

Costa Rica -Culture and economy

HERITAGE AND CULTURE

The first European explorer to encounter Costa Rica was Christopher Columbus. The day was September 18, 1502, and Columbus was making his fourth and final voyage to the New World. Coming on shore he saw the rich vegetation and thought it would be a country full of riches and therefore the name: Costa Rica, or Rich Coast

Costa Rican culture is in many ways a reflection of its racial diversity. The predominant influence has long been European, which is reflected in everything from the official language -- Spanish -- to the architecture of the country's churches and other historic buildings. The indigenous influence is less visible, but can be found in everything from the tortillas that make part of a typical Costa Rican meal, to the handmade ceramics sold at roadside stands.

An important aspect of Costa Rica's cultural legacy is their love for peace and democracy. The Ticos like to stand out that their nation is the exception in Latin America, where military dictatorships have long dominated politics.

They take pride in having more than one hundred years of democratic tradition, and almost half a century without an army. The army was abolished in 1948, and the money the country saves by not expending in military issues is invested in improving the Costa Ricans' standard of living, which has fostered a culture of social peace that makes it such a pleasant place to visit.

THE TICOS

The Ticos, as Costa Ricans are commonly known, are famous for their hospitality, and are quite happy to live up to their reputation. They are well-educated and hard working people, who are quick with a handshake and a smile. They are well aware of the special land they have, and most likely they will help foreigners when they get lost, even explaining things that might seem bizarre to foreigners, and making their stay as enjoyable as possible.

People say the Ticos are their nation's greatest asset, and once you've experienced their friendliness and spontaneity, you'll have no doubt to that regard.

ECONOMY

You don't have to drive very far in Costa Rica -- past the coffee, pastures, bananas, and other crops -- to realize that agriculture is the basis of its economy. Coffee has historically been the country's most important crop, and Costa Rica continues to produce some of the finest coffee in the world. However in recent years less traditional crops have been playing an increasingly important economic role. Bananas are the second most important export crop, with vast plantations covering parts of the Caribbean lowlands. There is also significant land dedicated to the cultivation of pineapples, sugar, oranges, rice, hardwoods, and ornamental plants, as well as raising cattle for beef and dairy products.

Though agriculture remains the basis of the national economy, tourism has earned more than any single export crop during the last few years and the tourism industry continues to grow providing new employment opportunities and stimulating the conservation of our complex biodiversity. Electronic exports and textiles come in as major roles in the economy after agriculture and tourism.

