land that is actually known as La Sabana. This is one of the largest city parks of San Jose and used to be our International Airport some forty years ago.

Nevertheless, San José was not meant to be Costa Rica's capital city from the beginning. It was not until 1823, in the time of Costa Rica's independence from Spain, that this honor was taken away from the more traditional Cartago and given to more dynamic and growing, San José. It was this great communal effort oriented towards agriculture and commerce that established the basis to design the future of the young city. In the educational area, towards 1814, the Santo Tomas Education House was established by the neighbor's own initiative. It was declared University of Santo Tomas by public decree in 1843. Minor studies consisting of lessons in Latin, Castilian and Philosophy were imparted as major studies in Law, Medicine, and Theology. With the economic growth of the city, thanks to the coffee and tobacco plantations, by 1860 many youngsters had the opportunity of traveling and studying in universities abroad, mainly in England.

It is worth noting that this educational process was extended in the course of time to make Costa Rica what it is today: A country of educated and well mannered people who love peace.

In the agricultural area, San José was known for its coffee and tobacco plantations. This activity flourished all over the Central Valley and the producers started buying land and farms away from the city. They also built homes downtown in the venerable Barrio Amón to spend

seasons with family and friends. Actually, Barrio Amón has become a place of Bed and Breakfast hotels, restaurants, and commerce established precisely on these nostalgic and charming homes.

Nowadays, San José is a small city where visitors can enjoy all sorts of attractions, go shopping, or please the palate in one of its excellent restaurants. Exciting and fashionable, it is indeed a city worth to be lived!

©

### Hotel Insights

Just picture yourself, in an everlasting line at the airport immigration counter at arrival, after a few exhausting hours on that plane! Even worse, there was a tremendous turbulence and the guy in the next seat did not stop trying to sell you a life insurance policy during the flight! As if this was not enough, the airline carrier lost your Gucci bag! At this point, what you are probably wishing for is a soft, clean, big bed at a charming, nice hotel, right?

### Escazú

San José experienced a great tourism boom growth in the eighties and hotels of all sorts were built. It is important though, to know the reason of your visit to make the right choice.

With the increase of business class tourism, wonderful convention centers and resorts that offer business travelers all the convenience required to carry on with their work were developed. At the Tara Resort Hotel Spa the guest receives luxurious accommodations in addition to fast Internet connections, fax, secretarial services, voice mail, and conference rooms are some of the features offered. For the LGBT crowd, the Banderas Annex adds many amenities such as horseback riding and massage. The resort Inter Continental Real Costa Rica includes jacuzzis, swimming pools, tennis courts and gyms, as well as nice bars with live music for demanding tastes. If you are traveling with the family, a wonderful option is the Apartotel María

Alexandra, where they also have a full service tour agency.

### Downtown

For the traveler who is more interested in the city life, Downtown San José offers quite an array of medium to small size hotels. They have the advantage of their location, so they are great if you want to explore the city by foot and you can always catch a cab or bus easily if you want to go further. They apply as well to the business traveler who has affairs in town and although they do not offer the same amount of services that a resort does, they are generally clean and comfortable. One great option is the Hotel Santo Tomás, among their amenities you will find bar and restaurant service, cable TV, air conditioning and a travel agency. If shopping is your weakness, stay at the Hotel Aloki where you are close to retail stores that carry almost anything you might want to buy. (With the exception of wild animals and endangered species that is!). For history buffs, stay at the Hotel Vesuvio which is located near many monuments. For more affordable lodging, stay at the Casa Ridgway, a hostel for young travelers.

### La Sabana

The tourism boom created the bed and breakfast phenomenon as well. Just a few blocks north of Central Avenue, in the historical and charming Barrio Amón, you will find some options that operate in the old mansions of the coffee plantation owners from the turn of the Century. The Apartotel El Sesteo is one such hotel. After some restoration, the Hotel Barceló Palma Real and the Hotel Barceló Rincón del Valle have been turned into charming hotels, full of history and tradition. You will find bed and breakfast hotels in the San Pedro and Escazú areas as well as in some rural zones. They generally offer comfortable and clean rooms, telephones, and air conditioning or fans, and cable TV. Most of them have private bathrooms and breakfast is part of the fare. The Cacti Hotel is an option for travelers in family groups, or whose final destination is a

## San Jose Snapshot continued

beach or mountain resort, but wish to spend a few days in the city.

