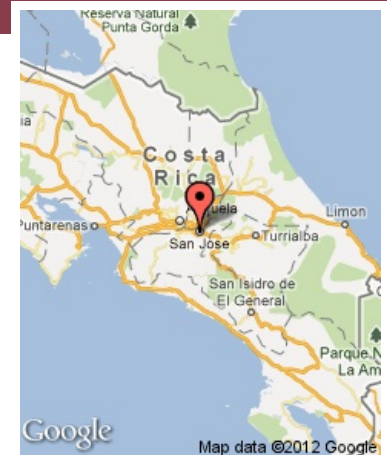


Volunteering in Costa Rica



Highlights

Spend a week volunteering in Costa Rica helping a local rainforest community set up a sustainable tourism destination to support their town. Participate in projects such as: painting schools, installing safety road signs and laying new pipes for clean water and come away having seen a different side to the country!

Costa Rica is a truly magical place with mountains, rainforest and idyllic white sand beaches. Much of Costa Rica relies on eco-tourism as people flock to the country to see the abundant species of birds, plants and animals that inhabit the country. It is said that Costa Rica houses 12,000 species of plants, 1,239 kinds of butterflies, 838 species of birds, 440 different kinds of reptiles and amphibians and 232 kinds of mammals. It is encouraging that in recent years the government has taken preservation seriously but Costa Rica in the past was not known for valuing its natural resources. In the 1990s it was nearly top of the table in Latin America in terms of deforestation, going from 99% of the country being covered in forest to only about 35% today. Still, it is one of the best places in the world to see exotic plants and animals you can't see anywhere else. You'll feel like an explorer discovering new species in exotic forests filled with so many hues of green, you're likely to run out of adjectives when trying to describe all the beauty.

Imagine waking up to the sounds of the birds calling to each other amongst the thick walls of green rainforest. A gorgeous waterfall is a popular destination to escape the tropical heat and the local children show you which fruit is ripe enough to eat. This can be your backdrop, not just to lounge around, but to get to know the local customs and culture. By spending your holiday volunteering in Costa Rica, you will be helping a rainforest community set themselves up for a sustainable future. The exact activities will depend on how many people are in your group and what needs doing but you will be working alongside Costa Ricans as you construct bridges, improve schools and find ways to make sure this village thrives and the local children have a home for years to come. You'll also be able to take advantage of the exotic surroundings as you taste locally made coffee, go horseback riding, learn the traditional way of making sugar and enjoy the bright and awe-inspiring nighttime sky. Yes, you'll be living in a tropical paradise, but you'll be working to make it a better place for the people who make sure that this amazing piece of the planet is preserved for everyone to enjoy.

Is it for me?

This is not a luxury tour so if you know you are picky about hotels, can't picture yourself happy without your hairdryer or travel with a special pillow you just can't live without, this tour is not for you. The accommodation is spartan and the weather most of the time will be hot and humid. Some people love the heat but for some the idea of sweating a lot is not their idea of fun, so be honest with which category you fall into. You don't need to speak Spanish or have any background information about Costa Rica or the rainforest - all you need is a willingness to try new things and a passion for helping people and immersing yourself in new cultures. This is not a "lay by the pool" break, you will be working hard, but at the end of the week you will be able to see the fruits of your labour and it will be a great feeling of satisfaction. If you have been on "lazy holidays" before and felt bored or if you like the idea of volunteering to help the less fortunate, this would be a great way to combine the two and see an amazing country at the same time.

Accommodation

Accommodation is sparse, but will provide you with all you need during your week in the rainforest. You will be staying in traditional Costa Rican "cabanas" constructed by former volunteer groups. The cabanas have beds,

Prices from

844 GBP (7 days) per person

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fans and Western-style bathrooms. There is running water, though not hot water but the temperature will be tropical throughout your stay so you won't want a hot shower anyway! There is electricity but not available all the time. No matter, starlight and candlelight will really complete the exotic experience.

Your food is included in the tour price and you will be sampling nothing but the freshest Costa Rican food which will include fresh cheese, rice, beans, meat and of course their world famous coffee.

Itinerary

There is no set itinerary as this depends on how many people happen to be in your group, the weather, availability of supplies and also the kinds of things that the village and the Carara Biological Reserve need. Sometimes the final itinerary is not confirmed until the week before the trip and is often subject to change. Usually programs go from Saturday to Saturday and begin with an orientation and team building exercises. Then each day you will wake up relatively early (around 6am) to begin your service projects. Groups to the Carara Biological Reserve in the past have: set up a first aid centre, built recycling centres and planted trees. Each day you will have some free time to explore the area and get to know your local hosts and fellow volunteers. Most times activities will be arranged for you that range from bird watching to going on nature hikes. All the leisure activities are focused on getting to know the area and culture better.

Details

Getting there

You will need to fly to the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. There a group coordinator will meet with everyone for a transfer to the project site at 12.30 on the Saturday the project starts; it takes four hours to reach the destination. The following Saturday, when the project ends, you will be returned to San Jose so make sure not to book a flight any earlier than 3.30 in the afternoon.

Price includes

Accommodation, meals, transfers to and from San Jose to the project site, any activity listed in the itinerary.

Typical Duration

1 week

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

A detailed packing list will be mailed out upon registration.