### Outside the City

Finally, outside of the city there are a few hotels that will suit the traveler on a modest budget. If not ideal, they are also an option. One of these hotels is Prado.

It is worth mentioning that some medium sized, more specialized excellent hotels like the Los Lagos Hotel and the Hotel Occidental La Condesa which is located in the mountains. Superb restaurants with European chefs and lavishly decorated rooms are their seal. They are perfect for honeymooners or persons who want to relax and forget all about everything, although their rates are a bit on the high side.

©

### Restaurants Insights

With all the coming and going, the morning stroll and the shopping spree downtown, it seems like your stomach has forgotten that just a few hours ago it enjoyed breakfast at the hotel veranda. You note that the Oeufs à la Benedictine, the gallo pinto with sour cream and the pancakes with bacon Texas fashion, all washed down with coffee and freshly squeezed orange juice, really made for a super international and sumptuous breakfast! Enough to forget about lunch! No way! Your stomach demands with an awful and loud growl as a reminder that is time to indulge again.

#### Downtown

Since you are close to the hotel, you decide to go back, change, and drop your shopping bags. On the way out, you almost sit back down again on the same veranda where you had breakfast this morning, but your instinct reminds you that hotel restaurants (with clear exceptions, that is) are good for breakfast, and breakfast only. Therefore, you go out in quest for good food at other times.

Finding a good restaurant is not a problem. In the gastronomic arena, San José puts on airs of a big city and savoir faire,

rubbing shoulders and rivaling with more cosmopolitan towns. With the development of a solid and always growing tourism industry, restaurants specializing in dishes from all over the world are common including fast food chains, small cozy restaurants, and five star rooms. Since the coastlines are so close together, seafood is known for its freshness, as they are brought in daily refrigerated, but not frozen. At Tin Jo Corvina, shrimp from the Pacific and lobster from the Caribbean are served Chinese style, although themarisquerías offer the widest variety, the freshest product and the best prices.

#### Escazú

Concerning the indigenous gastronomy, the corn kitchen stands out. As a heritage from the indigenous tradition all the way from Northern Mexico to South America, the tortillas, tamales, corn biscuits, and a wide array of dishes made out of corn are part of the daily diet. This are combined with beans and picadillos, meats and all sort of vegetables. There are some specialized quality restaurants developing a new Costa Rican cuisine like Casa de Doña Lela which mixes genuinely local ingredients with others of higher lineage in the preparation of truly original and exclusive dishes. For Italian food, try Cerutti and Alfredo, both are well recommended by the locals. French cuisine at Le Monastere is always a wonderful option for dining in Escazú and for Peruvian fusion try La Divina Comida.

#### Montes de Oca

Montes de Oca and the university area is a very busy district, with lots of hungry students at lunchtime. To fulfill this need, besides the fast food chains and the picturesque Chinese restaurants, economical refreshment room outlets and sodas are found all over. The bar La Castilla serves great drinks and snacks. Every establishment makes it differently but there is no doubt they carry the home made seal. If you are on a tight budget or otherwise want to try something really local, go to La Isabela Tapas & Wine Cellar for some Spanish tapas and for coffee lovers,

try Casa del Café and choose among a huge variety of flavors.

#### Outside of the City

San José, all the way down from Central Avenue to Sabana Oeste, Escazú, and San Pedro is the mecca for culinary arts. Nevertheless, you will find good typical restaurants and outlets practically in every corner of this little piece of land. Outside of the city, for a real Argentine experience, go to El Novillo Alegre for Argentinian steak. Pan e Vino offers traditional Costa Rican cuisine and Ichiban provides diners with Japanese dishes. Another choice is Antigua which serves international cuisine.

So now that you made up your mind with a firm decision and a demanding stomach, there is only one thing left to say, Bon Appetite!

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### Nightlife Insights

When the day is over, almost melancholic and disheartened, the vibrant and noisy city yields gradually to murmurs and tranquility. San José starts transforming its formal business and commerce face, into a makeup of coquetry and glamor! Bars and taverns get crowded with business men and women, public workers, professionals, and patrons of all kinds, wishing to release the pressures of the working day and anxious for new friendships.

#### Nightlife

San José and the surrounding cities are packed with small bars and taverns that in many cases are traditional landmarks. It is true that some years ago, ladies sitting on a barstool were looked upon with disdain, times have changed. It is common to see groups of women sitting on the stools nowadays, a sign that they are open to conversation and friendship. The tables are relegated to more intimate or business conversations. Establishing contact with the local people is easy, as by nature they are friendly and talkative.

At the sports bar Hooligan's, the preferred drink per excellence is beer, which is of

## San Jose Snapshot continued

outstanding quality. Imperial, Pilsen, and Bavaria are traditional brands along with some newer ones with appealing names for the young at heart such as Rock Ice. For stronger spirits, the Zambra Lobby Bar in the neighborhood of Escazú is the place to try Guaro Cacique, the national drink, which is mixed most of the time with Coca-Cola, Ginger Ale, or in cocktails. For jazz enthusiasts, the Jazz Café hosts renowned artists that play until late.

### Museums

There are a large number of museums in San José and each one offers the visitor a glimpse into this beautiful country. The Popular Culture Museum, the Childrens Museum and the Gold Museum(Museo de Oro) are ideal for the family. The National Museum narrates the history of Costa Rica and houses a tremendous amount of pre-columbian art. For those lepidopterists(butterfly collectors)out there, go to the La Salle Natural Science Museum and for something a little more macabre, there is the Criminology Museum. For more contemporary works, the Costa Rican Art Museum displays both international artists and local ones. If you thought jade masterpieces were only made in China, the Jade Museum proves this assumption wrong, since it contains some fine artifacts created in Latin America.

### Eco-Tours

Costa Rica is known to have some of the most diverse flora and fauna on the planet thanks to its varied topography. And although the country has its share of deadly, venomous snakes, there are other attractions throughout the city of San José that can help you avoid them, while still enjoying the rich eco-history of the capital. The Lankester Botanical Garden is one such place, it mainly focuses on orchids and their cultivation while Zoo Ave, the city zoo has many exotic animals, even a 12 foot long crocodile. For the family, take them to the Spirogyra Butterfly Garden and learn in detail about butterflies, their reproduction and life cycle alongside more information about the natural history of Costa Rica and the preservation of

ecosystems. If you would actually like to climb into the trees, take the Original Canopy Tour, which is a zip-line tour through massive trees in the rain forest. An informative tour can also be had by visiting the INBioparque, this is a 20 acre theme park that describes in detail(with bi-lingual guides) about the various topographies and climates in Costa Rica.

### Galleries

San José has an innumerable amount of artists and no shortage of galleries to house their works. If you are looking to buy some art, visit the Andromeda Gallery and purchase some contemporary art at modest prices. At the Galería Ocelote, fine works from national artists are on display here as well as indigenous handicrafts. The ever popular Galería Roberto Lizano is a gallery with a rotation of artists from throughout Costa Rica, a place to see the true nature of this culture. Galería José Vargas is a gallery where the owner, Mr. Vargas, reproduces masterpieces from some of the greatest artists of all time, such as Da Vinci, Dürer and Van Eyck.

### Festivals& Celebrations

In Costa Rica, it seems as if every day there is a festival or celebration happening, so no matter when you go, you are bound to find one. Religion plays a large role in the theme of these festivals and celebrations like San Ramón's Day where celebrants hold a procession in homage to more than 30 different saints, including San Ramon. Another festival remembering the patron saint of Costa Rica is the festival for the Virgen de Los Angeles. More secular celebrations include the Día de la Raza(Columbus Day) which celebrates the Hispanic heritage and Guanacaste's Day, a day where the citizens of this town chose whether to belong to Nicaragua or remain as Costa Ricans. Another festival where the visitor can party at the beach is the Virgin of the Sea Celebration, this festival remembers the virgin of Mount Carmel with food, special masses, parades and music, all while getting a tan under the warm July sun. All Saints Day and All Souls Day is one of the most important festivals in Costa

Rica, it honors the deceased and visitors should be mindful of becoming belligerent. On the other hand, to celebrate the living, Easter Week is where the whole country shuts down for days to hold massive processions throughout the streets. More secular and interesting festivals include, the National Orchid Show, Day of San José, Worker's Day or labor day and University Week which celebrates on the campus of the University of Costa Rica.

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## Things to Do Insights

### A Spiritual Experience: Visiting Heredia& Cartago

If you are staying in San José and want to venture out a bit to visit some of the more quaint towns nearby, you may want to go to the historical towns of Heredia and Cartago as well as visit the gateway town of La Fortuna, which offers access to the Arenal Volcano. Easily accessible by taxi, car, and bus from many points in San Jose, these neighboring towns offer a tourist a chance to become immersed in the local culture, to meet many friendly townfolk, and to experience a bit of natural life away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

When you visit both towns, you are immediately struck by the strong influence of the Catholic Church on the area. This is especially prevalent in Cartago inside the Our Lady of the Angels Basilica. This church is dedicated to the patron saint of Costa Rica, Our Lady of the Angels and offers the visitor a glimpse into a very tranquil sanctuary. The church is also home to many beautiful displays of religious statues, carvings, and art. If you are lucky to be in town during the Christmas season, you may also be able to partake in a town parade that features floats, music, marionettes decorated with Christmas attire, and evening fireworks. It seems as if the whole town comes alive during these celebrations, which also draw people from other towns and local villages who come to enjoy the festive mood and good will offered.

## San Jose Snapshot continued

In Heredia, a religious undertone can be felt in one of the open-air concerts often held here. Whether you are religious or not, it is a spiritual experience to listen to a gospel concert performed live here. Attending this type of concert, you can feel the interest emanated by the crowd as people gather to contemplate the music as well as the day in general. No place for worrying about the day's troubles, you can get a sense of peacefulness and calm here as you mingle with the crowds who often attend these festivities dressed in their Sunday best.

### Arenal Volcano

Another point of interest that provides an uplifting experience is a visit to the town of La Fortuna, home of the Arenal Volcano, which is one of the most active volcanoes in all of Central America. When you visit the volcano, you can see nature in its most majestic form as you feel, from an observation point nearby, the earth trembles beneath you. Many tours of this volcano are available from San Jose and other local area hotels and tourist agencies. (See Expediciones Tropicales for an example of a tour group that offers tours to this volcano.) These tours are worth taking as it is truly spiritual experience to stand on a lava slope and watch burning lava flow. Additionally, the rumbling from the live volcano leaves you in awe of Mother Nature over man.

The area surrounding the volcano is also home to many hot springs where you can relax in the warm and calming sulfurous waters. If you are a fan of horseback riding, you will also be able to find guides in La Fortuna that can accompany you across mountain ridges and pass flowing rivers to the Arenal Lagoon, which is a beautiful mountain lake. Although you may catch a glimpse of a speedboat on the lake as it passes by, this modern intrusion into the area does not detract from the tranquil, almost timeless scenery that you view from your vantage point on high. **Pueblo Antiguo**

The Pueblo Antiguo singular theme park is an unforgettable experience of color, music, and wonderful food. It presents

three important aspects of great cultural and historical relevance, recreated on a very realistic setting: The city at the turn of the century, the countryside, and the Caribbean coast. Magic occurs through the architecture, live folklore dances and songs, carnivals, fireworks, boat rides, and lots and lots of fun!

Just close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself in turn of the century San Jose: Horse-drawn carriages rolling over tile-paved roads, beautiful señoritas wearing laced white gloves and matching sun umbrellas, taken by the arm of elegant gentleman in top or "pita" hats. The buildings resemble those of the epoch, and represent the Municipal Market, the Church and Plaza, the Central Park, the Congress, the Bank, the Fire Station and some souvenir stores and restaurants—Oh! even a train on tracks!

Perhaps the countryside is one of the most nostalgic remembrances of our little piece of land, that although still exists, are being swallowed little by little by the impact of the urban expansion. The Costa Rican peasants are well known for their honesty, candor and kindness. In this setting, you will be able to enjoy typical dances, songs and masquerades, oxcarts, hundred years old adobe and tile houses (some are real structures brought specially to Pueblo Antiguo), and the trapiche (cane mill) where the most delicious sugar cane juice was extracted and cooked in huge pans. Oh! A dairy farm with cows is also included! (Sorry, milking is not allowed).

You better bring a hat, sunglasses, and tanning lotion! This setting will really transport you over to the Atlantic Coast where the re-creation of the world famous Tortuguero canals with its exuberant vegetation, exhort our nature lover and explorer's spirit and plunges us into a realm of relaxation and peacefulness.

### More Tours

Experience all of Costa Rica on Classic Journey's Costa Rica Guided Tour. This exclusive and luxurious eight-day walking trip takes groups to unique and breathtaking natural and historic sites

throughout the country. With Tours María Alexandra you can ride on the back of a Harley-Davidson or more affectionately known as a "hog" with your own private guide or rent one of your own. Saint Germain Tours is owned and operated by Costa Ricans and leads travelers throughout San José and its environs. The tour agencies Mitur and Cotur offer excursions in the Caribbean and both take you to Tortuguero Island, which is a magnificent day trip to see with all of its flora and fauna. For those more intrepid travelers, Nature Adventures and Tropical Rivers are two companies that take clients rafting on some of the myriad canals and rivers that traverse Costa Rica.

### Carnival

It's Carnival time! Get yourself ready to enjoy the rhythm and joyfulness of an authentic Caribbean Carnival. The colorful dresses and disguises, the eternal smiles and sensual movements of the dancers will electrify you all the way up and down! Get yourself in the mood, do not be shy, and shake your body! Afterwards, a bilingual guide will give you a tour over all three settings and will tell you stories and legends about the country. If by then you are hungry, a delicious typical lunch awaits you at the restaurant El Ventolero, where you will experience the tradition of Costa Rica's best cuisine.

### San José Central Market

If you have an adventurous spirit and uninhibited personality, you will love this market which will take no more than just a few morning hours (Saturdays and Sundays exclusively). First, get dressed in comfortable and loose fashion clothing: shorts, T-shirt, hat, and sandals in the Summer time (between February and April). In the green or rainy season (May to November) jeans and tennis shoes are appropriate. Oh, and you will need a large umbrella. December and January are cold months, so keep a windbreaker or sweater handy. A small backpack is a good idea, and of course your photographic or video camera with lots of film. San Jose is a safe place fair enough, but as in any other city,

## San Jose Snapshot continued

there may be pickpockets now and then. So please, and for your own safety, leave your Rolex and jewels at the hotel safety box, and do not go around showing great deals of money! Regarding money, you will need some cash, no more than ₡5000. Another good idea is to make this tour in a group. Sell the idea to your new friends at the hotel!

Once armed, cameras I mean, equipped, and with a happy full stomach you are ready to go! Catch a cab and ask him to take you to your destiny: the closest Feria del Agricultor (San José Central Market). These are small open-air markets. You will find them all over the city skirts, in towns and districts. Here, farmers from around the country bring their fresh produce for sale. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes of all kinds are neatly arranged in wooden palettes, which create an unforgettable symphony of color and smell. Meats, chicken, and fish are sold too, and cleanliness all over is acceptable. This is a real, absolutely local, and very, very tico setting. Feel at ease. Unless you are sporting a tinted green and pink punk haircut, you might expect just some funny curious looks and a few giggles. Buy some fruit and take it back to the hotel!

Since by now you should start getting hungry, it is time for lunch! Forget about fancy restaurants and chain fast food outlets. Today they are forbidden! Take note of the direction the taxi took to take you there (North, South, and the like). Generally, this ride should be on a range of one to one and a half kilometers from where you started, so we are going to re-create it on our way back by foot. If you get lost, just ask! There should be a few sodas (small refreshment rooms) close to any farmers market. Most of them are tidy, clean and inexpensive places. Go in one that appeals you, and ask for *acasado*, which is served with some sort of meat of your choice, and rice, beans, vegetables, plantain and salad on the side. To wash it down, the *frescos* prepared in water (no soda pop please) are just delicious. Pineapple, blackberries, tamarind, *cas*, etc. just to mention a few, or try one prepared in milk

like *horchata*, *crema*, *pinolillo*, *cebada*, or *cocoa*. If you are a big eater, you can also have *empanadas* (a sort of turnover) filled with meat, potato and sausage, beans or cheese, or try the wonderful sweet, ripe *plantain empanadas*, filled with mashed black beans or melted cheese. So, if you asked for typical food, this is the real thing. If you get tired of walking with all those fruits in your backpack, just grab a cab back to the hotel!

**Guided Tours** Classic Journeys (+1 800 200 3887/ <http://www.classicjourneys.com/>) Coast to Coast Adventures (+011 506 2280 8054/ <http://www.ctocadventures.com/>)

**Specialty Tours** Go with a Wheelchair (+011 506 2454 2810/ <http://www.gowithwheelchairs.com/>)

**Ecological Tours** Tropical Rivers (+1 888 722 8273/ <http://www.riostropicales.com/>) Natural Adventures (+1 800 321 8410/ <http://www.adventurecostarica.com/>)

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### Travel Tips

#### Getting There:

**By Air:** The Juan Santamaria International Airport (SJO) lies 11 miles north of downtown. Major airlines include:

American Airlines (+1 800 433 7300/ <http://www.aa.com>) Continental (+1 800 525 0280/ <http://www.continental.com>) Delta (+1 800 221 1212/ <http://www.delta.com>) Mexicana (+1 800 531 7921/ <http://www.mexicana.com>) Iberia (+1 800 772 4642/ <http://www.iberia.com>) United (+1 800 241 6522/ <http://www.ual.com>) US Airways (+1 800 428 4322/ <http://www.usairways.com>)

Buses marked 'Ruta 200 San José' exit from the airport about every 15 minutes between 6AM-10PM. Since San Jose lacks a central terminal the buses drop passengers off near the city center on Avenida 2. Rides take 35 minutes and cost USD.55 cents. Luggage space is limited. If you are saddled with backpacks and/or suitcases consider a taxi.

Taxi Unidos (+011 506 221 6865) is the official cab company of the airport. These orange taxis charge a fixed rate, usually around USD12. Rides last 20 minutes. Avoid the unregulated cabs that lurk about the front terminal. The drivers are famous for ripping off tourists.

Rental Car Companies include: Alamo (+1 800 327 9633/ <http://www.alamo.com>) Budget (+1 800 527 0700/ <http://www.budget.com>) Europcar (+011 506 443 2336/ <http://www.europcar.com>) Hertz (+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com>) Thrifty (+1 800 367 2277/ <http://www.thrifty.com>)

**By Train:** Due to tracks being ravaged by earthquakes and mudslides there is no international train service into San José.

**By Bus:** Despite being known as the transportation hub of Costa Rica there is no central bus station. Nor is there one predominant bus line. Instead there are a number of small bus companies, many of which whose 'terminals' consist of a window facing out on the street. Tica Bus (+011 506 221 8954) is the closest thing to an international bus company, providing service to San Salvador, Panama City, Guatemala City, and Managua.

**By Car:** San José can be accessed via the Inter-American Highway, which is part of the Pan American Highway. Bear in mind that Costa Rica holds the world's highest car fatality rate. Despite this dire statistic the highway abounds with staggering jungle scenery and is well maintained.

#### Getting Around:

Because most locals don't own cars San José's bus system is extremely extensive, seemingly servicing every street corner. Rides cost around USD.15 cents. Buses are usually crowded making them heaven for pickpocket opportunists, so keep guarded attention on valuables.

Red taxis are easy to hail from the street. Drivers are supposed to charge via meters, or 'marías' as the locals say, so be sure it is on before entering. Rates start at USD.75 cents the first mile and USD.35 cents

## San Jose Snapshot continued

thereafter. If you would prefer to call ahead for a taxi try Coopetico(+011 506 224 7979) or Coopeguaria(+011 506 226 1366).

Walking is the best means of transportation through downtown. It is faster than driving. Most of the main attractions such as the Jade Museum and the National Arts Museum are all close to each other. Avoid, however, wearing expensive jewelry and carrying cameras and loose handbags or you will become a marked target for thieves.

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### Fun Facts

**San Jose Country:** Costa Rica

#### San Jose by the Numbers:

Population: 300,000 Elevation: 3021 feet  
Average Annual Precipitation: 70.8 inches  
Average January Temperature: 66 degrees F/ 18C  
Average July Temperature: 69 degrees F/ 20C

#### Quick Facts:

Major Industries: Food Processing, Textiles& Clothing, Construction Materials, Fertilizer, Plastic Products Ethnic Mix:

94% Caucasian, 3% African American, 1% Amerindian, 1% Chinese, 1% Other  
Electricity: 120 volts, 60Hz Time Zone: GMT-6 Country Dialing Code: 506

#### Did You Know?

Why does coffee grow so well around the city? It's the climate. The Central Valley, in which the city sits, has a perfect climate. At 1,125m(3,690 ft.) above sea level, San José enjoys springlike temperatures year-round.

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